

HTS 3088: Race, Medicine, & Science

Location: Skiles 314

Days: Tue/Thurs

Time: 3:30 – 4:45

Prof. Andrew Buskell

Office Hours: Online, by Appointment

Course Description

This course looks at how changing technologies, scientific theories, and medical practices have shaped, and been shaped by, our understandings of race. It focuses on the intellectual history of scientific work on heredity, eugenics, genetics, and genomic science. The geographical center of the course is the United States, but case studies and vignettes will explore how scientific, medical, and racial concepts function both internationally and globally. Beginning in the late nineteenth century with early views on human evolution and human "improvement", the course ends with an extended examination of commercial DNA tests and how they have been taken up and used by different groups within the United States.

Course Materials

All required and recommended texts for the course will be made available through Canvas and Perusall (more on this below). Optional texts that complement this course:

Yudell, Michael. 2014. *Race Unmasked: Biology and Race in the Twentieth Century*. Columbia University Press. ([Available online through the GaTECH Library](#))

Saini, Angela. 2019. *Superior: The Return of Race Science*. 4th Estate.

Learning Objectives

The central aims of this course are to develop:

1. **Course specific knowledge**, i.e. to:
 - a. Recall changes in theories of human evolution, heredity, and racialization over the 20th century.
 - b. Describe important stages in the transformation of genetic theories and technologies by situating these in their local institutional and political context, and
 - c. Illustrate the importance of particular technologies, persons, and contexts.
2. **Skills in engaging with historical materials**, i.e. to:
 - a. Analyze primary source material and relate it to histories of technological, social, and cultural change.
3. **Critical reasoning skills as they are applied to historical materials**, i.e. to:
 - a. Develop skills for assessing secondary source material; notably, to critically appraise key arguments and ideas,
 - b. identify and distinguish historical and historiographical approaches,
 - c. and discern and critique background assumptions and positionality.
4. **Communication and writing skills**, i.e. to:
 - a. Craft critical historical essays that draw on both primary and secondary source material

Core IMPACTS statement

This is a **Core IMPACTS** course that is part of the **Social Sciences** area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social or geographic relationships develop, persist or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion

Course Format

This course will feature in-class activities centered on historical methods and critical engagement. Much of it will involve seminar-style discussion of the reading(s) in both small groups and as a class.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Required Reading
8.25	Introduction and Orientation	
8.27	Some Tools for Thinking about Race	Metcalf - "1000-word Philosophy: Philosophy and Race" Morning - "Key Concepts & Race Conceptualization"
9.1	Displaying Human Difference	Qureshi - "Ladies and Gentlemen I Bring You..." (Selections)
9.3	Skulls and Race	Douglass - "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered"
9.8	Immigration, Censuses, Citizenship	In-class: Critical Reading Assignment
9.10	Blood and Skin	Lederer - "Lost Boundaries: Race, Blood, and Bodies"
9.15	Blood Groups and Nation Building	Burton - "Genetic Crossroads" - Ch. 3
9.17	Eugenics and Genetics	Galton - "Eugenics" Roberts - "The Progressive Science of Eugenics" QUIZ
9.22	Eugenics and Reproduction	Davenport - "Eugenics and Euthenics" Stern - "Introduction"
9.24	The UNESCO Statements on Race	"The UNESCO Statement on Race" "The UNESCO Statement on the nature of race and race differences"
9.29	The Black Panther Party and Sickle Cell Anemia	Black Panther Magazine, April 10th and May 22nd (Selections)
10.1	Sociobiology and Science for the People	Schmalzer - "Science for the People, 1970s and Today" Botelho - "Biology and Medicine"
10.6	Fall Break	
10.8	TEST	

10.13	Obstetrics, Birth Weight, and Intelligence	Jensen - "How much can we boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?" Lewontin - "Race & Intelligence"
10.15	Race, Medicine, and Science	Epstein - "Histories of Human Subjects"
10.20	Racialized Pharmaceuticals	Kahn - "The Birth of BiDi"
10.22	Public Health and Biopolitics	Pollock - "Un/Natural Disaster"
10.27	Comparisons and Contamination on the way to the HGP	Marks, "What it means to be 98% Chimpanzee"
10.29	The Human Genome Project	Watson - "A Personal View of the Project"
11.3	The Diversity Project	Cavalli-Sforza et al. - "Call for a Worldwide Survey of Human Genetic Diversity" Reardon - "The HGDP: Where Did It Go Wrong?"
11.5	Ancient DNA, and AIMs	Fullwiley, "Ghosts" (pt. 1)
11.10	Ancient DNA, and AIMs	Fullwiley, "Ghosts" (pt. 2)
11.12	GATs and Identity Repair	Panofsky and Donovan, "Genetic ancestry testing among white nationalists"
11.17	Recreational Genealogy	Nelson, "Genetic Genealogy Testing"
11.19	Genealogy & Imagined Pasts	NPR's Codeswitch
11.24	Genetic Surveillance	Hinterberger – "Categorization, Census, and Multiculturalism"
11.26	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
12.1	GATs and Personalized Medicine	National Academies – "Using Population Descriptors"
12.3	TEST	
12.8	Final Instructional Day	

Assessment

Assignment	% of total grade	Assessment	Grade Scale
Readings	24	Complete (1) Incomplete (0)	A: 90–100
Participation	10	Participation	B: 80–89.5
Critical Reading	6	Sufficient (6) Insufficient (3)	C: 70–79.5
Quiz	10	Excellent (10) Good (7) Insufficient (4)	D: 60–69.5
Tests	30	Writing Assignment Rubric	F: 0–59.5
Final Project	20	Final Project Rubric/Writing Assignment Rubric	

Reading Assignments:

Discussing the assigned readings is central to the course. This is where you will be exposed to the different methods for engaging with evidence, styles of writing, and kinds of sources. These form the basis for the critical conversations we have in class, which will develop your skills of critical thinking. So doing the reading is important.

Because of this, the course uses the Perusall platform. You must use this platform to complete the readings, and these readings must be completed the day before class. Perusall is a community space where you leave comments (and images, and videos) and engage with the comments of your peers. Again, we're all in this together!

Some warnings and guidance: you must be connected to the internet while you access the Perusall platform. Moreover, Perusall does not perform well on phones or tablets, and struggles with having multiple sessions open. I encourage you to complete these readings using a laptop or desktop computer in an area with a strong internet connection. If this presents a problem, do get in touch.

Your completion grade for each reading is determined by three metrics: (1) completing the reading, (2) time spent engaging with the reading, and (3) the comments that you leave. Some readings are short, some are long — but in general, I encourage you to make about 3–4 substantive comments per piece.

Tests:

There will be two non-cumulative tests. The first will cover material from weeks 2-6, the second from weeks 7-14. These are designed so that you can get deeper knowledge on specific topics in the course that interest you and gain further skills in exercising your critical thinking skills and synthesizing knowledge. Each of the tests will give you a list of questions, from which you choose one to answer. Each question will link to a specific session. Answering it, however, will require you to not only be familiar with the required reading, but also the extra "assigned" readings for that session. These tests will be written in-class and will use Respondus LockDown Browser or related software. I will drop the lower of the two tests when calculating your final grade.

Final Essay/Un-Essay:

One of your major assessments will be a final project. This can take the form of a final essay of 2000 words, on a mutually agreed-upon topic. Alternately, you may propose an "un-essay": a creative project like a graphic novel, podcast, YouTube video. As with the essay, you will have to pitch your project and provide a grading rubric (what deserves an "A", what deserves a "B", etc.) that we can together agree upon. Towards the end of the course, you'll have to present on your project to the class.

Note: if you decide to write an essay, keep in mind [my policies around AI & coursework](#), which require you to use OneDrive's Microsoft Word with version control.

Class Participation:

This class is all about participation! And class participation means more than just mere attendance. At minimum, I expect that you will have completed the reading for the day's session and have come to class ready to discuss it. Moreover, there will be classroom activities where you will be working with your peers in small- or large- group discussion. For more on how I evaluate participation, please check the course policies below. To anchor your expectations: if you merely show up but don't otherwise engage, you'll receive a "D" for participation.

Participation grades are evaluated holistically — and that means it happens at the end of the course. To avoid these grades being a big surprise, I provide a participation "check-in" around the mid-point of the semester, which will provide you with feedback on your participation and suggest the likely grade range you would fall in if evaluated at that point in time.

Course Policies

[Academic Integrity & Expectations](#)

[Accommodations, Extensions, Late Assignments](#)

[AI and Coursework](#)

[Attendance Policy](#)

[CIOS Incentive & Bonus Assignments](#)

[Class Participation](#)

[Commenting & Feedback](#)

[Recording & Intellectual Property](#)

Academic Integrity & Expectations

Academic Integrity:

Honesty and transparency are important features of good scholarship. On the flip side, plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses with serious consequences. If you are discovered engaging in either behavior in this course, you will earn a failing grade on the assignment in question, and further disciplinary action may be taken.

Your work should be new material crafted and written by you for each assignment. You may talk with others about your ideas—you may even use the ideas discussed in class seminars—but these ideas must be made your own. That means working by yourself to develop your own ideas, providing your own reasons, and explaining things in your own words.

You are required to cite all sources you use in your submitted coursework. This includes both direct quotations and cases where you use ideas published elsewhere. “Sources” thus include papers, journals, conversations, anything found on the internet, and so on. Basically, if the thought did not originate within the assignment you are producing, you should provide an in-text citation and a reference list. For the GATech's description of what counts as plagiarism, cheating, and/or the use of unauthorized sources, please see the [Academic Honor Code](#).

Note that, while not explicitly mentioned within the Academic Honor Code, self-plagiarism — where you substantially copy or duplicate your own previous work — counts as plagiarism in my classes and is taken to be a violation of the Academic Honor Code.

Similarly, in line with the AI policies below, any unauthorized use of AI will be considered a violation of the Academic Honor Code.

If you have questions about the integration of GATech's honor code into this course, please do not hesitate to ask: my aim is to foster an environment where you can learn and grow, while ensuring that the work we all do is honest and fair.

Student-Faculty Expectations:

I believe that mutual respect is at the heart of the student-teacher relationship. In general, this is characterized by respectful language, punctuality and care for others' time, clear and an openness to dialogue and debate. I am committed to such mutual respect and encourage everyone in the class to work towards the best possible learning environment so that all can meet their highest ambitions. Please explore [Tech's policies](#) this for more information.

I encourage and appreciate suggestions for ways that the classroom can better support learning, inclusion, and the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.

Accommodations, Extensions, & Late Assignments

Accommodations:

If you wish to request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please inform me and contact Disability Services as soon as possible. They can be reached at dsinfo@gatech.edu or 404-894-2563 (voice)/ 404-894-1664 (TDD). I encourage you to make use of the academic and pastoral resources at <https://success.gatech.edu>

I also encourage you to discuss with me what you need — I will do whatever I can to improve your ability to succeed in the course. Adjustments will often be case-by-case, but to give a sense of accommodations I have provided in the past, these include: booking additional rooms for quiet group-work, providing access to readings for speech-to-text software, and providing flexible submission schedules.

Extensions, Late Assignments, Missed Quizzes:

My default policy is to deduct **two points** for each day that an assignment is late — and I won't accept work that is more than a week late.

That being said, I am generally happy to grant extensions if and as needed. To get an extension, please contact me by email, or in class, as soon as you become aware that you need more time on an assignment. There is no reason to be ashamed to ask for more time if emergencies, life, or even other classwork have made things hectic.

Missed quizzes and tests will be marked zero unless you have an excused absence with documentation (institutionally approved event, illness, emergency, court dates, etc.). If you have such an excused absence, you will have an opportunity to retake the quiz or test the following week during office hours. If personal circumstances mean you cannot take this rescheduled test, I will assign alternate coursework.

AI & Coursework

In my classes, you will frequently be evaluated on written coursework. Such assignments are meant to probe your understanding of course material, your reasoning abilities, and your analytical acuity. Since I'm using your writing to evaluate these, it is important that what you submit is a true representation of your effort and understanding.

In light of this, I have two policies surrounding AI and coursework. First, for all work where you write material outside of class **you must write your work on OneDrive's Microsoft Word**. As Georgia Tech students, you all have institutional access to OneDrive and Microsoft Word. The reason I require this is that this has version control. When you submit work, you provide "editing" access to this version control document. This allows me (if necessary) to see and understand how you have written your essay and how your thoughts have developed.

Second, and related to the above, my default policy is that the use of any standalone (e.g. ChatGPT, scite, OpenAI Research) or integrated AI tools (e.g. Grammarly, Co-Pilot, Notebook LM) is **impermissible** at all points in process of producing and submitting work. This includes the stages of brainstorming, preparation, writing, and/or correction of materials. Inbuilt spelling and grammar checkers that alert you to errors are fine — inbuilt or installed tools that modify your text (Grammarly, Microsoft Co-Pilot) are not.

You might worry about your writing, especially if English is not your first language. Know that when I read your work and evaluate it, I ignore spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. I evaluate your understanding, reasoning, and analysis — not your flair for coming up with nice metaphors or a snappy phrase. Spelling and grammatical errors are not part of my evaluation unless they seriously impede my ability to understand the text, evidence, and argumentation.

If you believe that an AI tool is essential to you completing your submitted work you must: (i) **check with me** as to whether the use of the tool is permissible, (ii) accept **responsibility** for all material submitted including errors, hallucinations, or outright falsehoods produced by AI tools, (iii) include a short written statement (typically around 100 words) that is **open** and **transparent** about what elements of the essay were produced with AI tools, and (iv) **document** specific content, if any, was generated by AI tools through correct citation practices.

The unattributed use of AI tools to produce text, citations, or images will be seen as a violation of academic integrity and reported to the [Office of Student Integrity](#). Though penalties for such violations differ — and will be settled on a case-by-case basis (what OSI calls [Faculty Conference Resolution](#)) — it will typically result in the assignment being marked "0". If the assignment is worth less than 10 points, a minimum penalty that deducts 10 points (one grade classification) from your overall grade will be applied.

Detection tools will be used, including Turnitin, to check for plagiarism and unattributed AI-generated text and I reserve the right to employ other means of detection as needed.

Attendance Policy

Showing up on time is required and expected. If you are more than 15 minutes late for a class, you will be marked absent. While there is no penalty for missing a single session, there are repercussions for missing multiple classes. If you miss **5 or more classes**, the highest grade you can achieve is a "B", 7 or more a "C", and 9 or more a "D".

You can think of this another way. You have 4 "freebies" — 4 absences to use to go to career fairs, music concerts, or if you're just not feeling the reading for that week.

There are legitimate reasons for missing a class: those necessary for career advancement (graduate school visits, job interviews, professional conferences where you are presenting), those related to your health (serious illness, mental health), and those related to your family and legal status (bereavement, court appearances, religious holidays, visa appointments). If you have something you believe counts as a legitimate reason for your absence that is not on this list, please feel free to get in touch with me to discuss.

CIOS Incentive & Extra Credit Assignments

The CIOS Survey:

The Course Instructor Opinion Survey (CIOS) is an important source of feedback for instructors. We use this to update and change course material, to address issues of presentation, and generally to improve our abilities to speak with and engage with you all. I strongly encourage you to complete the CIOS survey, which opens the last week of classes.

Unless explicitly overruled elsewhere in your syllabus (which is updated more regularly than these terms and conditions), I offer a standard incentive to complete this CIOS survey: if 70% of students complete the CIOS survey, I add one point to your final grade. If 80% of students complete the CIOS survey, add two points to the final grade.

Extra Credit Assignments:

Depending on the course, optional extra credit assignments may be added throughout the year. These are opportunities arising where the course material ends up connecting with outside events. Generally, these involve self-funded travel to outside events (academic talks, museums, movies) or engagement with Tech resources (video games at RetroTech, board games from the library) alongside critical evaluation of one's experience (usually a photo and a short paragraph on your experience).

Aside from these opportunities, I do not offer extra credit assignments to recover grade points that have been lost or not otherwise achieved on other assignments.

Class participation

Class participation is not just mere attendance. You should be ready to participate in the class, whatever its format. Usually this will mean you have completed the reading for the day's session and are ready to discuss or debate about it with the class or in your small groups.

Generally, the class participation grade reflects your engagement with readings, the questions that you contribute, your involvement in class discussions and activities, and your commitment to fostering a positive and respectful learning environment. It is evaluated holistically, but is based on the following criteria:

- **Quality of contributions:** This includes contributions on Perusall, on peer-reviews, and in class discussions. “Quality” here is measured in terms of how one’s contributions help the class come to understand the structure and content of the readings. Helpful contributions can come in any number of forms: well-supported guesses about puzzling passages, relating elements of argument to one another, spelling out a difficult concept, offering a using example, or simply asking a question and explaining why such a question is an important one to address.
- **Regularity of contributions:** Regularity does not mean asking the same question (“Well what does *this* mean?”) every five minutes every class. Regularity instead is measured in terms of the frequent occurrence — across class sessions — of helpful contributions.
- **Respect for others:** Your behavior in class should facilitate a positive learning environment for all class participants. Experiences of class members, when offered, should be treated with respect. Arguments, reasons, and evidence should be treated charitably — interpreted to bring out the most helpful contributions to class discussions and activities. Being disrespectful about others’ experiences, uncivil or rude in response to others’ contributions, or being deliberately uncharitable are discouraged.
- **Commitment to the learning environment:** Your behavior should support the learning objectives. Such behavior means participating and being attentive, considerate, and punctual. Doing homework for other courses, noodling about on your phone, being late, or falling asleep in class detracts from such a learning environment. It will lead to a lower participation grade.

Excellence on all these metrics, and across all points of engagement (Perusall, Piazza, seminar discussions) will earn full marks. To anchor your expectations, note that showing up, but not otherwise participating, will earn you the equivalent of a “D” grade on the participation component of the course.

Commenting & Feedback

You do not have to wait until your assignment has been graded to get feedback! I am happy to support your work by listening to pitches and reading outlines, sketches, and drafts.

But this support becomes curtailed towards assignment due dates. I will read full drafts of assignments emailed to me **7 days before the due date**. So, for example, if your assignment is due on a Friday, I will read and give feedback on all full drafts received by the preceding Thursday, end-of-day.

I will continue to read and provide support on outlines and introductions up to **3 days before the due date**. So, for instance, I will read and give feedback on outlines and introductions received on Tuesday for work that is due on Friday.

Recording & Intellectual Property

The course materials that I have prepared and that you access — the syllabus, exams, study guides, assignments, slides, notes, presentations, handouts — are my intellectual property. The selling and dissemination of these is prohibited. In addition, video, audio, and photographic recording of lectures, or the streaming of lectures, is prohibited without my explicit permission. If you have an accommodation that requires audio recording, please do get in touch as soon as possible.

Version History:

I am sometimes forced to update the syllabus during the semester to deal with unanticipated issues or to improve its clarity. I will notify you in class if the syllabus has changed, and what has changed. This syllabus is up-to-date as of 24 August, 2026.