Understanding Culture: Analytical and Modeling Approaches

Meeting Time: Tuesday 2:30pm to 5:30pm
Meeting Place: 2405 Kenny

Instructor: Joe Henrich
Office: 2039 Kenny or 901 Buchanan
Email: joseph.henrich@gmail.com
Phone: (604) 822-3007 or (604) 822-3826
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description
This course reviews current theoretical and empirical approaches to understanding culture and cultural evolution from an interdisciplinary perspective. Theoretical work will principally draw on modeling approaches in evolutionary biology and anthropology, while most empirical research will come from economics, archeology, and psychology. Emphasis will be given to new sources of data and novel techniques for testing hypotheses about population-level differences and cultural evolution.

Course Materials and Resources

Online, Vista
There is a course website on the new Blackboard UBC Vista system. This system is the main vehicle for delivering the readings. Extended discussions may also occur in the chat room. Vista is at https://www.elearning.ubc.ca/home/index.cfm. Or log directly on at: https://www.vista.ubc.ca/webct/logon/226906602011.

Course requirements and weightings for final grade:
Your course grade is based on four components: your general participation in seminar, which includes attendance, your effectiveness at reviewing readings and leading discussions (see Discussion leader assignments), your review of available databases, and your final paper.

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<tr>
<th>Grading Instrument</th>
<th>% contribution</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Leading</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Database Review</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Participation
Students are expected to do the reading and avidly participate.

Discussion Leading
Students will be assigned to lead one or more discussions for a class. Discussion leaders will be responsible for presenting the readings, highlighting key insights or
concerns, and energizing the discussion. This DL will lead off the class with a 15 minute presentation. Discussion leaders may meet with me prior to their discussion leading, but this is up to them to arrange.

**Database Review**

Students will also be asked to review the existing databases that are available for use. These may be publicly available data sources or datasets created by specific researchers. Reviews should focus on (1) what information is available in the data source, (2) how it was collected (sampling), when, and by whom, (3) what are the shortcomings of the data source, (4) how can we access it, and (5) what questions might this data source address especially when combined with other data sources. Ideally, students will have actually obtained (e.g., downloaded and converted) the data source and worked with it.

Every student will be required to review two data sources (1) one source assigned by the professor (from his list) and (2) one that the student locates on his or her own. Students with particular interests that might favor one or another database should make the professor aware of this.

**Final paper:**

The final paper will consist of three parts, and the absolute deadline is December 9th. The subparts may be submitted individually, at any point during the semester.

Part I. Design a set of experiments to confirm and extend empirical findings on “culture” from macro-level analyses. These may be findings from economics that we discussed or other findings. These experiments should (1) help detail the psychological, physiological or cognitive processes involved in creating the empirical patterns, and (2) contribute to explaining the variation (testing a theory for explaining the variation). A prime goal is to further develop theories of variation. Be clear about how your experiments accomplish this. Four pages is the target.

Part II. Develop a simple, “first pass” test an existing psychological theory, idea, or claim and examine it using one (or preferably more) of the available global databases. Be clear about what your analysis tells us about this psychological theory, idea, or claim. Please also verify that no one has already done what you did. Five pages is the target. This will likely involve recombining data sets from different sources. Consider what additional data or analytical technique you’d need to really nail this down.

Part III. Review either (a) the existing evidence for cumulative cultural transmission or (b) the available theory. After reviewing it, highlight the gaps and propose a way of filling the gaps, either theoretically, empirically, or both. Five pages here.

Student must submit a paragraph describing their plans for Part I and II during November, or sooner. Students may want to submit early to “claim” certain ideas, or they can wait to be inspired by other people’s ideas. Each student, however, must pursue their
own unique idea. This means that those who have not explained their basic plans by Nov 22, will be asked to do so then.

## Schedule

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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| Sept 6 | **Understanding Culture**  
- Review of syllabus  
- Goals of the course  
- Value of interdisciplinary reading  
- Introductory lecture |
| 2 Sept 13 | **Evolution and Culture: How to theorize culture**  

Discussion leader: Aiyana Willard  
Database presentation: Michael Muthukrishna (Mathematica)  
Special Guest: Maciej Chudek |
| 3 Sept 20 | **Culture, Economics and History**  
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 27</td>
<td>Culture, Economics and History</td>
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<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>Culture, Economics and History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 11</td>
<td>Cumulative Cultural Evolution</td>
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**Discussion leader: Jack Eurich**

**Database presentation: Rita McNamara (World Values Survey)**

- Fernandez, Raquel Does Culture Matter. NBER working paper

**Discussion leader: Jordan Levine**

**Database presentation: Eric Thulin (Afro, Euro, Asiabarometer)**


**Discussion leader: Michael Muthukrishna**

**Database presentation: Jack Eurich (GSS and UNdata)**


**Discussion leader: Joe Henrich**
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| 7 Oct 18 | **Cumulative Cultural Evolution**  
Discussion leaders: Michael Muthukhrisna  
Database presentation: Jordan Levine (HRAF and SCCS) |
| 8 Oct 25 | **Deep History and Religion**  
Discussion leader: Rita McNamara  
Database presentation: Aiyana Willard (Religion DBs)  
Special Guest: Damian Murray |
| 9 Nov 1 | **Cultural Phylogenetics**  
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| 10 Nov 8 | **Marriage and Sex**  
| 11 Nov 15 | **Culture and Cognition**  
| 12 Nov 22 | **TBA**  
**Cultural Neuroscience, Preferences and Sociality**  
- Zaki—social influences alters preferences  

Ukraine learning time preference


Remaining students must explain their plans for Parts I and II of the final paper.

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mathematica curated datasets</td>
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| 2 | World Values Survey  
http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/ |
| 3 | Human Development Program  
United Nations (UNdata)  
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm |
| 4 | Women Stats  
http://www.womanstats.org/ |
| 5 | Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)  
http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/ehrafe/index.do?browseSelect=1&topSelect=0&context=main |
| 6 | Standard Cross Cultural Sample (SCCS)  
http://eclectic.ss.uci.edu/~drwhite/courses/index.html |
| 7 | Inter-university consortium for political and social research  
http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/ |
| 8 | Religion  
http://dss.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/datasources/newdatasources.cgi?term=1  
http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Browse.asp |
| 9 | Genes  
http://genome.ucsc.edu/ |
| 10 | Afrobarometer  
http://www.afrobarometer.org/  
Eurobarometer |

CLASS OPTIONAL: The instructor is in Kyoto. I recommend the class still and discuss the course material.
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