

Workshop on Human Uniqueness and Behavioral Modernity.

Homo sapiens has evolved a unique suite of characteristics that interact to make us evolutionary “outliers”. “Human uniqueness” is most clearly manifest by our current biological dominance of the planet, but even hunter-gatherer populations lived in organized communities of several thousand individuals with dozens of activity specializations and complex social stratification. Even without the invention of agriculture, their communities may have eventually numbered around 70 million individuals by the time the whole earth was colonized as Homo Sapiens spread over the planet more broadly than any other large vertebrate. No creature on earth lives in cohesive social units that rival this complexity or biomass. Such human uniqueness derives from an integration of exceptional Cognition, Cultural capacity, and Cooperation (CCC).

The timing and causal factors that led to the emergence of “human uniqueness” are still unclear. At some time in the Pleistocene hominins became something more than just bipedal apes and began to express the beginnings of human uniqueness, ultimately becoming what we would recognize as human. Archeologists describe the emergence of “behavioral modernity” very late in this process. This behavioral modernity represents the expression of the special evolved capacities. But how to recognize this expression under differing contexts remains a major challenge that can only be met by a research agenda that integrates the sciences of cognition, cultural capacity, and cooperation with the record of human evolution. The pace of advance in each of these areas has been remarkable in recent years, and we are confident that we are very close to a significant integrated consensus.

The ASU Program on Human Uniqueness, under the auspices of the new Origins Initiative, proposes to bring together for the first time a small group of key scientists spanning a broad range disciplines to explore these questions. We will focus on the end point of the process – the transition to fully modern human uniqueness. The proposed workshop will last 2.5 days, Feb 19-22, and will comprise a series of presentations by invited participants with ample time for discussion. All travel and accommodation expenses will be covered. We hope that you can come to Arizona during this beautiful period for what we hope will be an exciting and transformative program.

Kim Hill and Curtis Marean
Program in Human Uniqueness, School of Human Evolution and Social Change, ASU

Lawrence Krauss
Director, Origins Initiative, ASU.