This is a seven-week course devoted to a close reading of Charles Darwin’s classic text, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*, usually (mercifully) abbreviated as *Origin of Species*. Of all the scientific works that have made major contributions to our knowledge of the natural world, Darwin’s is perhaps the most accessible to the general reader. We will essentially proceed through the first (1859) edition of the text chapter by chapter. The schedule below indicates the expected pace. We may deviate slightly from that schedule from time to time, depending on the nature of the discussions and the general consensus of the class. Our aim will be to understand what Darwin was trying to say in his own terms, that is, as regards his own sense of the nature of the phenomena he was describing and the explanations that he put forward, within the context of mid-nineteenth century culture. You are not expected to be an expert on Victorian science and culture, of course, but that is the background within which Darwin lived and worked. To help to gain a better understanding of that background, we will also be reading a short book by Darwin’s premier biographer, Janet Browne, titled (appropriately for this course) *Darwin’s Origin of Species: A Biography*.

The course will consist of discussions based on your careful reading of Darwin’s text, supplemented with a few short selections from primary and secondarid sources. I will try to clarify scientific concepts as they come up and supply some additional information regarding either the scientific content or the cultural context, but for the most part this will be a collective effort to understand one of the most significant scientific texts ever written on its own terms. We will examine Darwin’s language, his method of explanation, the nature of the evidence that he cites, and the conclusions that he draws from it. At the end of the course, making use of the final chapters of the Browne text, and possible additional readings, we will briefly treat the implications of Darwin’s work, in his time and ours.

**Learning goals.**

1) Gaining intimate familiarity with a classic text
2) Experiencing Darwin’s thinking and reasoning process as a prime example of thinking and reasoning in the sciences (and in general)
3) Understanding this major work within the context of its times and establishing a grounding for contemporary debates and controversies over the implications of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection

**Course requirements.** (1) regular attendance and participation, including posting responses on the readings to the course forum for each class; (2) an essay (5-6 pages) due at the end of the fourth week; (3) an essay (6-8 pages) due at the end of the seventh week, details to be supplied later.

**Basis for evaluation.** attendance and participation (25%); first essay (30%); second essay (45%)
The following texts have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore and placed on reserve at the Bobst Library:


In addition to the above, there will be occasional supplementary short reading selections, as indicated on the schedule that follows. These will be made available on NYU Classes. Some additions and changes are possible over the course of the term.

Ground rules. *Attendance and etiquette.* I take attendance and expect you to attend every class. The class begins promptly at 12:30. Please respect your classmates and arrive on time; late arrivals always disrupt the atmosphere of a classroom, as do mid-class exits and re-entries. The only good reason for leaving the classroom in the middle of a class period is sudden illness, so expect to remain for the full 75 minutes. For obvious reasons, turn off cell phones before coming to class. The success of this class depends upon open discussions. Feel free to speak your mind, but also be prepared to listen and respect the opinions of others. *Turn off laptops.* If you bring a laptop, please do not turn it on or use it during class time. Notetaking with pen or pencil is a wonderful exercise of the mind and hand. *Late papers.* Papers are due on the dates designated. Unless the paper is late due to documented illness or emergency, it will be downgraded one grade for each day late.

*Documentation and plagiarism.* Out of respect for yourself, your fellow classmates, your professor, and the academic enterprise, *do your own work* and always acknowledge the work of others with proper documentation. I will assume that all written work is your own and that you understand the basic rules for acknowledging your sources. If you don’t, please ask; I’ll be more than happy to assist you. Also, please review the official Gallatin statement on academic integrity:

http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html

*Reading responses.* Every student must post responses on the readings to the online forum on the course NYU Classes site for each class period. Your responses should be about a paragraph in length and can deal with any aspect of the readings for that date. They can be in the form of observations, insights, general thoughts, questions, criticisms, whatever. You must submit them by 11 a.m. on the day of the class. We will use these posts to help shape the discussion for that day.

**SCHEDULE**

Come to class prepared to discuss the readings listed on the date indicated. You should read the introduction and first three chapters of the Browne text during the first three weeks.

M JAN 26    Introductions

W JAN 28    Read Darwin, *Origin of Species*, “Notes on This Edition” (lix-lx), Darwin’s introduction, pp. 11-15, and Chapter I, Variation Under Domestication
Malthus, excerpt from *Essay on the Principle of Population* (NYU Classes); Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, vol. 2, chap. 9 (NYU Classes)

W FEB 4  *Origin of Species*, Chapter IV, Natural Selection
Smith, “Of the Divisison of Labour,” from *Wealth of Nations* (NYU Classes)

M FEB 9  *Origin of Species*, Chapter V, Laws of Variation

W FEB 11  *Origin of Species*, Chapter VI, Difficulties on Theory
Note: You should have read the introduction and chaps. 1-3 of Browne by the end of this week

M FEB 16  President’s Day  NO CLASS

W FEB 18  *Origin of Species*, Chapter VII, Instinct, & Chapter VIII, Hybridism
FIRST ESSAY DUE, Friday, Feb. 20


W FEB 25  *Origin of Species*, Chapter XI, Geographical Distribution, & Chapter XII, Geographical Distribution—continued
Browne, “Biogeography and Empire” (NYU Classes)

Richards, “Classification in Darwin’s *Origin*” (NYU Classes)

W MAR 4  *Origin of Species*, Chapter XIV, Recapitulation and Conclusion

M MAR 9  Browne, *Darwin’s Origin of Species*, chap. 4

W MAR 11  Browne, *Darwin’s Origin of Species*, chap. 5

FINAL ESSAY DUE, Friday, Mar. 13