

UN3450/4450 Syllabus Fall, 2024

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Seminar meets on Thursday afternoons (2:10-4) in 405 Schermerhorn
Office hour: Thursday 10-11 AM and other times tba.

This seminar will systematically review the implications of Darwin's theory of evolution for contemporary studies of animal and human cognition, with particular emphasis on the evolution of language.

Format of course: Each student will lead a seminar on a topic of his/her choice that will be selected from the following list.

1. September 3 INTRODUCTION
2. September 10 READING PERIOD (Preparation for October 1 seminar)
3. September 17 READING PERIOD (Preparation for October 1 seminar)
4. September 24 READING PERIOD (Preparation for October 1 seminar)
5. October 1 THEORY OF EVOLUTION
6. October 8 CONDITIONED BEHAVIOR
7. October 15 ANIMAL & PRIMATE COGNITION
8. October 22 ANIMAL COMMUNICATION AND APE LANGUAGE
9. October 29 HUMAN COGNITION & ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- November 5 ELECTION DAY
10. November 12 INFANT COGNITION
11. November 19 HUMAN ANCESTORS AND WALLACE'S PROBLEM
12. November 26 PROTOLANGUAGE
13. December 3 INTERSUBJECTIVITY/ JOINT ATTENTION
14. December 10 WHAT IS A WORD?

All of the assigned readings, which will be in pdf format, will be assigned one week before each seminar. At each seminar, all students (except the presenter) are asked to submit one or two questions about the assigned readings by email by 6 pm on the Monday before each seminar. Those questions will help the presenter of each seminar focus discussion of his/her topic.

Grades, on a 100-point scale, will be calculated as follows:

Seminar presentation: 40 points
Seminar participation: 20 points
Take home exam: 40 points

Grades for seminar participation will be calculated as follows: 10 points for submitting questions about assigned readings each week; 10 points for discussion of seminar topics.

To ensure that students have an adequate amount of time to prepare their seminars, I will meet as much as needed with students who chose one of the earlier topics during the first three weeks of the semester. The purpose of those meetings is to provide a basis for the preparation of the seminar. I will, of course, also meet with all students prior to their seminars. I envision at least 3 meetings with each student. Please make an appointment to meet with me at least 3 weeks before your topic is scheduled.

There will be 9 seminars. I intend to have all the topics covered but, in some cases, two students will be assigned to lead a seminar on a particular date. How this works will be determined by individual preferences that will be discussed during the first meeting of the seminar on October 1, and by the number of students that actually take the course.

Background reading. Depending on the extent to which a student is familiar with a particular topic, I will assign that student enough background material to ensure that he/she will be able to lead a discussion of that topic.

Selection of assigned readings for seminar. These readings (all pdf files) will be circulated at least one week before each seminar.

Preparation of outline for talk. After discussing those aspects of a particular topic that are to be highlighted during a seminar, the student will prepare a 1-2 page outline of his/her seminar.

Annotated bibliography. Each student should select 2-3 readings that

were especially helpful for his/her talk and summarize in a short paragraph what was special about that reading. The annotated bibliography should **NOT** be in the format of a book report. Instead, it should provide commentary about the innovation, incisiveness, brilliance, etc. of a particular reading. These bibliographies will be helpful for each student while they work on a take-home exam.

Seminar: The leader(s) of each topic will distribute his/her outline at the seminar and be prepared to cover the main points and to also lead the discussion.

Circulation of Annotated Bibliographies and PowerPoint

Presentations: Be sure to circulate an annotated bibliography for your talk on the day on which you present it. These are usually helpful for students preparing their take home exams. For the same reason, it would be helpful to circulate your PowerPoint presentation if you used one.

Take home exam: About 3 weeks before the end of the seminar I will distribute an essay exam about the topics that were discussed in this seminar. The exam will be due one week after final exams begin.

Copy of recent take home exam:

Write a critical essay on the evolution of intelligence and language that addresses the following issues.

- How do animal species differ qualitatively with respect to their intelligence?
- What evidence is there that animals think without language?
- Are computers conscious and/or intelligent?
- What are the roles of dyadic and triadic interactions on the development of language?
- How did changes in social pressure influence the evolution of language?
- How did language evolve from animal communication? Your answer should comment on the significance of Wallace's problem.

Your paper should be ~10-20 double-spaced pages. When I grade it, I will be concerned with:

1. The clarity of your arguments about the positions you take on each issue focus on the degree with which you agree with my position (or with anyone else's).
2. Your ability to include information from your own reading and from seminar discussions

Each question should be answered separately (1-2 double spaced pages). Please be sure to attach both a bibliography and an annotated bibliography. Your bibliography should document each point you make, where relevant. Your **annotated bibliography** should contain approximately 6 references that you thought were particularly helpful.

Please peruse the topics that will be covered before we meet on

September 3 to make sure that they are what you were expecting.

During your work for this course, please keep in mind the following Faculty Rules regarding academic integrity.

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.