Course Description

CSUS 823 is centered on one of the most fiercely debated topics in contemporary science and culture: what is the fitting role of animals in human culture and of humans in animal culture? Through the lens of interdisciplinary contemporary scholarship,

- Students gain a social science perspective on the relationship between humans and other animals, a perspective valuable to those enrolled in disciplines that are primarily science-based and have not had the opportunity to consider animals as members of a community and as thinking-feeling-reflective beings.

- The course explores the shared community of humans and other animals. Finding ways to peacefully coexist with our wild neighbors is a pressing topic given the movement of coyotes, foxes, bears, mountain lions, wolves and other animals into urban and surrounding areas. We examine the biological, ecological, sociological and philosophical issues associated with co-existing with other animals in urban and rural areas.

- We will examine the human practice of killing animals (hunting and baiting; slaughter practices and the treatment of feral and stray animals; animal death in art, literature and philosophy) from an interdisciplinary perspective.

- We will examine the relational obligations that arise from the varied ways that animals relate to human societies and institutions, building on recent developments in the political theory of group-differentiated citizenship.

Books


Killing Animals
The Animal Studies Group, 2006, Univ of Illinois Press


Coyote at the Kitchen Door: Living with Wildlife in Suburbia
Stephen DeStefano, 2011, Harvard University Press
The basics: No exams, written summaries of selected readings, powerpoint presentations of the summaries, one class project (final paper & oral class presentation). This course can be used as an elective requirement for the graduate specialization in Animal Studies: Social Science & Humanities Perspectives see \url{http://animalstudies.msu.edu}.

Requirements: Students will be responsible for all of the class readings listed on the Schedule. In addition, individual students will be assigned to write summaries of selected readings, and present them to the class (see Schedule, TBA). The summaries are to be written as literature review essays, not as a critique (nor a list of bullet points/outline). Critique of the readings will be saved for class discussion (and critique is also an appropriate and admirable part of the final research paper). For an example of what the written summary should look like see the “prototype summary” posted on D2L. The student must prepare two questions centered by the student’s assigned reading that will serve as the foundation for class discussion. After the student presents the summary (using powerpoint) the discussion questions will then serve as a guide for a more thorough analysis and critique of the material. By the date of the assigned reading, the summary, discussion questions and powerpoint presentations must be uploaded onto D2L in the STUDENT SUMMARIES and POWERPOINT drop boxes.

The course will be conducted as a seminar. At the end of the semester, each student will have a portfolio of summaries which will be helpful in preparing the final project, the written portion is due at the time of our final exam (see the university schedule) and the oral portion will be scheduled during the last weeks of the semester.

Instructions for the final project:
For your final project (written paper and oral presentation), you will use the material covered during the semester to write a scholarly paper on the “animal question.” Any aspect of the animal question is suitable. I suggest that you choose something that is meaningful to you, and I of course would like to see potentially publishable essays. In that regard, I would like to see papers of about 5,000 words (the minimum publishable piece) if you intend to work toward submitting a paper to a journal. If you do not have that goal in mind, then a paper of fewer words is fine, but not less than 2,500, please. The paper is due by the end of the final exam period for the class, by email, no hard copy is necessary. As noted above, each of you will give an oral presentation of the paper during the last two weeks of class (see the schedule for your assigned presentation day for the final project, TBA).

The paper can be on any topic in animal studies (hunting, raising animals for food, using animals as laborers, blood sports, ethics/philosophy, vivisection, petkeeping, animal theme parks, zoos, keystone predators, so-called “problem” animals such as pit bull dogs or backyard deer or urban wildlife – whatever interests you). The paper must be grounded in the literature we have read this semester. Thus, I ask that you include at least 30 citations from...
that literature, and at least half of those must come from the texts for the course. Remember that for the literature covered in class, you will have summaries provided by your colleagues. Your paper must have an introduction, a body, a conclusion and a list of references cited (use any standard citation format).

Finally, I want to approve your paper topic. Please submit a one-page proposal to me by email by midterm. Given the schedule, I’ll try to get my feedback to you within 24 hours of receiving your proposal, so everyone should have feedback no later than the first class meeting after midterm.

PRESENTATIONS: The summary and final presentation dates are assigned and listed on the schedule. If the schedule doesn’t work for you (for example you might need to miss class for travel or other reasons) please feel free to find someone to switch with. Just be sure to let me know of the switch so I can keep track of who is doing what when. If you need to make a change you might have to do two summaries in one week.

You will have 30 minutes during the last two weeks of class for your presentation, including time for discussion. The presentation should be a slide show in power point or you may bring your visuals to class, perhaps as handouts.

Evaluation: I expect all of the summaries to be of very good (A) quality. I may ask that a summary be rewritten if it is not of very good quality, but it is expected all will be, and you will not hear back from me unless yours falls below an A. Your grade will be based on A’s for the written summaries = 50% and the final paper and oral presentation = 50%.
Coyote on a commuter train, author unknown, circulated widely on the internet (May 2012)