

Paper Assignment

Evolution has generated controversies within biology since well before Darwin and is continuing to do so today. Many of these turn critically on the concepts employed in understanding evolution and so have engaged philosophers as well as biologists. For this paper, choose one of these controversies:

1. how much a role does drift plays in determining the course of evolution
2. are processes of development important in shaping the course of evolution
3. how does one need to characterize species in the context of evolution
4. can groups of individuals be the entities undergoing natural selection.

Each of these is a focus of reading and class discussion in Unit 3. If you prefer to work on a different controversy that arises in this unit, check with me first. I want to ensure that you work on something that is likely to result in a good paper.

You are to write a paper in which you select a specific thesis with respect to one of these controversies and defend it. The thesis doesn't have to take an extreme position (e.g., one side in the conflict is right) but it must be specific (e.g., if we found evidence for X, that would establish that position Y is correct or this recipe will lead to a resolution of the controversy). Make sure that you state your thesis clearly. Draw upon material in the readings or discussion in class to defend your thesis; you do not need to go beyond the readings and material discussed in class (although you are free to bring in outside material with which you are familiar but that won't, on its own, improve your grade).

Keep in mind that this is to be a short paper (900-1500 words). Do not go over the limit! You need to focus on a specific thesis and develop in as much detail as you can the argument for it. If you find that you cannot cover all you set out to cover in sufficient depth in 1500 words or less, narrow your thesis. Make sure what you assert as your thesis is what you actually defend in the paper. Your thesis should take a stand and be controversial (it should be one some reasonable people will disagree with). Your paper will be evaluated in part by whether you have chosen and stated an interesting thesis, but mostly by how well you defend it.

Write your paper for an intelligent audience, but do not assume that they have been in this class or have read what you have read. Accordingly, you need to explain the relevant material to your audience, not just allude to it and assume your point will understand. There should be little or no need for quotations in your paper—present the ideas in your own words. Quotations should only be used as evidence that someone really held a particular position. Even then, you also need to say what the position is in your own words.

You may ask others to read your paper and give feedback, but you should construct the paper (thinking it though well as writing it) yourself.

Give your paper a title. This is your first opportunity to direct your reader's attention to what you are doing in the paper.

You should submit the paper as an attachment to email to papers@mechanism.ucsd.edu by Noon on Friday, February 25. I much prefer you sending it in MS Word or .rtf format as that will make giving feedback much easier. Only if you are not able to do so should you submit a PDF.