COGS 201. Human Cognition in Evolution and Development

Fall 2011. Lectures: M &W 12:30-1:45 pm, Nord Hall 204

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Course description: COGS 201 is a foundation course providing an introduction to the descent and development of the modern human mind and its exceptional capacities for innovation and creativity.

Overview of grade components:
 Snippet — **5%**
 Response paper — **10%**
 Attendance and preparation — **15%**
 Midterm #1 — **15%**
 Midterm #2 — **15%**
 Final project — **40%**

Description of grade components:

Snippet: Every student will be required to produce one "snippet" for the course discussion board, worth 5% of your grade. A snippet is a brief— but thoughtful!— posting about something you came across in everyday life (e.g. from the Internet) that is closely related to course material. A "snippet" due date will be randomly assigned to each enrolled student and posting of snippets to the discussion board will begin during the third week of class.

Response papers: There will be two short (~2 page) response papers, each worth 10% of your course grade. Response papers are designed to be open-ended in nature, and will be graded on the degree to which they reflect intellectual engagement with the course material.

Attendance and preparation: Attendance is mandatory, and will be assessed by having four unannounced reading quizzes over the course of the semester. If you are not present during the reading quiz, you will receive a zero (barring subsequent proof of legitimate absence). No make-up readings quizzes will be given.

Midterms: There will be two midterms, each worth 20% of your course grade. Midterms will be multiple choice format, but with more than one correct answer possible. Midterms are not cumulative.

Final project: There is no final exam for this class— rather, there is a final project. The project will be on a topic of your own choosing (subject to instructor approval) and will unfold in a series of steps. These steps include an in-class workshop, an in-class presentation, and a final written product of <2000 words. More information will be given about the various components of the final project later in the semester.

Requirements and policies

Late policy: Assignments due in class (e.g. response papers) are to be turned in at the beginning of class. Any assignment turned in after the beginning of class will be considered one day late. Late assignments will be deducted 10% for every school day late.

Collaboration policy: You are welcome— and encouraged!— to discuss course content, ideas, and assignments with your classmates. However, all writing turned in for grading purposes must be your own. Whenever you do collaborate with classmates, you are asked to note the names of all collaborators/ discussants on the top of your turned in work.

Plagiarism policy: You are responsible for being familiar with CWRU's academic dishonesty guidelines, which are available on the web. One key to avoiding plagiarism is understanding and using a standard set of citation practices. **For this course, you will be expected to formally cite all sources used for your written assignments using APA style**. APA style governs how you should refer to sources in the running text, as well as in your references section at the end of your document. Here is an on-line guide to APA style. (**Note**: you are **NOT** expected to use APA style for all aspects of your document, *only* for citations.) If you have any questions about what resources you can and cannot use for a given assignment, please ask.

Course readings: Course readings are available in one of three places: 1) the course documents section of the Blackboard site, marked as **[BCD]**; 2) the Internet, marked as **[WEB]**; 3) the MIT encyclopedia of the cognitive sciences, marked as **[MIT]**. **Important**: readings are listed underneath the class meeting by which they are to be completed. Note that for certain class meetings you may be asked to review other online materials, all of which are linked from the schedule.

Course schedule

Week 1 — **What makes human cognition special?**

Aug 29 — *Introduction; What makes us unique?*

Aug 31 — *Are we just smarter?*
READINGS: **(1)** 'Think you're smarter than animals? Maybe not' [WEB]; **(2)** 'Animal tool-use' [BCD]
OTHER: **(3)** Radiolab short: 'Fu Manchu' [WEB]

Week 2 — **Human evolution**

Sep 5 — LABOR DAY (no class)

Sep 7 — *Evolutionary basics; The human story*
READINGS: **(1)** 'Evolution' [MIT]; **(2)** 'Adaptation and adaptationism' [MIT]; **(3)** 'The evolutionary road' [WEB]

Week 3 — **Glimmers of humanness in body and behavior**

Sep 12 — *Anatomical changes over human evolution*
READING: **(1)** 'Neandertals' [BCD]; **(2)** selection from 'From Lucy to Language' ('Evolution of the human brain') [BCD]
OTHER: **(3)** browse Smithsonian interactive human evolution timeline [WEB]

Sep 14 — *Burial, tool-use, body decoration, figurines, Paleolithic art*
READING: **(1)** selection from 'Becoming human' (Ch. 1: The creative explosion'); **(2)** selections from 'From Lucy to Language' ('Oldest stone tools', 'Fire', 'Clothing', 'Burial', 'Art') [BCD]
OTHER: **(3)** Tour Lascaux cave

Week 4 — **Capacities of the great apes**

Sep 19 — *Social capacities*
READING: **(1)** 'Chimpanzees understand psychological states' [BCD]
OTHER: **(2)** watch 54-min PBS program 'So human, so chimp' [WEB]

Sep 21 — *Social capacities (contd.); memory and concepts*
READING: **(1)** 'Humans have evolved specialized skills of social cognition' [BCD]; **(2)** read letters in response to first reading: 'Comparing Social Skills of Children and Apes'

Week 5 — **Capacities of the great apes (contd.)**

    Sep 26 — *Linguistic capacities*
        RESPONSE PAPER #1 due
        READING: *NO READINGS*
        OTHER: **(1)** 1978 documentary 'Koko: A Talking Gorilla' (pt. 1 of 8) [WEB];
        (2) Radiolab short: 'Kanzi' [WEB]; **(3)** 'Kanzi and novel sentences' [WEB]

    Sep 28 — *review for midterm #1*

Week 6 — **Capacities of human children**

    Oct 3 — **MIDTERM #1**

    Oct 5 — *Overview; Social capacities*
        READING: **(1)** 'Cognitive development' [MIT]; **(2)** 'Infant cognition' [BCD]

Week 7 — **Capacities of human children (contd.)**

    Oct 10 — *Memory, categories, and concepts*
        READING: **(1)** 'Psychological essentialism in children' [BCD]

    Oct 12 — *Linguistic capacities*
        READING: **(1)** 'A usage-based theory of language acquisition' [BCD]

Week 8 — **Analogy, creativity, imagination**

    Oct 17 — Analogy
        READING: **(1)** 'Analogy' [MIT];

    Oct 19 — Metaphor
        READING: **(1)** 'Figurative language' [MIT];

Week 9 — **What provided the spark?**

    Oct 24 — FALL BREAK (no class)

    Oct 26 — Metaphor; Blending
        READING: **NO READING**!

Week 10 — **What provided the spark? (contd.)**

    Oct 31— Theories of the spark
        READING: **(1)** 'The Origin of Language as a Product of the Evolution of
        Modern Cognition' [WEB]

    Nov 2 — Theories of the spark
        READING: **(1)** 'Did working memory spark creative culture'? [BCD]

Week 11 — **Culture makes us human**

Nov 7 —*The capacity for culture*
READING: **(1)** 'The cultural niche' [BCD]

Nov 9 — *Case study #1: Literacy*
READING: **(1)** 'The unique role of the visual word form area in reading' [BCD]

Week 12 — **Culture makes us human (contd.)**

Nov 14— *Case study #2: Google*
READING: **(1)** 'Google effects on memory' [BCD]; **(2)** 'Searching for the Google Effect on People's Memory' [BCD]

Nov 16— review for Midterm #2
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY due

Week 13 — **Midterm and final student projects**

Nov 21 — **MIDTERM #2**

Nov 23 — peer review workshop

Week 14 — **Final student projects**

Nov 28— student presentations, session #1

Nov 30— student presentations, session #2

Week 15 — **Final student projects**

Dec 5— student presentations, session #3

Dec 7— student presentations, session #4