

Paper B1: Humans in Biological Perspective 2022-2023

Lectures are Tuesday 9-10 am and Wednesday 11 am-12 midday in the [Henry Wellcome Building Seminar Room, Fitzwilliam Street](#)



Anthropology is the study of humans in a comparative perspective – comparing societies and cultures, looking at change over time, and exploring human biological diversity.

Biological Anthropology takes this comparative approach to exploring human evolution and adaptation: comparisons between humans and other animals to understand human uniqueness and biological variation; comparisons across time to unravel the evolutionary history of hominins over the last 6–8 million years; investigating variation in human development and health, exploring the mechanisms that generate population differences today and in the past; and looking at individual behaviour in terms of evolution and adaptation and its underlying cognitive basis.

Paper Coordinator: Dr Emma Pomeroy (eep23@cam.ac.uk)

Lecturers: Dr Nikhil Chaudhary, Dr Sylvain Lemoine, Dr Doug Momberg, Dr Emma Pomeroy, Dr Gillian Ragsdale, Dr Jaap Saers

Paper aims and objectives:

This paper provides a broad introduction to Biological Anthropology and covers major subject areas such as primate biology and behaviour, human evolution, human health, adaptation to different environments and life history theory. Through studying this course, students will gain a strong foundation in the field of Biological Anthropology, the processes and patterns of evolution, the way humans fit into the overall pattern of biodiversity, the way in which humans reproduce and grow in an ecological and social environment, and the challenges of living in different environments. Focus is on both the past and how we became human, and the present, with the biological challenges, such as health and disease, humans face today.

The course is designed both for those who wish to specialise in Biological Anthropology, and those who can use it as a complementary and contextual field of study for Archaeology, Psychology and Human, Social and Political Sciences. The course provides an understanding of how different approaches can be used to address specific questions about human origins and diversity, as well as serving as a way of exploring the interaction between biological and social or cultural factors in being human.

Learning outcomes:

On successful completion of this paper, students will produce high-quality essays demonstrating a firm grounding in the fundamental theories and principles of Biological Anthropology, supported by a range of relevant examples drawn from different cultures, populations, time periods and species (including the non-human primates), and a critical approach to key theories and evidence.

Assessment:

This paper is assessed by a three-hour written examination. All topics are covered in single undivided paper, and candidates must answer three essay-style questions from a choice of approximately ten.

Supplementary teaching:

Supervisions will be arranged by your Director of Studies. If your DoS does not have a supervisor arranged, please ask them to contact the Paper Coordinator (eep23) for suggested supervisors.

Three supervisions per term are usual, with an essay typically expected for each supervision.

Course structure:

The course is divided into four sections:

1. An introduction to the world of primates, and how their evolution and diversity throws light on evolutionary processes and how humans are part of the natural world;
2. Human evolution, examining the fossil, genetic and behavioural evidence for the history of the human lineage, and how we became human;
3. An introduction to the field of genetics, introducing the basic principles and how modern genetics is revealing patterns and processes of human diversity and adaptation;
4. The biology, ecology and behaviour of contemporary populations, exploring how behavioural ecology can be applied to humans, the interaction of nature and nurture, growth and development and the factors that influence health, and how humans adapt to multiple environments.

Lecture Schedule:

Michaelmas Term 16 lectures	Week 1: Introduction to B1: Humans in Biological Perspective	Dr Emma Pomeroy
	Weeks 1-4: Primate Evolution, Biology and Behaviour	Dr Sylvain Lemoine
	Weeks 5-8: Human Evolution	Dr Jaap Saers
Lent Term 16 lectures	Weeks 1-3: Introduction to Human Genetics	Dr Gillian Ragsdale
	Weeks 4-6: Evolution of Human Biology, Health and Disease	Dr Doug Momberg
	Weeks 6-8: Human Environmental Adaptation	Dr Emma Pomeroy
Easter Term 4 lectures, 2 practicals & 1 exam session	Weeks 1-2: Human Behaviour and Ecology	Dr Nikhil Chaudhary
	Weeks 2-4: Revision and exam session	Dr Emma Pomeroy