

American Studies 157

Spring 2006

Animals in American Culture

CRN 93046

Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:10-4pm 1204 Haring Hall

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4, Wednesdays 10-noon, and by appointment

This course explores the meanings we attribute to animals in our everyday lives. We experience real animals as our pets and in zoos, theme parks, circuses, rodeos, and as hunters. We eat animals (or don't), drink their milk (or don't), and wear their skins and fur (or don't). We consume representations of animals in children's stories, on television, in film, in print advertisements, in Gary Larson cartoons, and more.

We look at these animal "texts" and their meanings toward understanding some larger questions in American culture, including questions about gender, sex, race, and the range of values at odds in "the Culture Wars." We shall draw upon a number of disciplines (anthropology, folklore, geography, history, literary criticism, psychology, rhetorical criticism, sociology, and visual studies, among others) to understand the various meanings of these texts in their historical, social, and cultural contexts.

My goals in this course are that you (1) learn the basic concepts and vocabulary scholars use in writing and speaking about the cultural meanings of nonhuman animals; (2) learn how gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, and other human particularities influence our understandings of animals; (3) understand the public policy questions concerning animals (usually rights conflicts); and (4) have the experience of designing, researching, and writing an independent piece of scholarship on animals in American culture.

Toward achieving these goals, you will complete the following work:

- an **open-note, open-book bluebook exam (50 minutes) on each of the five books** we will read this quarter; this format is a sort of timed take-home exam meant to show you can take the ideas and language from each book and apply them to the sorts of animal texts we are studying in class; 5 exams at 10% each, dropping the lowest grade (make-up exams only with a documented medical excuse); counts **40% of term grade**
- a **2,500-3,000 word term paper** on a topic agreed upon by you and me (see below); counts **50% of term grade**
- a **take-home final exam (750 words)** based on the presentations by students of their term project research; counts **10% of term grade**

Term Paper. I will talk with each of you about choosing a term paper project that is meaningful to you. The books we read and the discussions should give you some ideas, but here are some preliminary suggestions:

- choose an animal not included in the Gillespie & Mechling volume (nor apes and chimps) and write an essay exploring the uses and meanings of that animal in American culture;
 - write an interpretive ethnographic account of a site where humans and animals interact, such as a research lab, a farm, a hunting or fishing trip, a zoo or aquarium, an animal theme park, or a nature preserve;
 - write an interpretive ethnographic account of a pet in its human family (or dyadic) context;
 - do a textual analysis of a mass-mediated, popular culture text (e.g., a film, television show, series of commercials) involving animals and, if possible, include an audience-response analysis;
 - create a portfolio of original photographs (at least 24), with an accompanying essay of at least 1,000 words showing how the photographs capture ideas from the course;
 - create a 10-minute video documentary pertaining to animals (the documentary must incorporate concepts from the course);
 - create a 10-minute broadcast-quality audio documentary pertaining to animals (the documentary must incorporate concepts from the course)
- or propose something in keeping with the materials & goals of the course.

I expect your term paper to reflect the ideas, approaches, and language you are learning in this course. I am looking for critical thinking that demonstrates the difference this course makes in the ways you talk and write about animals.

AMS 157 is a **General Education** course that counts in all three categories: (1) as a breadth course in Social Science or Humanities; (2) as a writing course; and (3) as a course in social & cultural diversity.

Time Management. Faculty members expect that students will spend 2-3 hours outside of class for every hour in class. This means that I have designed the readings and exercises with the expectation that you will spend 8 hours a week reading and doing your research.

Class Schedule
(assignments due date listed)

I. Policing the Border: Human and Nonhuman

1. Wed. March 29 **Introduction to Course**

The culture concept and animals as “texts” in contexts; our encounters with pets; play frames and the human/pet dyad;

2. Mon. April 3 **Intelligence, Language, and Being Human**

Read: Michael Crichton, *Congo* (1980), pp. xi-155.

3. Wed. April 5 **What Apes Teach Us**

Read: Crichton, *Congo*, pp. 156-313.
Write: Open-note bluebook exam on Crichton in 2nd half of class.

4. Mon. April 10 **Pop Culture Primates**

The nonhuman primate in American culture, from 19th century museums of natural history to King Kong; gender, race, and sexuality in these representations;

No reading this class.
Write: Write a 300-word preliminary proposal for your term paper.
This initial proposal should announce the topic, explain your interest, explain how the topic is a case study of the larger questions (as you understand them so far) about the meanings of animals in American culture, and how you plan to initiate the study.

II. Folk Ideas about Animals

5. Wed. April 12 **Folk Ideas about Animals**

Folk ideas as a basic unit of worldview; the relationship between folk ideas, popular (mass-mediated), and high culture; turkeys & rattlesnakes

Read: Gillespie & Mechling, pp. 1-72

6. Mon. April 17 **Animals, Gender, Ethnicity, and Sexuality**

How people use animals to think and talk about gender, ethnicity, and sexuality; alligators, armadillos, bears, foxes, and coyotes

Read: Gillespie & Mechling, pp. 73-233.

7. Wed. April 19 **Why Animals Are “Good to Think”**

No reading—we continue our discussion of the essays in Gillespie & Mechling.

Write: Open-note bluebook exam on essays in Gillespie & Mechling in 2nd half of class.

III. Zoos, Theme Parks, and Other Sites

Saturday, April 22 – PICNIC DAY

8. Mon. April 24 **Analyzing Picnic Day**

Picnic Day as a festival, as a spectacle, and as a touristic experience; the uses of animals during Picnic Day

Read: John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”

9. Wed. April 26 **Animals as Spectacle**

The nature of tourism as a pilgrimage; nature tourism; history of zoos in the US; zoos and natural history museums; zoos, nationalism, and globalization;

Read: Elizabeth Hanson, *Animal Attractions* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 1-70

10. Mon. May 1 **Animals as Spectacle (cont.)**

Collecting wild animals and the colonial project; the zoological expedition; anthropology and natural history; changing paradigms for live animal exhibits; wild animal parks; critiques of zoos and other sites for “animal spectacles” by the animal rights movement;

Read: Elizabeth Hanson, *Animal Attractions* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 71- 186.

Write: Open-note bluebook exam on essays on Hanson in 2nd half of class,

OR

Write: Visit the Sacramento, Oakland Zoo, San Francisco Zoo, or Marine World (Vallejo) and write a 750-word essay using Hanson to analyze the ways the zoo creates narratives about animals. This paper is due in class today.

IV. Looking at Animals

11. Wed. May 3

Reading Images

Models for reading images; nature as a social/rhetorical construction through visual narratives; photodocumentary and science; ideological elements of photodocumentary; the pre-Disney history of wildlife films; the Disney version; wildlife films on television;

Read: Derek Bousé, *Wildlife Films* (U Penn, 2000), pp. 1-83

12. Mon. May 8

Reading Visual Narratives

Science as narrative; narrative formulae in Disney & other wildlife films; wildlife films as narratives about human society—family, politics, morals, and more.

Read: Derek Bousé, *Wildlife Films* (U Penn, 2000), pp.84-193.

13. Wed. May 10

Case Study: *The March of the Penguins*

Watch in Class: *The March of the Penguins* (2005, dir. Luc Jacque; 80 min)

Write: Write a one-page outline (single-spaced) of your term essay project as it has developed to date. Include at least 5 key sources as a bibliography for the project, Send this as an attachment to an e-mail to the instructor.

V. Animal Rites and Animal Rights

14. Mon. May 15

Constructing the Wild

The cultural creation of “nature” and “wild”; human ideas about controlling and “managing” nature; rights conflicts; science and aesthetics in narrating the wild;

Read: Jan Dizard, *Going Wild: Hunting, Animal Rights, and the Contested Meaning of Nature* (U Mass Press, 1999), pp. ix-94.

Write: Open-note bluebook exam on Bousé in 1st half of class,

OR

Write: Write a 750-word essay analyzing the film, *The March of the Penguins*, using the concepts and language from Bousé's book. This paper is due in class today.

15. Wed. May 17 **No class meeting**

Watch on a computer: *Buck Season at Bear Meadow Sunset* (1984, a film by George Hornbein & Kenneth Thigpen, 27 minutes)

Go to <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,100> and click on the "MPEG-4" link for a streaming version of the film.

Watch: *Gunblast: Culture Clash* (1996; dir C. Becker, 28 min)

16. Mon. May 22 **Hunting and the Rights Controversies**

The history and culture of hunting in the US; conflicting rights discourses;

Read: Jan Dizard, *Going Wild* (U Mass Press, 1999), pp. 95-211.

Write: Open-note bluebook exam on Dizard in 2nd half of class.

VI. Student Research

17. Wed. May 24 No reading. Each student does a 10-minute presentation on her or his term paper research. Order of presentations to be determined by lot.

Mon. May 29 – MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY

18. Wed. May 31 No reading. Student research presentations.

19. Mon. June 5 No reading. Student research presentations.

20. Wed. June 7 No reading. Student research presentations.

Term papers due today at the beginning of class.

Take-home final questions sent as e-mail by 8pm today.

Friday, June 9 10:30-12:30 Final exam Scheduled, BUT...

Take-home final exam based on student presentations due in the American Studies Office or submitted as an attachment to an e-mail to the instructor no later than noon on Monday, June 12.