

Syllabus EARTH 3113A – Fall 2026

Welcome to Geology of Human Origins

Have you ever looked at a monkey and tried to understand how you are related? Or how you are related to a squirrel? Are you curious about fossils? Do you want to know why only humans have chins? Would you like to better understand how important evolutionary events have shaped our current biology as a species? This course examines the origins and evolution of our species from geological, biological and cultural perspectives and explores these questions and more! We will trace human ancestry from our primate roots through time and changing environments, and explore controversies, frauds, and misconceptions surrounding human evolution and evolutionary theory.

Lectures:

Wednesdays 18:05 - 20:55 (6:05pm 8:55 pm) Tory Building Room 208 (In person only)

First Lecture: Wednesday September 9th



Learning Outcomes:

This class is an evolutionary survey of how changes to the environment have affected human biology, morphology, ecology, and culture. Students completing this class will gain an understanding of scientific knowledge about the origin and evolution of humans in light of the fossil record and geologic history of Earth.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Objectively evaluate novel hypotheses and controversies about human origins, evolution, and general science;
- Recognize and describe misconceptions surrounding scientific theory and application;
- Demonstrate an understanding of their own evolutionary history and relationships with other organisms; and
- Describe how geological processes and time have influenced human evolution.

Teaching Team

Course Instructor: Genevieve Ferguson, Ph.D.

Email: genevieveferguson@cunet.carleton.ca / genevieve.ferguson@carleton.ca

Office hours: Virtual and/or by appointment (Tory 425)

Your TA: Lea Veine-Tonizzo - LEAVEINETONIZZO@gmail.com



Email correspondence regarding the course must originate from a Carleton email address and should have the course code in the subject line.

Course Materials

Mandatory Textbook:

Explorations: An Open Invitation to Biological Anthropology. 2 edition. Beth Shook, Ph.D., Lara Braff, Ph.D., Katie Nelson, Ph.D., Kelsie Aguilera, M.A. (Ed). 2023.

Available through Creative Commons open access:

<https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/explorationsbioanth2/>

The course schedule, weekly readings, lecture notes and videos will all be available on the course Brightspace page.

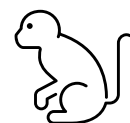
There are also web resources, links, and interesting things of note available to you on the Brightspace course page – please use it!

Land Acknowledgment

Carleton University acknowledges the location of its campus on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin nation. In doing so, Carleton acknowledges it has a responsibility to the Algonquin people and a responsibility to adhere to Algonquin cultural protocols.

Course Assessment

Each week 1-2 major topics will be covered. Lecture slides and assigned reading will be posted on Brightspace before each lecture. Students are expected to attend the weekly in-person lectures to discuss key concepts from previous lectures and readings, interact with fossil replicas, complete assignments, and explore the main evolutionary theories.



Component	Description	Value
Quizzes	5 quizzes spaced throughout the semester that will cover topics from the previous 1-2 lecture periods and readings. Quizzes will be available on Brightspace and are worth 5% each. There will be 1 optional bonus quiz at the end of term to replace the lowest quiz mark.	20%
In-Class Activities and reflections	There will be 4 in-class activities and 4 reflections throughout the semester. Each activity is worth 7% and reflections are 3%.	40%
UnEssay Project	The UnEssay project is an opportunity for students to explore a single topic of their choice in greater detail and share it at the end of the semester. The projects can take on several media forms including (but not limited to) essays, PPT presentations, artwork, games, needlework, websites, songs, etc. Several aspects of the project must be completed throughout the semester for full grades.	40%

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Late Policy

The breakdown of late penalties for each assessment component is outlined below. While overall the late policy is generous, it is up to each student to ensure that they are communicating with the course instructor concerning difficulties meeting deadlines or attending lectures (life happens). For short term accommodations (5 days or less) written requests must be sent to the instructor via email. If accommodations are required for longer than the 5-day period, please email the instructor to discuss how/whether accommodation needs can be met for this course.

Component	Description
Quizzes	Each quiz will become available to students (open) on a set date (Fridays) and will close 2 weeks after (also Fridays). Quizzes will not have a set time duration once opened and are considered open book. Unless you have discussed it with the instructor by 1 day after closing you will not be allowed to make-up quizzes.
In-Class Activities and reflections	All activities and reflections will be done <i>during class time</i> and therefore due at the end of the activity or class period. No late penalties apply but there are also no make-up activities unless already discussed with instructor.
UnEssay Project	Many components of the UnEssay project have a due date for the “week of”. It is understood that students will hand in components during the specified week. If components are handed in after marking has occurred (and they have been returned to students) an automatic late penalty of -5% will apply per occurrence. The Final UnEssay project is due the last day of class (Wednesday December 9 th) and late projects will not be accepted unless already discussed with instructor.

Your Rights, Responsibilities, and Accommodations

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty, such as cheating, will not be allowed. Plagiarism includes cases of lack of citations and sources of information and ideas as well as failure to paraphrase or acknowledge other people’s work. If any cases of academic dishonesty are discovered, the responsible student/s will not receive any credits for the affected work. Repeated cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the University administration.

Please see <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/> for the university policy on academic integrity.

Use of Generative AI

It is expected that all final work submitted by students (quizzes, assignments, UnEssays) has been completed and produced by the individual themselves. Minimal use of AI is deemed acceptable for this course. Students may use AI tools in the following ways:

Basic word processing and formatting functions:

- Grammar and spell checking (e.g., Grammarly, Microsoft Word Editor)
- Basic formatting and design suggestions (e.g., Microsoft Word’s formatting tools, PowerPoint Design editor)

Content Generation *with* Attribution:

- Brainstorming ideas (e.g., generating essay topics with ChatGPT, using Microsoft Word's Smart Lookup to find inspiration and related topics) – **AI use MUST BE CLEARLY IDENTIFIED**
- Creating outlines (e.g., using AI to structure an essay or presentation flow, using Microsoft Word's Outline View with AI suggestions) - **AI use MUST BE CLEARLY IDENTIFIED**
- As our understanding of the uses of GenAI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of GenAI in any circumstance not described here with the course instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course.



Rights and Responsibilities

The *Carleton University Undergraduate Calendar* details the rights and responsibilities of students registered at the University. It is the responsibility of each student to familiarize themselves with the Academic Regulations of the University: <https://carleton.ca/curriculum/regulations-reorganization/>.

Academic Accommodations

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals and you may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website: students.carleton.ca/course-outline

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)

In accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA), all personal and academic information is considered confidential and will not be disclosed to a third party without the authorization of the person to whom the information pertains. Carleton University's FIPPA policy requires that information requests concerning academic or administrative issues will only be answered if the request originates from the student's University provided email account (cmail) or in person upon presentation of their Carleton Campus Card. Requests via phone or originating from other emails accounts, will not be answered.

For a complete list of Carleton University's Policies please visit: <https://carleton.ca/secretariat/policies/>

Course Copyright

My lectures and course materials (including all PowerPoint presentations, outlines, and similar materials) are protected by copyright. I am the exclusive owner of copyright and intellectual property of all course materials. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. **You may not** allow others (including websites) to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly without my express written consent.



ERTH3113 Course Schedule

Please note that topics covered may change slightly throughout semester due to timing/interest. The schedule will be kept updated on Brightspace.

Week	Topics to Cover	Quizzes	In-Class Activities	UnEssay
1	Introduction to EARTH3113 UnEssay Project			
2	Topic 1. Development of Evolutionary Theory Topic 2. Mechanisms of Evolution Referencing /Plagiarism/Using AI	Quiz 1 Opens (Friday)		
3	Topic 3. Fossilization and Geological Time Topic 4. What are Primates Scientific Nomenclature		Reflection 1	UnEssay Topic Proposal Due
4	Topic 5. Reconstructing Behaviour and Paleoecology Reading Scientific Papers	Quiz 2 Opens Quiz 1 Closes (Friday)	Activity 1	
5	Topic 6. Early Ape Evolution Topic 7. Trends in Hominin Evolution Science and Society			
6	Topic 8. Origins of Hominins Topic 9. Bipedalism	Quiz 3 Opens Quiz 2 Closes (Friday)	Reflection 2	UnEssay Annotated Bibliography Due
7	Topic 10. The Australopithecines		Activity 2	
8	Fall Break—NO LECTURE			
9	Topic 11. Origins of the Genus Homo	Quiz 4 Opens Quiz 3 Closes (Friday)	Reflection 3	UnEssay Detailed Outline Due
10	Topic 12. Homo Erectus/Ergaster		Activity 3	
11	Topic 13. Pre-Modern Homo Topic 14. Homo Neanderthalensis	Quiz 5 Opens Quiz 4 Closes (Friday)		
12	Topic 15. Modern Humans		Reflection 4	UnEssay Detailed Draft Due
13	Topic 16. Cultural Evolution Topic 17. What Makes Us Human	BONUS Quiz Opens Quiz 5 Closes (Friday)	Activity 4	
14	UnEssay Presentations	Bonus Quiz Closes (Friday)		UnEssay Project Due

