

# HUMAN ORIGINS

**ANTH 250-002 | Watkins Art Building – 110 Lecture | M/Th 8:10 AM – 9:25 AM**

## INSTRUCTOR

Professor **Kevin Gibbons**  
305 Hamilton Building  
M/W: 3:00-5:00 PM & F by appointment  
kgibbons@american.edu

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

**Sam Menefee-Libey**  
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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to key concepts and methods of biological anthropology and the interdisciplinary study of the evolution of human physiology and human behavior, the relationship between hominins and non-hominin primates, and the relationships between human populations (past and present) and their biophysical environment. At the completion of this course, you will have the information and tools needed to build a firm understanding of human origins, the significance of human evolutionary biology to matters of the modern world, and the ability to think critically about how these topics are discussed in popular culture.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will combine lectures with structured class discussions, readings, and films and asks students to engage with several key areas of inquiry. By the end of the semester, using examples encountered throughout the course, students should be able to:

- Explain the different forces of evolution and how they produce changes in the frequency of traits over time.
- Describe the biological relationships between humans and other primates, particularly the Great Apes – our closest living relatives.
- Identify and give examples of the major hominin fossil discoveries.
- Interpret the major biological changes that occur throughout human evolution from the late Miocene to the early Holocene periods that make us unique among primates.
- Explain the domestication of plants and animals, urbanization, and the development of complex civilizations through your comprehension of archaeological methods and theory.
- Discuss and analyze the range of modern human biological variation and the effect it has on our lives as an increasingly globalized species.

## REQUIRED READINGS

- Lewis, R. Barry, Robert Jermain, and Lynn Kilgore (eds.)  
2012. *Understanding Humans: Introduction to Physical Anthropology and Archaeology*.  
11<sup>th</sup> edition.
- Articles and supplementary material available through Blackboard.

**GRADING**

Group Discussions/Labs	15%
Quizzes	30% (5% each)
Film Research & Critique Paper	15%
Primate Observation Assignment	20%
Museum Assignment	20%

**ASSIGNMENTS***Group Discussions/Labs (15%)*

Working in groups and in class, you will complete a series of four (4) lab assignments covering genetics, primate phylogeny, early hominin evolution, and domestication and food production. Class discussions will be facilitated by these group assignments.

*Quizzes (30%)*

You will complete six (6) quizzes on Blackboard over the course of the semester to help you keep up with the learning material and give me a chance to gauge understanding and review different concepts in class. Each quiz will focus on material we discussed in class since the previous quiz, but it may also include the occasional question from previous material. Each quiz has a time limit and will be completed on Blackboard. You **may use** your notes; however, keep in mind that the quiz is timed. The quizzes include a combination of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short answer questions.

*Film Research & Critique Paper (15%)*

This film research project will help develop your information literacy and communication skills. Many topics related to biological anthropology that we cover in the course are frequently discussed in pop culture with varying degrees of scientific accuracy. This assignment asks you to critically examine how topics related to biological anthropology are depicted in a work of fiction. You will choose one of the following films that most interests you and compose a brief paper in two separate steps.

- *10,000 BC* (2008)
- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- *Gattaca* (1997)
- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2017)
- *Planet of the Apes* (1968, 2001 – not the recent sequels)
- *Rampage* (2018)

**Note:** If you would like to make an additional suggestion for a film to include, please let me know and we will consider including it as an option for the course.

This assignment will be completed in two separate steps:

1. *Movie summary & annotated bibliography:* A brief, single page, double-spaced summary (~300 words) of the plot, characters, and themes of the film. Also, outline the specific topic you'd like to examine that's addressed in the film (such as genetic modification or evolution). You will also identify five (5) primary sources from biological anthropological or other scholarly research that discuss your topic. You will annotate, or provide a brief

critical summary, of **two (2)** of the sources on your bibliography. Due on Blackboard by **11:59 PM on February 7, 2020**.

2. *Research & critique paper*: The final step of the assignment is to write a 4-6 page (~1500 word) report that discusses how the topic you chose is portrayed in the film using the information from the research you identified. This report should be your own analysis of how, or if, the writers and directors portrayed the science accurately (for either their understanding of the facts at the time of the film's production or by today's understanding) or if they embellished with creative and narrative license. Due on Blackboard by **11:59 PM on February 28, 2020**.

#### *Primate Observation Assignment (20%)*

This assignment will be completed on an independent visit to the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park to enhance your critical inquiry skills. During your visit, you will conduct field observations of the different primates at the park and take notes to answer critical thinking questions provided to you in the instructions for the assignment. The observation forms should be scanned/photographed and your answers to the critical thinking questions should be typed. You will upload both together on Blackboard by **11:59 PM on March 20, 2020**.

#### *Museum Assignment (20%)*

In addition to observing living primates at the Zoo, you will also travel to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and spend some time in the Hall of Human Origins. Within this exhibit, you will select a handful of artifacts to examine and describe as well as critically analyzing the dioramas of various hominin and early *Homo* specimens. The anthropologists and archaeologists at the museum have had to make assumptions regarding the behavior of these individuals. This assignment will result in a short 3-5 page essay that will be uploaded to Blackboard by **11:59 PM on May 4, 2020**.

Further instructions and grading criteria for each assignment are available on Blackboard and will be discussed in class.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### *Classroom Conduct*

You are expected to conduct yourself in an adult and professional manner at all times. Please be courteous to your professor and TA as well as your fellow students. During class discussion, please also be respectful of other students' opinions, especially if they disagree with your own. Do not engage in private conversations during lecture periods and make sure that all cell phones or personal communication devices are on silent mode. Do not bring food into the lecture room. You **MAY USE** electronic devices for taking notes during the lecture, but please do not text or use social media during class because it may be distracting to the other students or the professor. Be mindful that using computers to take notes, instead of pen and paper, has been proven to be less effective for your retention of information.

The uncertainty of life also often leads to sleep deprivation. This deprivation is occasionally unintentionally, and unfortunately, remedied by a 75-minute nap in a dark room to the white noise of some academic droning on about million-year-old bones. Try your best to stay

awake, and I will try my best to keep your mind alert. I won't send the TA to wake you up, unless you snore, but I can't guarantee we won't all be laughing at you as you drool on your desk.

*Late Work and Missed Quizzes:*

All due dates are outlined in the schedule below. Quizzes and assignments that are turned in late will be penalized 0.5 points per each day beyond the due date. Late assignments will *only* be accepted if discussed with me on or before the due date. Missed assignments and quizzes due to excusable research (illness, family emergency, religious observances) can be made up without penalty. Please come to class even if your assignment is not ready to turn-in so that you do not fall behind.

*Academic Integrity Code:*

Cheating on a quiz or any other assignment is a violation of the university's Academic Integrity Code and will not be tolerated. Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university's [Academic Integrity Code](#). By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary action will be taken should violations occur. This includes cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism.

**SafeAssign:** In this course, one or more assignments may be submitted to the instructor using the SafeAssign plagiarism detection tool, which is integrated into Blackboard. Plagiarism, an unlawful act that is defined as the misrepresentation of the published ideas, concepts, or words of another as one's own. SafeAssign uploads the submitted work to the AU SafeAssign database for comparison against other student papers, as well as academic articles and internet resources, to generate an "Originality Report" that identifies areas of potential overlap. In addition to discouraging academic dishonesty, this tool can create opportunities for students to learn how to properly cite and paraphrase sources. Each assignment description will provide information on how to cite work properly, but please contact the instructor if you have any questions or concerns about how to avoid plagiarism. Neither Blackboard nor AU claim any copyright ownership of work submitted through SafeAssign.

**Serious Note:** If you are struggling in the course, talk to Professor Gibbons ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the semester for help. By then, it is too late. If you do not do as well as you would like on the first assignments, come to Professor Gibbons' office hours (or make an appointment) so we can figure out how you can improve your performance in the course. Further, if you are struggling in any aspect of your college career, please find help as soon as possible, and I would be happy to be your first point of contact. As a student enrolled at a university, you have many resources available to you for free. College is exciting and world-expanding, but it also tends to correspond with the most psychological challenging period in our adult lives. You are not alone, there is help, and we care about both your academic and personal successes.

## RESOURCES

### *Technical Support*

AU is committed to providing a reliable online course system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty that prevents a student from completing a time-sensitive assessment activity, instructors may extend deadlines and provide appropriate accommodations based on the situation.

**Blackboard Support:** Students should immediately report any problems to their course instructor and also contact the Blackboard Support Center at [blackboard@american.edu](mailto:blackboard@american.edu) or call (202) 885-3904 for 24/7 support. Students can also log on to [Blackboard Help](#) for support.

**AU Help Desk (focuses on all other IT issues):** Answers to your technology questions are just an e-mail, instant message, or phone call away. Contact the IT Help Desk at 202-885-2550, [helpdesk@american.edu](mailto:helpdesk@american.edu), or [AskAmericanUHelp](#) to reach one of our professional staff who can answer your questions and provide general troubleshooting assistance. Students can also log on to the [Need Help Now?](#) portal for support.

### *Academic Support Services*

All students may take advantage of the [Academic Support and Access Center \(ASAC\)](#) for individual academic skills counseling, workshops, Tutoring and Writing Lab appointments, peer tutor referrals, and Supplemental Instruction. The ASAC is located in Mary Graydon Center 243.

Additional academic support resources available at AU include the Bender Library, the Department of Literature's Writing Center (located in the Library), the Math Lab in the Department of Mathematics & Statistics, and the Center for Language Exploration, Acquisition, & Research (CLEAR) in Asbury Hall. A more complete list of campus-wide resources is available in the ASAC.

### *Accommodations for Students with Disabilities*

AU is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. The ASAC assists students with disabilities and promotes full participation in academic programs and other campus activities.

Students are not required to notify the university or any of its offices or personnel of a disability either prior to or subsequent to admission; however, if a student plans to request accommodations, documentation of the disability must be provided. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended.

To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-885-3360 or [asac@american.edu](mailto:asac@american.edu), or drop by MGC 243. For more information, visit AU's [Services for Students with Disabilities web page](#). Once you have registered, or if you have already registered, please provide me with your accommodation letter or notify me if:

- You anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course.
- You have emergency medical information you would like to share with me.

- You need to make arrangements in case the building must be evacuated.

#### *Center for Diversity & Inclusion*

[CDI](#) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, multicultural, first-generation, and women's experiences on campus and to advancing AU's commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy. It is located on the 2nd floor of Mary Graydon Center. (202-885-3651, MGC 201 & 202)

#### *Counseling Center*

The [Counseling Center](#) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources. (202-885-3500, MGC 214)

#### *Dean of Students Office*

The [Dean of Students Office](#) offers one-on-one meetings to discuss academic, adjustment, and personal issues that may be interfering with a student's ability to succeed academically. The office also verifies documentation for students who have medical or mental health issues that cause them to be absent from class. (202-885-3300, Butler Pavilion 408)

#### *International Student & Scholar Services*

[International Student & Scholar Services](#) has resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, [support for second language learners](#), response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and other campus resources. (202-885-3350, Butler Pavilion 410)

#### *Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence*

[OASIS](#) provides free and confidential advocacy services for anyone in the campus community who experiences sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking. Advocacy is survivor-driven and intended to empower survivors to make informed decisions about their health, emotional well-being, and the adjudication process (202-885-7070, Wellness Center, McCabe Hall 123).

#### *Writing Center*

The [Writing Center](#) offers free, individual coaching sessions to all AU students. In your 45-minute session, a student writing consultant can help you address your assignments, understand the conventions of academic writing, and learn how to revise and edit your own work. (202-885-2991, Bender Library – 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Commons).

#### *Discrimination and Harassment (Title IX)*

American University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The university is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. AU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income,

veteran status, an individual's genetic information, or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the [AU Department of Public Safety](#) (202-885-2527) or the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) ([dos@american.edu](mailto:dos@american.edu) or 202-885-3300). Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff – with the exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, staff in the Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence (OASIS), medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center – who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident. For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact [OASIS: The Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence](#) ([oasis@american.edu](mailto:oasis@american.edu) or 202-885-7070) or the Office of the Dean of Students. For information about your rights, see the [Title IX Information](#) page on the AU website.

#### *Religious Observances*

Students will be provided the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Please send this notification through email to the professor. For additional information, see American University's [religious observances policy](#).

#### *Sharing of Course Content*

Students are not permitted to make visual or audio recordings, including live streaming, of classroom lectures or any class-related content, using any type of recording devices (e.g., smart phone, computer, digital recorder, etc.) unless prior permission from the instructor is obtained, and there are no objections from any of the students in the class. If permission is granted, personal use and sharing of recordings and any electronic copies of course materials (e.g., PowerPoints, formulas, lecture notes, and any classroom discussions—online or otherwise) is limited to the personal use of students registered in the course and for educational purposes only, even after the end of the course. Exceptions will be made for students who present a signed Letter of Accommodation from the Academic Support and Access Center. Further details are available from the [ASAC website](#).

To supplement the classroom experience, lectures may be audio or video recorded by faculty and made available to students registered for this class. Faculty may record classroom lectures or discussions for pedagogical use, future student reference, or to meet the accommodation needs of students with a documented disability. These recordings are limited to personal use and may not be distributed (fileshare), sold, or posted on social media outlets without the written permission of faculty.

Unauthorized downloading, file sharing, distribution of any part of a recorded lecture or course materials, or using information for purposes other than the student's own learning may be deemed a violation of American University's Student Conduct Code and subject to disciplinary action (see Student Conduct Code VI. Prohibited Conduct).

<b>Part I: Biological Anthropology &amp; Evolutionary Theory</b>		
Jan. 13	Introduction to Anthropology	Ch. 1
Jan. 16	Evolutionary Theory	Ch. 2
Jan. 20	Dr. MLK Day – NO CLASS	
Jan. 23	Darwin & Natural Selection	Ch. 3
Jan. 27	Introduction to Genetics	Ch. 3
Jan. 30	Heredity & (Epi)genetics	Ch. 3-4
Feb. 3	Modern Human Variation & Adaptation	Ch. 4
Feb. 6	Forces of Evolution	Ch. 5
<b><i>Film Summary/Biblio. Due, 11:59 PM Friday, Feb. 7</i></b>		
Feb. 10	Speciation & Classification	Ch. 5
Feb. 13	Ecology, Landscape, & the Anthropocene	Articles-Blackboard
<b>Part II: Primates – Our Relatives &amp; Ourselves</b>		
Feb. 17	Intro to Primates & New World Monkeys	Ch. 6
Feb. 20	Old World Monkeys & Lesser Apes	Ch. 6
Feb. 24	The Great Apes	Ch. 6
Feb. 27	Primate Behavior & Reproduction	Ch. 7
<b><i>Film Critique Due, 11:59 PM Friday, Feb. 28</i></b>		
Mar. 2	Primate Language & Culture	Ch. 7
<b>Part III: Human Origins in the Fossil Record</b>		
Mar. 5	Paleoanth., Archaeology, & Deep Time	Ch. 8
Mar. 9, 12	Spring Break – NO CLASS	
Mar. 16	Early Hominins: The Bipedal Adaptation	Ch. 9
Mar. 19	The Pre-Australopiths	Ch. 9
<b><i>Primate Obs./Zoo Report Due, 11:59 PM Friday, March 20</i></b>		
Mar. 23	The Australopiths	Ch. 9
Mar. 26	Almost Human?	Ch. 10
Mar. 30	The First Hominin Diaspora	Ch. 10
Apr. 2	Premodern Humans	Ch. 11
Apr. 6	Neandertals & Denisovans	Ch. 11-12
Apr. 9	Anatomically Modern Humans	Ch. 12
Apr. 13	Early Holocene Hunter-Gatherers	Ch. 13
Apr. 16	Domestication & Food Production	Ch. 14
Apr. 20	The First Civilizations	Ch. 15
Apr. 23	Biocultural Evolution	Ch. 16
Apr. 27	Our Past 10,000 Years, Our Future	Ch. 16
<b><i>Museum Assignment Due, 11:59 PM Monday, May 4</i></b>		

**THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM.**

**WE WILL NOT MEET DURING THE FINAL EXAM PERIOD.**