

## Chance, Purpose, and Progress in Evolution and Religion: ECOL524 Spring 2011

### Instructors

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The scientific theory of evolution by natural selection has had a profound philosophical influence on ideas of chance, purpose and progress, sometimes running into conflict with religion in the process. The touchy nature of these questions means that they are rarely discussed openly in scientific circles. This course will provide a forum for rigorous, authentic, respectful but not circumscribed discussion of these core philosophical issues, including both scientific and theological perspectives. Students of any religious belief or none are equally welcome. Discussions will be structured around assigned readings, announced in advance, to be read before the class meets. Choice of readings may be directed by the expressed interests of the class. Students will take turns to lead the discussion and are also required to contribute to an associated blog.

The course will usually include a guest lecture invited from across the country, which may not always coincide with the regular course time: in this case students are expected to make all reasonable effort to attend these lectures, subject to prior constraints. Otherwise, each student is expected to attend every class session; however, all holidays or special events observed by organized religions will be honored for those students who show affiliation with that particular religion, and absences pre-approved by the UA Dean of Students (or Dean's designee) will be honored. Enrollment in the course signifies that a student will participate to the best of his or her abilities in each class session.

At times, discussion may include material of a sensitive nature. No opinion will be considered inappropriate for discussion, but the manner of the discussion must be appropriate. In order to deal with these complex issues productively, it will be important to identify the intellectual content of arguments. One goal of the class is to improve students' ability to deal with emotionally laden material in an academic manner. Distracting or personal rhetoric will be discouraged.

#### Policy Against Plagiarism

<http://dos.web.arizona.edu/uapolicies>

#### Policy Against Threatening Behavior

<http://policy.web.arizona.edu/~policy/threaten.shtml>.

#### Academic Integrity

Integrity is expected of every student in all academic work. The guiding principle of academic integrity is that a student's submitted work must be the student's own. This principle is furthered by the *Student Code of Conduct* and disciplinary procedures established by ABOR Policies 5-308 - 5-403, all provisions of which apply to all University of Arizona students. For further information, please see: <http://w3.arizona.edu/~studpubs/policies/cacaint.htm>.

## Special Needs and Accommodations Statement

Students who need special accommodation or services should contact the SALT (Strategic Alternatives Learning Techniques), the Center for Learning Disabilities (SALT Center, Old Main, PO Box 210021, Tucson, Arizona 85721-0021, (520) 621-1242, FAX (520) 621-9448, TTY (520) 626-6072), <http://www.salt.arizona.edu/>, and/or the Disability Resources Center, 1540 E. 2nd Street, PO Box 210064, Tucson, Arizona 85721-0064, (520) 621-3268, FAX (520)621-9423, <http://drc.arizona.edu/>. The appropriate office must document the need for accommodations.

## Grades

Regular grades (A/B/C/D/E) are offered. Achievement of an A grade requires attendance at every meeting (unless excused for valid cause), significant participation in discussions that demonstrates that the assigned course materials have been read, and significant contribution to the class blog. Failure to meet one of these three criteria will result in a B grade, while failure to meet more than one will result in a grade of C, D or E, depending on the extent of a students' contribution.

## Schedule

The focus for this semester is on the **Evolution of Religious Practices**. We meet **Mondays 2-3:50pm in Harvill 105**. Readings are listed below, to be completed before we meet.

Jan 24 Chapter 1 of Darwin's Cathedral by David Sloan Wilson

Feb 7 "Ch.6: The many faces of religion" by Lucas Mix, preface to Karen Armstrong's "The Case for God", Michael Reiss "[The Relationship between Evolutionary Biology and Religion](#)"

Feb 21 Chapters 2 and 3 from Paden's "Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religions"

Mar 7 E.O. Wilson "Sociobiology" p.559-564

Mar 21 guest lecture by Konrad Talmont-Kaminski, reading Atran & Henrich "[The Evolution of Religion: How Cognitive By-Products, Adaptive Learning Heuristics, Ritual Displays, and Group Competition Generate Deep Commitments to Prosocial Religions](#)"

Apr 4 Norenzayan "[The Origin and Evolution of Religious Prosociality](#)"

Apr 11 Further discussion of evolving traits in religion, exploration of class-chosen case studies.

May 2 Gladden et al. "[Moral intuitions and religiosity as spuriously correlated life history traits](#)". Discussion of the definition of religiosity.