ANIMALS, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Professor: Colin Jerolmack
Meeting Information: Tuesday, 2:00-4:30; online

***NOTE THAT THE FIRST 30 MINUTES OF CLASS WILL BE SMALL GROUP CHECK-IN/DISCUSSION. EACH WEEK, 4-5 OF YOU WILL LOG IN AT 2:00 [YOU WILL SIGN UP FOR CERTAIN WEEKS]; THE FORMAL CLASS WON’T BEGIN UNTIL 2:30, AND SO THE REST OF THE CLASS SHOULD NOT LOG IN UNTIL THAT TIME.***

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This survey course introduces students to the key ideas and debates within the social sciences and humanities pertaining to how human and animal lives intersect. Specifically, it examines how relationships with animals both reflect and shape social life, culture, and how people think about themselves. We will explore the myriad and contradictory positions that animals occupy in society [e.g., as pets, pests, mascots, and food] and deconstruct the social origins of these seemingly natural categories. We will also take a grounded look at what actually happens when humans and animals interact, which sheds new light on the nature of human and animal consciousness. Fundamentally, students will learn how the roles that animals take on in our lives, and the ways that we think about and relate to them, are inherently social processes that are patterned by geography, culture, class, and gender; and they will gain an appreciation for how “the animal turn” problematizes the anthropocentric foundations of the social sciences and humanities and transgresses traditional disciplinary boundaries.

The theories and substantive topics that this course covers are varied and complex; and the readings are demanding. In both our class discussions and the written assignments, students must be able to critically analyze and compare the materials. Requirements include four short writing assignments, a proposal, and a final paper (see “grading” below). Unless noted at the bottom of this page, all materials are available on the Classes course site.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: “The College is a “community of the mind.” Its students, faculty, and staff all share the goal of pursuing truth through free and open inquiry, and we support one another’s endeavors in this regard. As in any community, membership comes with certain rights and responsibilities. Foremost among these is academic integrity. Cheating on an exam, falsifying data, or having someone else write a paper undermines others who are “doing it on their own”; it makes it difficult or impossible to assess fairly a student’s interest, aptitude, and achievement; and it diminishes the cheater, depriving him or her of an education. Most important, academic dishonesty is a violation of the very principles upon which the academy is founded. Thus, when students enter the College, one of the first things that they are asked to do is to sign a community compact, recognizing these principles of academic integrity. For this reason also, violations of these principles are treated with the utmost seriousness.” For more information on this policy, and sanctions, visit: http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity.

Materials not on Classes course site [i.e., you need to get from library or purchase]
Coatzee: *The Lives of Animals*
Tuan: *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*
Donaldson and Kymlicka: *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*
Pachirat: *Every Twelve Seconds*
COURSE OUTLINE

I: LOOKING AT ANIMALS
Week 1: **Bryant:** “Zoological Connection;” **Noske:** “The Animal Question;” **Berger:** “Why look at Animals?”

II: FROM ANTHROPOCENTRISM TO POSTHUMANISM
Week 2: **Descartes:** “Animals are Machines;” **J.M. Coatzee:** *The Lives of Animals*
Week 3: **Haraway:** *Cyborg Manifesto;* **Leslie Irvine:** *If You Tame Me* [selected chapters]
Week 4: **Fudge:** *Renaissance Beasts* [selected chapters]

III: PLACING ANIMALS
Week 5: **Philo & Wilbert:** *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places* [selected chapters]; **Jerolmack:** “How Pigeons Became Rats”; **Kinkead:** “The Squirrels of Central Park”

IV: ANTHROPOMORPHISM, TOTEMISM, AND BOUNDARY-WORK
Week 6: **Levi-Strauss:** *Totemism;* **Durkheim:** *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
Week 7: **Fisher:** “Disambiguating Anthropomorphism;” **Geertz:** “Deep Play;” **Jerolmack:** “Animals Practices, Ethnicity, and Community;” **Philo and Wilbert:** *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places* [selected chapters]
Week 8: **Fine & Christoforides:** “Dirty Birds and Filthy Immigrants;” **Arluke & Sanders:** *Regarding Animals* [selected chapters]; **Harris:** “Cows and Pigs”

V: LIVING WITH ANIMALS
Week 9: **Tuan:** *Dominance and Affection* [selected chapters]
Week 10: **Ritvo:** “Modern Pet-keeping;” **Schaffer:** *One Nation, Under Dog* [selected chapters]

VI: COMMUNICATING WITH ANIMALS
Week 11: **Sanders:** “Action Speaks Louder Than Words;” **Mechling:** “Banana Cannon;” **Jerolmack:** “Humans, Animals, and Play”

VII: POLITICAL ANIMALS
Week 12: **Donaldson and Kymlicka:** *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* [selected chapters]
Week 13: **Pachirat:** *Every Twelve Seconds* [selected chapters]

VIII: VALUING ANIMALS
Week 14: **Arluke & Sanders:** “The Sociozoologic Scale;” **Jasper:** “Sentiments, Ideas, and Animals”; **Jamieson:** “Against Zoos;” **Regan:** “The Case for Animal Rights”
A MOST UNUSUAL SEMESTER

This course will be online but synchronous. As a graduate seminar, it is discussion-driven. I do very little lecturing and so it’s hard to imagine running this as a mostly or entirely asynchronous course. We will try as hard as we can to capture the intimacy and back-and-forth of a traditional in-person seminar. Given this, I request that you do everything in your power to attend the class synchronously and turn on your cameras.

That said, I recognize that this is a time of tremendous uncertainty and stress. My goal is to support you doing the best work you can do in spite of the challenges you face. I don’t want anyone to worry about having to drop the class, or to obsess over their grade, if they face situations that make it harder for them to meet the expectations of the class. I will be as flexible as I can be. I just ask that you let me know if you are finding it hard to balance your health, wellbeing, and schedule with your work in this class. I am very responsive over email, and I will be setting aside the first half hour of each class for small group check-ins. Think of it as a kind of informal office hours, with several of your peers. I will also of course be able to hold virtual one on one meetings with you.

Last, I also ask that you be patient and flexible with me if I am forced to make changes as the semester goes on. I’ll do my best to stick to the syllabus and communicate any changes, but like many of you I am dealing with an awful lot on the home front this semester.

GRADING

I have to submit a grade for each of you at the end of the semester. But please keep in mind that even in a normal semester graduate school is about the intellectual experience; if people do the work, they all get good grades (This is reflected in the fact that one must get a B- to pass a graduate class; that’s not meant to be a high bar, it’s an indication that graduate school is not focused on grades). Given the unique (and to be frank, awful) circumstances of this semester, I want to make worrying about grades the furthest thing from your mind. I will offer you a chance to write an optional self-assessment at the end of the semester, to clue me in on how you think about your own performance and to provide context for your work (e.g., challenges you faced), which I will take into account when determining the final grade. If situations prevent you from fulfilling certain expectations, to the extent possible I will work with you on coming up with alternative assessments.

There will be no midterm. Grades will, ideally, be based on performance in four areas. As mentioned above, I recognize that I may need to tailor how I evaluate performance to individual circumstances.
10% Participation: Class participation includes, of course, what the student does when he/she is in (virtual) class. Students are expected to have read the material, reviewed notes from the previous class, and be ready and willing to discuss the readings and contribute to class debates. Students are expected to attend to the comments of other students and the instructor. They are also expected to arrive to each class with at least one pre-written critical/analytical question they would like to raise with the class. They are to email this question to the professor by 10:00am on the day of class so that it can inform how he structures the class. Students will be expected to sign up for several of the 30-minute, pre-class “check ins.” Lastly, each class will feature a “go to student” who is expected to play a bigger role in guiding the conversation that day by preparing several discussion questions/topics and providing context for the readings.

20% Essays: Four one-page (single-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, one inch margins) essays will be assigned (5 points each). These essays are due one week after the date assigned. Each essay will be in response to a question that determines whether the student has critically read the assigned material, and students will also be asked to (briefly) apply concepts from the class to a case study of their choice. Please email the paper, as a PDF, with your last name in the title of the document.

20% Project Proposal. Students must submit a 2-3 page proposal at midterm that delineates the key question[s] and rationale for their final paper [see below]. Please email the proposal, as a PDF, with your last name in the title of the document.

50% Final Paper. Due a week after the last class. Students must write an 8-10 page (single-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, one inch margins) paper in which they identify a particular “real world” issue pertaining to human-animal relations, relate it to key concepts and debates covered in class, and show how the application of one’s chosen theoretical lens sheds new light on the issue. While students may use one of the case studies they wrote about for their short essays, they are required to find, read, and cite at least ten scholarly research articles and/or books not read in class that offer conceptual or empirical support for their analysis. For ease of presentation, cite sources as footnotes rather than in a bibliography. Please email the paper, as a PDF, with your last name in the title of the document.

A list of databases for journal articles, organized by topic [e.g., Environmental Science, Sociology, Economics, Anthropology] is available through NYU’s library. Start here: http://arch.library.nyu.edu/

- For information on identifying and finding research articles, see: http://www.lib.unc.edu/house/how_do_i/
- For information on when and how to cite sources, see: http://library.albany.edu/usered/cite/citing.html