

# EVOLUTION of SOCIETIES and CULTURES

## Environmental Science and Policy/Anthropology 105

Spring 2009

### COURSE OUTLINE

**Instructor:** Peter J. Richerson, Division of Environmental Studies, 3146 Wickson Hall

Office Hours: M 2:10-3:00 PM

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<http://www.des.ucdavis.edu/faculty/richerson/richerson.htm>

#### Course time and location:

Lecture	MWF	10:00-10:50 AM	Bainer 1132
Discussion	M	3:10-4:00 PM	Hutchinson 102

#### Overview

Prior to ten-thousand years ago, nearly all humans on the planet made their living by foraging and hunting. Now, among those people who still produce their own food, nearly all practice some form of agriculture. The rest of us—most citizens of first-world states—exchange various services for our food and are incapable of surviving for long in even the mildest wilderness. How humans got from hunting and gathering to agriculture to massively complex societies with widespread division of labor is one of the great mysteries of the social sciences. Every field from history to economics to evolutionary biology has weighed in on these debates. This course plunges head-first into the middle of this arena. First, we provide a general overview of our ethnographic knowledge of different scales and forms of human social organization and production. Second, we address the causes of transitions between these forms—part of a process social scientists sometimes call *cultural evolution*—using theories from diverse fields.

Your instructors have their own opinions, but are by no means certain they are correct. There is a great deal of progress yet to be made in understanding how a hairless tropical primate specialized for hunting and gathering became the world's dominant organism, transforming both itself and the world's environment. This course lays out the facts to be explained and the texture of the contemporary debates.

#### Texts

We'll read two books.

(1) Johnson & Earle, *The Evolution of Human Societies: From Foraging Group to Agrarian State* (2nd Edition)

(2) Richerson & Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*

These should both be available in the campus bookstore. All together, the reading in this course averages out to about 50 or 60 pages a week, over ten weeks. If you keep up each week, it will not be a chore.

## **Essays, Examinations and Grading**

Grades will be based on performance on two exams (50%), a take home essay (40%), and active participation in discussion (10%).

**Exams:** The midterm will be based on material from the first half of the course. The final exam will be cumulative: approximately one third of the material will be based on the first half of the course and two thirds on the second half. Both exams will consist of a selection of short-answer questions. We will hand out these questions ahead of the exams, and students will be asked in class on exam day to answer a few of the questions they have had a chance to prepare for.

**Essays:** A list of essay topics will be distributed on the day of the midterm exam and on the day of the second to last lecture. You will be asked to choose one of the questions and write up to 1000 words (approximately 4 typed, double-spaced pages) on it. The midterm essay will be due one week after the questions are handed out, and the final essay will be due at the final exam. The questions will be reasonably open-ended, so feel free to seminar with other students me before you write. The only restriction is that each essay must actually be written independently. Your responses should be well-written and must be typed. They should be well organized essays which introduce a theme or question, build an argument, and sum up at the end. Cite references in scientific style (as in the texts) as appropriate. Email them to me as an attachment.

I will grade these essays partly on style; a well designed essay will impress the reader, apart from the content. This is in part because a well-written essay is easier to understand, and in part because poor writing is usually a result of sloppy thinking. If you believe that you can improve an essay significantly for either content or style, we'll be glad to regrade a revision.

## Lecture Outline

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
March 30	Introduction and overview	
April 1	Evolution of human societies	J&E pp 32-37
April 3	Family-level groups	J&E Ch 2
April 6	Foraging	J&E Ch 3
April 8	Domestication	J&E Ch 4
April 10	Local groups I	J&E Ch 5
April 13	Local groups II	J&E Ch 6
April 15	Villages and clans	J&E Ch 7
April 17	Corporate groups and big-men	J&E Ch 8
April 20	Regional polities	J&E Ch 9
April 22	Simple chiefdoms	J&E Ch 10
April 24	Complex chiefdoms	J&E Ch 11
April 27	Archaic states	J&E Ch 12
April 29	Agrarian states	J&E Ch 13
May 1	Modern states	J&E Ch 14
May 4	<b>MIDTERM; hand out essay questions</b>	
May 6	Culture as information	R&B Ch 1
May 8	Culture is essential	R&B Ch 1
May 11	Evidence that culture exists I	R&B Ch 2
	<b>Midterm essay due</b>	
May 13	Evidence that culture exists II	R&B Ch 2
May 15	Culture evolves I	R&B Ch 3
May 18	Culture evolves II	R&B Ch 3
May 20	Culture is an adaptation I	R&B Ch 4
May 22	Culture is an adaptation II	R&B Ch 4
May 25	Memorial Day	
May 27	Culture is maladaptive	R&B Ch 5
May 29	Demographic transition And Modernity	R&B Ch 5
June 1	Gene-culture coevolution	R&B Ch 6
	<b>Hand out essay questions</b>	
June 3	Conclusion	

June 9 1-3 PM **FINAL EXAM; second essay due**