I thank April Hill for her suggestions.

Name: Erik Craft
Department: Economics
Proposed Semester: Fall 2011 First Year Seminar (two sections)
Chair Approval Pending
Title: Darwin’s Theory of Natural Selection: Its Uses and Misuses

Description of Course: Students will read Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and learn of the context in which he proposed it. Thereafter we shall study the development of the uses of his theory: its role in the history of Social Darwinism, its rehabilitation in the form of evolutionary biology and psychology, a modern treatment of evolutionary theory, and the concerns of contemporary critics. A central question in our seminar is how far the theory can be pushed in contributing to our understanding of the human condition. Is it a theory that applies only to the attributes of the body one can see and measure? Or can the theory usefully provide insights into human behavior as well. We shall discuss what special hurdles exist when proposing and testing evolutionary psychology theories.

Briefly describe how the course will seek to achieve the five goals of the First Year Experience:

1. Expand students understanding of the world (e.g. state how the course will challenge students either to think about important questions and issues they may not have thought about before, or think about them in ways they have not thought about them).

   Students in this seminar will first learn/review basic evolutionary theory by reading Darwin’s own explanation of his thesis and a modern synthesis with additional evidence. We shall discuss the challenging political and social context of sharing such ideas. Then we shall follow the history of the use of the concept of natural selection by advocates of Social Darwinism, supporters of eugenics, its subsequent rehabilitation as a theory applicable to individual behavior in the late twentieth century, and the arguments by critics of these recent extensions of the theory to human behavior.

2. Enhance their ability to read and think critically (e.g. a preliminary list of books and articles for the course and exercises or pedagogical methods that will be used to improve critical reading and thinking).

   I expect to assign a subset of the following and other readings:
   Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*
   Jerry Coyne’s *Why Evolution is True*
   Selections from Francis Galton and Ernst Haeckel supporting Social Darwinism and eugenics
   Selections from G. E. Moore’s writings refuting the naturalistic fallacy
   Richard Dawkin’s *The Selfish Gene*
   Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel*
   Selections from Steven Pinker’s *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*
   Daniel Dennett’s *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*
   Modern critique of evolutionary psychology
      David Buller’s “Evolution of the Mind: 4 Fallacies of Psychology” in the *Scientific American* (January 2009)
      ______. “Sex, Jealousy, and Violence: A Skeptical Look at Evolutionary Psychology” in *Skeptic.*
3. Enhance students’ ability to communicate effectively in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms (e.g. describe the type and number of writing assignments students will complete, the opportunities students will have to develop their writing skills, the kinds of questions they will address, the ways in which they will be asked to communicate their ideas, and the type of feedback students will receive).

Students will write two five-page papers and one ten-page minor research paper. I shall grade initial versions of one short paper and the long paper and provide comments for revisions. A student colleague in the class will also read the first draft of the longer paper and provide comments. Each student will meet with a writing fellow before providing his colleague and me with the first draft of this paper. While the shorter papers will be reflections on our readings, the longer paper will require use of additional sources, thereby providing students an opportunity to seek out and weigh additional evidence (i.e. practice information literacy).

We will regularly discuss readings in class rather than following a lecture format.

4. Develop fundamentals of information fluency and library research. Make time on your syllabus for students to complete the required library workshop outside of class and at least one additional library-related assignment for the class. Indicate any additional ways in which students will make use of library resources.

For one assignment, I shall give students various evolutionary psychology topics and ask them to find a brief list of relevant articles. The students will prepare a formal bibliography. The longer paper I assign will require students to develop further information literacy skills.

5. Provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor (e.g. Indicate specific efforts you will make to interact with each student, learn more about each student’s interests and abilities, and provide appropriate guidance for their intellectual growth.)

I shall meet individually at least once with each student as he/she seeks to identify sources his/her ten-page paper and formulate an outline. I shall seek to be the academic advisor for a subset of my seminar enrollees.

Briefly state your background for teaching this course:

While not trained in evolutionary biology, there are models that economists use in game theory that are quite similar to some of the models evolutionary biologists employ. I once team-taught a course with Peter Smallwood (Biology) and Sydney Watts (History) entitled “Truths about Courtship, Sex, and Marriage.” That course provided biological, economic, and historical/social perspectives on human mating behavior. We discussed some evolutionary psychology in the course. I have continued my conversations with Smallwood and others since that time. I have followed developments in evolutionary psychology from a distance for over a decade.