OU establishes Center for Evolutionary Psychological Science
With a focus on promoting interdisciplinary research among students and faculty, and engaging the public with diverse perspectives, Oakland University has established a new Center for Evolutionary Psychological Science. The Center will foster collaborative research within and across colleges and schools at OU, and also with faculty and students at other universities, both nationally and abroad.

At its core, the Center is closely aligned with Oakland University's mission to impact Michigan and the world through education, research, scholarship and creative activity, according to Britt Rios-Ellis, OU's executive vice president for academic affairs and provost.

“Oakland University and its Department of Psychology have a longstanding commitment not only to fostering the success of students and faculty, but also to offering events and programs that advance public understanding of socially and academically relevant topics,” Rios-Ellis said. “These include everything from death and morality, to crime and war, to racism and sexual violence. A cornerstone of the Center's mission will be to examine these topics from an evolutionary perspective.”

Under the leadership of its founding director, Todd Shackelford, the Center will also serve as a means to recruit and retain top evolutionary scientists, as well as students who are interested in the subject.

“The Center's founding sends a powerful message that OU is a place for those who are interested in research and dialogue on evolutionary psychology,” said Shackelford, distinguished professor and chair of the Department of Psychology. “There are very few centers in the U.S. devoted to this particular area, and we are thrilled to say that OU is now home to one of them.”

As the name suggests, evolutionary psychology applies Darwinian theory to human psychology and behavior. Moreover, evolutionary psychologists propose that the
evolutionary processes that shaped the human body have also influenced development of the human mind.

“From an evolutionary psychological perspective, evolution by natural selection built our brains just as surely as it built our hearts, our livers, and our spines,” Shackelford explained. “The brain is the seat of psychology, so to understand human psychology we need to understand the processes that built the human mind.”

Evolutionary psychology interfaces with a wide variety of fields, including health sciences, medicine, business and law, Shackelford added.

“It has implications for virtually every area of human activity,” he said. “Whether we want to encourage people to take better care of their health, reduce crime, or promote other prosocial behaviors, understanding how the human mind works can help us figure out ways to do that.”

In addition to facilitating interdisciplinary research and public discourse on these topics, the Center will pursue philanthropic funding, and establish educational and financial partnerships with local and regional businesses, as well as publishers of academic journals and books. It will also develop educational opportunities such as weekend seminars, summer camps, an academic minor and a certificate program.

“The Center will build on our reputation for high-quality faculty and students, while drawing together academic, business and community partners,” said Kevin Corcoran, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and chief community engagement officer at OU. “It’s a wide-ranging, inclusive endeavor that will serve the good of all.”

Along with Shackelford’s leadership, the Center is also guided by a steering committee made up of faculty from across the university, as well as internal and external advisory boards appointed to five-year terms.

To learn more about the Center for Evolutionary Psychological Science at OU, visit oakland.edu/psychology/center-for-evolutionary-psychological-science.