

## **COLLOQUIUM SERIES**

**TITLE: Carpe Diem: Future Discounting, Risk-taking, and Homicide**

**Date: November 21, 2008**  
**Location: Somerville House, Room 3345**  
**Time: 3:00-4:00 p.m.**

*(Please join us after the talk for light refreshments.)*



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### **Abstract:**

The future is almost always worth less to organisms than the present, and evolved psychologies and physiologies "discount" it accordingly. Evolutionary theories of reproductive effort scheduling both explain why such discounting occurs and suggest testable hypotheses about variability in its magnitude. We have tested some of these hypotheses experimentally, finding that discount rates can be altered in predictable ways by contextual variables. We have studied real-world risk-taking, especially lethal violence. Homicides occur primarily in competitive contexts, and can be considered extreme manifestations of willingness to risk one's future in the pursuit of current goals. This interpretation suggest that factors affecting risk-taking and the perceived value of the future will also affect homicide, and we have therefore analyzed homicide rates in relation to such variables as the intensity of competition (assayed by income inequality) and local life expectancy. Thinking about human psychology as a product of natural selection can help researchers generate novel, fruitful hypotheses.

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