Overview

In this introductory course, we will guide you through an exploration of the scientific evidence for the evolution of humans and our fossil relatives, and humankind’s place in the natural world. This includes an introduction to evolutionary theory, an overview of the hominin fossil record and what that record teaches us about our place in nature. Dr. Donald Johanson, a world-renowned paleoanthropologist who found the skeleton known as Lucy will present an exciting in-depth exploration of paleoanthropological field research from his unique perspective.

Required prior knowledge and skills

To be successful in this course, we recommend English language fluency and computer literacy.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Outline the nature of science and explain how scientific research is conducted.
- Identify humans’ place in the natural world from taxonomic/phylogenetic perspectives.
- Define the role of paleoanthropologists in human origins research.
- Identify how paleoanthropologists use the scientific method to formulate hypotheses and strategically conduct research.
- Articulate differences between scientific evidence for human evolution and non-scientific, non-testable, explanations for human origins.

Additional Info

This course satisfies 3 credit hours toward the Social-Behavioral Sciences (SB) General Studies requirement at Arizona State University. It is strongly encouraged that you consult with your institution of choice to determine how these credits will be applied to their degree requirements prior to transferring the credit.
Dr. Donald C. Johanson
Donald C. Johanson is the Founding Director of the Institute of Human Origins now located at Arizona State University in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change. For the past 45 years he has conducted field and laboratory research in paleoanthropology. He is best known for his discovery of the 3.18 million year old hominid skeleton from Ethiopia, popularly known as “Lucy.”

Through grants from the National Science Foundation, the L.S.B Leakey Foundation and the National Geographic Society, Johanson has carried out field research in Ethiopia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Tanzania. He is an Honorary Board Member of the Explorers Club, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, a member of many other professional organizations and recipient of several international prizes and awards.

In addition to his scholarly contributions, he has co authored some 7 books including the widely read “Kucy: The Beginnings of Humankind” and most recently “Lucy’s Legacy: The Quest for Human Origins.” He hosted and narrated the three part NOVA television series In Search of Human Origins seen by more than 100 million people worldwide. Johanson is a frequent lecturer at university and other forums in the United States and abroad.

Dr. Sara Marsteller
Sara Marsteller is a teaching postdoctoral scholar in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University. She received her PhD in Anthropology from the Arizona State University in 2015. A bioarchaeologist, Marsteller is broadly trained in methods and theory in biological anthropology, archaeology, and cultural anthropology and specializes in online anthropology course development and instruction. In her research, Marsteller uses biological and chemical data from archaeological human skeletal remains to reconstruct past human behavior and social relationships. Her current project in Lima, Peru, focuses on patterns of diet and residential mobility to investigate how the Wari and Inka Empires influenced local communities in this important regional hub in the Central Andes.