

Evolutionary Linguistics – Ling 5170

INSTRUCTOR	Gareth Roberts				
OFFICE HOURS	By appointment				
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COURSE DESCRIPTION	Scholars have been interested in the origins and evolution of language for hundreds of years, and work was published on the topic throughout the twentieth century. The end of the century, however, saw a considerable upsurge in serious scientific interest, leading to increasing interdisciplinary communication on the topic and the development of new empirical tools. This course offers an introduction to the literature in this field, bringing together research from a diverse range of disciplines, and laying out what questions remain and how they might possibly be answered. No background in evolutionary theory or in the evolution of language itself is expected.				
COURSE STRUCTURE	<p>The course will involve a mixture of seminars led by the instructor and discussions of readings, often led by the students. While the first half of the semester will be dominated by fundamental matters relevant to the topic, the focus of the second half will be guided by the interests of students in the class. Topics likely to be covered include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Universal grammar and the language facultyThe comparative approach: Language in the context of other speciesApproaches to ProtolanguageThe biological evolution of speechLanguage and geneticsSign and modalityThe evolution of syntaxInformation theory and languageCultural evolutionPopulation structure and languageExperimental approaches to the evolution of language				
READINGS	<p>There is no textbook, but there will be readings provided over the course of the semester. These will be made available on Canvas.</p> <p>Students looking for a good single-volume book on the topic of the class are recommended to obtain a copy of W. Tecumseh Fitch's <i>The Evolution of Language</i> (2010; Cambridge University Press), from which some of the reading for the course will be drawn. However, owning the book is not required (and online copies are available from Penn Libraries).</p>				
GRADING	<p>Your grade will be weighted as follows:</p> <table><tr><td>Presentations</td><td>20%</td></tr><tr><td>Final paper</td><td>80%</td></tr></table> <p>For undergraduate students there is also the option of breaking the final paper into two papers, one a short midterm paper (worth 30% of your grade) and the other a longer final paper worth 50% of your grade (and typically of more limited scope than would be expected with the 20/80 option).</p>	Presentations	20%	Final paper	80%
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