

# EXPLORATIONS: AN OPEN INVITATION TO BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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# Preface

**Welcome** to [Explorations: An Open Invitation to Biological Anthropology](#). We (the editors) joined together in 2017 to create this dynamic and comprehensive Open Educational Resource (OER) for biological anthropology. We were motivated by the lack of existing OER in this subdiscipline and by a desire to save our students money on textbooks. We were also inspired by the recent success of [Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology](#) and supported by the editors of *Perspectives* and by the [Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges \(SACC\)](#), a section of the [American Anthropological Association](#) that consists of higher-education instructors who promote teaching excellence in anthropology. Together, the four editors bring to this project decades of experience in the classroom and a commitment to creating a resource that speaks to our students, sparking their interest in scientific inquiry and anthropological discoveries.



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This project is also grounded in the wider OER movement that emerged as a response to the skyrocketing costs of traditional textbooks. These costs, along with increased tuition, create serious barriers to student learning and success, especially for students dealing with financial constraints. As anthropologists concerned with social equity, we find that OER can begin to level the playing field within academia by enabling *all* students, regardless of socioeconomic status, to access materials they need to succeed in their courses.

## An OER for YOU

**Students:** This textbook has been created with you and your success in mind. The editors and authors are experienced instructors who hope to engage your curiosity and questions about humankind. It is available to you for FREE!

**Instructors:** We commend you for making the inspired choice to adopt this textbook written, reviewed, and edited by anthropology instructors. Like other OER, *Explorations* offers you the academic freedom to align course materials with your own pedagogy, course content, and areas of expertise. Rather than conform your course to the chapters of a conventional textbook, you are free to modify, supplement, or add to this textbook. This is why we chose to publish *Explorations* with a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#) (CC BY-NC 4.0), which allows anyone to remix, adapt, transform, and build upon the contents. In other words, you can use this book as it is or alter it by reorganizing, omitting chapters or sections of chapters, assigning only some chapters, or curating chapter selections. The only requirement is that you credit the authors and source, specify the license, and indicate any changes made. In the spirit of open education, this textbook and the content within cannot be used for commercial purposes.

We view *Explorations* as a dynamic text: we encourage your contributions on an ongoing basis. You may contribute by simply spreading the word! This textbook started as a grassroots endeavor that gained momentum by virtue of support from our professional communities, colleagues, and students. You may also contribute substantially by providing feedback, corrections, updated information, or additional research via the form on our website or by sending an email to [explorationstextbook@gmail.com](mailto:explorationstextbook@gmail.com). We recognize that biological anthropology is ever-evolving as new discoveries challenge prior understandings to extend knowledge of our species.

## Explorations: Mission and Organization

*Mission Statement: To provide a high-quality introductory biological anthropology textbook that is readable, engaging, and accessible to all students. With chapters written by experienced instructors and subject area specialists, this textbook addresses the question of what it means to be human by exploring the origins, evolution, and diversification of primates, especially that of our species, Homo sapiens.*

Anthropology is the study of humanity, in all its biological and cultural aspects, past and present. It is a four-field discipline comprised of biological anthropology, cultural anthropology, archaeology, and linguistic anthropology. The focus of this book is biological anthropology, which explores who we are from biological, evolutionary, and adaptive perspectives.

We lay the foundation for this inquiry in the first four chapters by introducing the discipline of anthropology, evolutionary theory, molecular biology and genetics, and the forces of evolution. Chapters 5–8 consider evolutionary, biological, and social aspects of our closest living relatives, nonhuman primates, with whom we share millions of years of evolution. We also learn about how fossils provide material insight into our past. Chapters 9–12 describe prior hominin species and the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, us! Finally, the last four chapters (Chapters 13–16) explore human biological variation and the concept of race, bioarchaeology and forensic anthropology, and human biology and health in the past and present. We include further readings on osteology (Appendix A), primate conservation (Appendix B), and human behavioral ecology (Appendix C). To guide your reading, each chapter begins with learning objectives and ends with review questions and a list of key terms.

## Acknowledgments

This book is for our students, past, present, and future, who inspire us to be better educators and better anthropologists.

The editors met through the [Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges \(SACC\)](#), which provided, and continues to provide, the collegial context in which this textbook emerged. We thank SACC for its support and seed money to begin this project. We appreciate the [American Anthropological Association \(AAA\)](#) for housing our book on their website, providing our ISBN, and publishing printed copies of this book at low cost. We thank the [University of Hawai'i OER](#) initiative for providing access to [Pressbooks](#), the formatting software we used for this project.

We also thank the editors of *Perspectives*: Nina Brown, Laura Tubelle de Gonzalez, and Thomas McIlwraith for their guidance and encouragement.

We are grateful for grants we received to finance this project. The [Minnesota State Innovation Grant](#) enabled us to hire professional copy editors and illustrators to ensure a professional product. We appreciate the support and guidance from Stephen Kelly, Minnesota State Open Education and Innovation Program Coordinator. The [Academic Senate for California Community Colleges- OER Initiative](#) (ASCCC-OERI) funded the development of our ancillary materials (lecture slides and test banks) to enhance this textbook (see [Teaching Resources](#) on our website).

Finally, this book would not be possible without the outstanding voluntary efforts of our 41 authors and 49 reviewers. Thank you!

With appreciation,

Beth, Katie, Kelsie, and Lara

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