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Invited by the University of Arizona  
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# CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

UNDERSTANDING THE  
INTERPLAY OF PRIMATE DIET,  
PHYSIOLOGY &  
GUT MICROBES



November 29, 2018  
2 - 3pm

Emil W. Haury, Room 215

Gut microbes have diverse influences on human physiology and behavior and have therefore become popular targets for manipulating human health. Nevertheless, despite myriad studies describing patterns of variation in the human gut microbiome, it remains difficult to clearly define a ‘healthy’ human gut microbiome. Because humans inhabit a diverse array of environments and employ a range of lifestyle practices, it is unlikely that the human gut microbiome has a single healthy state. Nevertheless, a suite of shared human biological and ecological traits is likely to be associated with a subset of ‘characteristically human’ gut microbial traits. What these traits are and how they emerged across evolutionary timescales remains an active area of investigation. Here, I use comparative data from non-human primates to explore the effects of diet, physiology, and phylogeny on the composition and function of the gut microbiome and to begin to isolate human gut microbial traits that are unique among primates. This approach provides new insight into the role of microbes in modern human health as well as the evolutionary success of our ancestors.

