Introduction to Liberal Arts & Sciences: Evolution

Dr. Everett Hamner
Western Illinois University, Fall 2014
A&S 195, Mondays 12:30-3, QC Complex 1112, westernonline.wiu.edu
e-hamner@wiu.edu, 309-762-3999 x62247; office hours in QC Complex 2209 (M 3-4, T 3-4, W 3-5)

General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

A comparative introduction to the major areas of the liberal arts and sciences. Students will learn how each area evolved and how each approaches problems and controversies. The course may take its particular focus each year from the university theme.

Specific Description & Goals

Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution is one of the most significant ideas in human history. Building on decades of earlier biology, he helped define evolution as descent with modification from common ancestry. His key insight into the process of natural selection was elegantly simple: organisms produce more offspring than their environments can sustain, so individuals whose traits best match a given ecosystem will be more likely to survive and reproduce. This causes their particular variations to become more common, so much so that over time, whole new species emerge.

According to polls taken over the last quarter century, however, 40-50% of Americans—far more than in any other developed nation—reject this scientific paradigm. In many cases their concerns stem from misunderstandings of the scientific term “theory” and insufficient exposure to the evidence. Other influences have been evolution’s confusion with “social Darwinism” or eugenics and its equation with atheism. Although mistaken, such assumptions have been very pervasive across the last century and a half, with major repercussions for science’s public influence more broadly (e.g. in the cases of climate change denial and resistance to efforts toward environmental sustainability).

By examining evolution and its cultural reception, this course offers students a stronger grasp of the unique capacities of the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Studying biological, sociological, historical, literary, and filmic texts, and engaging a wide range of guest lecturers and unique materials, we will explore the many opportunities of the liberal arts and sciences. Featuring a moderate reading load, four reading/viewing comprehension quizzes, regular written reflections, and the chance to dialogue extensively with fellow students, the course culminates with an argumentative essay tied to an area of personal interest. Key questions throughout will include:

✔ Where do terms like “evolution,” “natural selection,” “survival of the fittest,” “Social Darwinism,” “creationism,” “intelligent design,” “theory,” “knowledge,” and “faith” overlap and diverge?

✔ How have debates about evolution uniquely impacted the last century of American culture—on such issues as civil rights, feminism, abortion, homosexuality, genetic research, and climate change?

✔ How might we better integrate an understanding of evolutionary theory with approaches to literature, film, history, philosophy, religious studies, sociology, anthropology, and other fields?
# Meeting, Reading, & Assignment Schedule

## 1st WEEK, AUG 25TH: DEFINING EVOLUTION, DEFINING THE LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

**IN CLASS:**
- “*Friends*” episode clips, “Tree of Life” short video
- Working vocabulary for this semester & a chart from Jerome Kagan’s *The Three Cultures*
- Self-introductions (using introductory survey handout)
- Syllabus review and discussion of goals and assignments

### PART ONE: THE SCIENCE OF EVOLUTION

## 2nd WEEK, SEPT 1ST: NO CLASS (LABOR DAY); THE BASICS OF EVOLUTION, PART 1

**VIEWING:**
- Film: *Evolution: Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (part 1)
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA-c23O64UE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA-c23O64UE)

**READING:**
- Scott Freeman & Jon C. Herron, “The Pattern of Evolution” (ch 2, *Evolutionary Analysis*)
  [http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/0_0_0/evo_toc_01](http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/0_0_0/evo_toc_01)

**WRITING:**
- Reflection Essay Opportunity #1: With attention to many specific details as possible, how has your understanding of Darwin the man and/or evolutionary biology changed (no matter how incrementally) in light of this week’s reading/viewing?

## 3rd WEEK, SEPT 8TH: THE BASICS OF EVOLUTION, PART 2

**VIEWING:**
- Film: *Evolution: Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (part 2)
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbjRAvKiU4M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbjRAvKiU4M)

**READING:**
- Freeman & Herron, “Darwinian Natural Selection” (ch 3, *Evolutionary Analysis*)

**IN CLASS:**
- Guest: Dr. Jeanette Thomas (Biology)

TU, SEPT 9TH, 5:30-7 PM: “Unforgettable Lessons from the Holocaust” special WQPT presentation with former WIU president and speaker extraordinaire Al Goldfarb, Riverfront Hall 103-4, RSVP to Kasi DeFrieze at K-defrieze@wiu.edu by Sept. 2nd (Attendance = 1 bonus point on Quiz #1 in Week 4)

WED, SEPT 10TH, 3-4:30 PM: HALLWAS LECTURE BY NEW QC CAS ASSISTANT DEAN JIM RABCHUK (Attendance = 1 bonus point on Quiz #1 in Week 4)

## 4th WEEK, SEPT 15TH: THE GOALS & LIMITS OF SCIENCE

**READING:**
- Ian Barbour, “The Structures of Science and Religion”
- Chris Mooney, “The Science of Why We Don’t Believe Science”
- Greg Egan, “Oceanic” (short story)

**IN CLASS:**
- Quiz #1 (all materials in and out of class, weeks 1-4)
- Guest: Dr. Amy Patrick Mossman (Director, LAS Programs)
- Excerpts: Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* and more personal writings
5th WEEK, SEPT 22ND: SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL DARWINISM, & THE PERSISTENCE OF SEX

VIEWING: ~Film: Evolution: Why Sex? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wns5OQR74OQ)

READING: ~Stephanie A. Shields and Sunil Bhatia: “Darwin on Race, Gender, and Culture”
~Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”

WRITING: ~Reflection Essay Opportunity #2: In light of our recent materials and in-class discussions, how do you understand the relationship between “nature and nurture,” or better, between genetic and environmental influences? More specifically, what part does (or should) each play in shaping people’s sexual/gender identities?

IN CLASS: ~Guest: Dr. Tammy Werner (Sociology): Gender, race, and misapplications of Darwin

6th WEEK, SEPT 29TH: A HISTORY & POLITICS OF U.S. EVOLUTION BATTLES, PART ONE

READING: ~Amy Harmon, “A Teacher on the Front Line as Faith and Science Clash”


IN CLASS: ~Genesis 1-2 as an ancient near eastern text
~The 1925 Scopes “Monkey” Trial and the 2005 Dover, PA Intelligent Design Case

7th WEEK, OCT 6TH: A HISTORY & POLITICS OF U.S. EVOLUTION BATTLES, PART TWO

READING: ~Marilyn Robinson, “Darwinism” (from The Death of Adam)

WRITING: ~Reflection Essay Opportunity #3: With references to recent materials and in-class discussions, how do you think we should re-imagine the relationship between science and religion? Where do you see opportunities for better understandings and exchanges?

IN CLASS: ~Quiz #2 (all materials in and out of class since week 4 quiz)
~Guest: Dr. Jim Rabchuk (Physics; Assistant Dean, CAS, QC)
~Slide show tour of The Creation Museum; antireligious scientism; Islamic creationism

8th WEEK, OCT 13TH: THE STORIES WE TELL, PART ONE

READING: ~A. S. Byatt: “Morpho Eugenia” (in Angels and Insects), 1st half (read up to “And once or twice more he found her diligently at work,” right after a *** section break, near p. 95)

IN CLASS: ~Background info and guiding questions for interpreting Byatt
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<td>9th</td>
<td>Oct 20th</td>
<td>The Stories We Tell, Part Two</td>
<td>A. S. Byatt: “Morpho Eugenia” (in <em>Angels and Insects</em>), 2nd half</td>
<td>Reflection Essay Opportunity #4: What argumentative, non-obvious claim can you develop about Byatt’s novella? What evidence can you marshal to demonstrate it?</td>
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<td>Part Three: Some Still-Evolving Questions of the Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
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<td>10th</td>
<td>Oct 27th</td>
<td>So, Why Study the Liberal Arts &amp; Sciences?</td>
<td>Sanford J. Ungar, “7 Major Misperceptions about the Liberal Arts”</td>
<td>Reflection Essay Opportunity #4: What argumentative, non-obvious claim can you develop about Byatt’s novella? What evidence can you marshal to demonstrate it?</td>
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<td>“The Value of a Humanities Degree: Six Students’ Views”</td>
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<td>Hart Research Associates, “It Takes More than a Major”</td>
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**TUESDAY, NOV 4th: Election Day—VOTE!**

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<td>Quiz #3 (all materials in and out of class since week 7 quiz)</td>
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<td>Guest: Audrey Adamson (Career Services) (spillover from last week)</td>
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<td>The evolution of a screenplay; the value of “close reading” and “close viewing”</td>
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<td>12th</td>
<td>Nov 10th</td>
<td>How Is Humanity Affecting Evolution Globally?</td>
<td>Climate Change pages at the National Center for Science Education website</td>
<td>Reflection Essay Opportunity #4: What argumentative, non-obvious claim can you develop about Byatt’s novella? What evidence can you marshal to demonstrate it?</td>
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<td>Guest: Dr. Peter Cole (History)</td>
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<td>Extended clips from <em>An Inconvenient Truth</em> (2006)</td>
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<td>The US National Climate Assessment’s 2014 report</td>
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<td>Strengthening argumentative paper topics and thesis statements</td>
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13th WEEK, NOV 17th: HOW ARE HOMO SAPIENS & OTHER SPECIES EVOLVING LOCALLY?

READING: ~Excerpts from Sandra Steingraber’s Living Downstream (2nd ed., 2010)

WRITING: ~Argumentative paper: draft of first 3 pp. due online before class

IN CLASS: ~Quiz #4 (all materials in and out of class since week 10 quiz)
~Film clips: Living Downstream (film adaptation); Gasland; Crude
~QC-based Living Lands and Waters

PART FOUR: INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

NO CLASS NOV 24th (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

14th WEEK, DEC 1st: THESIS BRAINSTORMING & ENGAGING OTHERS’ VIEWS

IN CLASS: ~“The Creation,” ch. 4 of Terence Malick’s film The Tree of Life (2011)
~Characteristics of a strong introductory paragraph: Hook, Thesis, & Map
~Quoting and citing others: Who? Why? When? How much?
~Course evaluations

15th WEEK, DEC 8th: WRITING TIME & INDIVIDUAL/GROUP CONSULTATIONS

WRITING: ~Argumentative paper: full draft due online before class

IN CLASS: ~Group writing consultation (bring a copy of your paper so far to be counted present)
~Reverse outlining and revision: rebuilding around your most interesting idea
~Effective verbal presentations

FINALS WEEK, DEC 15th: ONE LAST POLISH

WRITING: ~Argumentative paper: final versions due online before class

IN CLASS: ~3-minute formal presentations of argumentative papers

Texts for Purchase

PLEASE NOTE:
*Prices below are rounded from recent amazon.com new prices—fyi, that site has free 2-day shipping for students. In many cases, used copies can be purchased less expensively (also try bookfinder.com).
*Other materials will be posted/linked via Western Online and may be printed on campus at no cost.

Grading Criteria

~An A recognizes broad and deep understanding of the course material, regular and insightful discussion contributions, and very strong written work—a major impact on the course’s success.
~A B indicates good commitment to coursework, demonstrable contributions and achievements in both verbal and written analysis, and tangible positive impact on other students’ learning.
~A C reflects adequate completion of coursework, including satisfactory participation and writing.
~A D or F denotes incomplete or unsatisfactory coursework, unsatisfactory participation, and/or detraction from course goals (via plagiarism or otherwise).

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.

20% Reflection Essays (2 x 10% each)
40% Quizzes (4 x 10% each)
40% Argumentative paper (30%) and final presentation (10%)

Brief Looks at Assignments

Reflection Essays: These are formal writing assignments, but they are posted publically (under “Discussions”) and thus involve immediate informal follow-up discussion from classmates. While mechanical polish and stylistic/organizational issues matter, the most important grading criteria I will use are the extent to which you probe a given question, the creativity and originality of your ideas, the ways you engage our various course texts and previous discussions, and the critical self-awareness that you display. In addition to broadening and deepening your personal engagement with the course’s bigger questions, these reflections also give me another tool for gauging the class’s responses to the material and for launching subsequent class discussions.

Your task is to complete (only) TWO of the four discussion postings, with due dates to choose between in week 2 (9/1), week 5 (9/22), week 7 (10/6), and week 9 (10/20). In each case, your post should be at least 1000 words and is due online before class on the date listed. You are also required to write at least 500 words in less formal (mechanics don’t count) substantive responses to other students’ postings (including their replies to your post) over the next week. Each of the two essays are worth 10% of your course grade, with your investment in the follow-up conversations also playing a minor but substantive role in grades (which I will determine after the one-week follow-up conversation period).

Quizzes: These will neither be picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could prepare sufficiently by reading summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned texts with good comprehension will average 70-80% of the points available (i.e., earn a “B” or better). Students sometimes grumble about the quizzes initially, but soon agree they provide valuable accountability during the course and allow for higher-quality, greater-depth discussions.

Argumentative paper: A short but very carefully revised 2000+ word (usually 7-8 pp. of actual text) argumentative paper about the representation of evolutionary biology in a particular cultural text, whether a novel, film, or otherwise, and whether featured in the course or not. Each student should engage materials that are individually interesting, referencing multiple secondary materials from the syllabus and beyond. Consultations about topic and thesis possibilities (whether via email or after class) may begin as soon as students are ready, but definitely by week 11. Please note that there are separate due dates for topic and thesis, pages 1-3, a full draft, and the final version; this is not a paper to dash off at the last minute! While preliminary drafts will not be graded, the project’s improvement across them will affect borderline final grades, and their late or non-completion will subtract 1/3 of a grade each from the final paper grade. Previous student papers and suggestions of popular text options will be available as we approach the assignment.
PLEASE NOTE:
The following is part of all of my syllabi. A given course may have additional/slightly varying policies.

My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students

The better we understand each other’s expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other authentically and maturely. I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~Just as critically, I require students to be professionally responsible. You should approach this course as you might a challenging and rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other endeavors, but my role is to challenge you beyond your comfort zone and to honestly assess the quality of your academic work. Knowing how it stacks up, however hard that may be to hear, is critical for your future decisions.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does not know. I spent over a decade earning several graduate degrees not in order to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. That can only happen with your simultaneous investment, though. What you get out of this will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond class meetings.

Attendance & Participation

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other’s unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness counting as half a class) will automatically lower the final mark by one grade (e.g. missing 4 classes would change a B to a C). Extensive absences are likely to result in an “F” for the course.

Classroom Courtesies

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and other electronics should not be used during quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.

Making Contact

Whenever you have a question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, you are welcome to contact me. Please turn to each other first for simpler questions about assignments or missed materials, but for more complex issues, email me, ask after class, or schedule a visit during office hours. Email is almost always the best way to reach me; my goal is to respond within 3 business days, if not sooner. Please also note that I use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.

General Writing Assignment Guidelines

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1” justified margins on all sides; size 12,
The Writing Center

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”

Late Work

If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare tardiness devastating. Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and may also lead to an “F” for the course. We will briefly review proper citation in class, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic honesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Counseling Services

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

Accommodations

“In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s) you must obtain documentation of the need for an accommodation through Disability Support Services and provide it to the instructor. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor’s attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512 for additional services” (from Official University Policy Manual at www.wiu.edu/policies/syllabus.php).

Student Rights & Responsibilities

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see www.wiu.edu/provost/students/.
Dr. Hamner's Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

The Introduction

1. **Hook:** Will your introduction (including the first sentence) grab readers’ attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper’s thesis natural or forced?

2. **Thesis:** Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper’s central claim?
   - *Strengthening your thesis:*
     - Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?
     - Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?
     - Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?

3. **Map:** Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

The Body

4. **Main Points:** Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs’ goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?

5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences:** Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?

6. **Organization:** Are there any paragraphs that don’t make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g., too-short/ disconnected “lonely” paragraphs or too-long/repetitive “bullying” paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument’s force grows more naturally?

7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation:** Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument’s main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?

8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis:** Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does your interpretive and analytical work stay primary?

9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches:** Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? (“The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.”) Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? (“In this story everything is about death.”)

The Conclusion

10. **Closure:** Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay’s main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues:** Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?
   - *Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation):*
     - Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?
     - Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?

12. **Stylistic issues:** Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?
   - *Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers:*
     - Verbal “fluff”: is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the “impact per word ratio” as high as possible.
     - Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?
     - Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?
     - Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?