

**ENG 469/569**  
**THINKING ABOUT ANIMALS**  
**Professor LeMenager PLC 457**  
**slemen@uoregon.edu**

**Course Précis:** This course intends to provoke questions about the meaning of animals in human life and culture, the philosophical status of “the animal” versus the human, the cultures of animals, and the possibilities of interspecies companionship and communication. We take the arts of literature and film as our primary archive in the investigation of how it feels to be human, to be companioned by animals, to be animal, and to consider alternatives to this strong binary.

**Assignments:**

**Participation (10%):** Participation includes regular attendance and being intellectually “present” in the class to discuss course readings and films. You are allowed one unexplained absence. Every other absence must be documented.

**Student-Led Discussion (10%):** Student teams lead discussion about four class films. Each team must create a carefully considered, guided conversation for the class as a whole about the film in question. This will require watching the film ahead of time and meeting at least once to divide tasks and formalize speaking roles.

**Midterm Exam (25%):** An in-class midterm exam tests students’ knowledge of course readings and films. You will be asked to identify and explain course concepts (40% of grade) and choose three quotations and/or scenes that have challenged your way of thinking, explaining in detail why they have had this effect (60% of grade). **April 25.**

**Student Fieldwork/Portfolio Presentation (40%):** Students will enter “the field” of our local environment to record observations of animals, plants, and other life encountered in the everyday. Each student should choose a place to conduct her/his field study that is accessible from the student’s residence by bike or foot. Allow yourself to be alert and attentive to this place for at least an hour, taking down notes, taking pictures with your phone, and/or recording observations. From your field study, choose one form of life (animal, plant, etcetera) for which you will create a portfolio to present to the class. One goal of the portfolio is to make a form of life perhaps overlooked in your everyday routines into a virtual “star,” as charismatic as a grizzly or panda bear. The portfolio will include: 1) a description of your chosen life form, in your own words, derived from biological science; 2) your personal reflections on it, which may feature sketches, writing, or photos/video; 3) notation of literature, art, or films in which this life form has appeared (you can begin to find such traces with a simple Internet search). **You will turn in your portfolio to Professor LeMenager on 5/23 and present it to the class on 5/30.**

**Final Gloss (Exam) (15%):** A short final exam requires you to identify and comment upon ten quotations from course readings after the midterm exam.

**Learning outcomes:**

Students will sharpen skills as critical thinkers, writers, and public speakers.

Students will conduct original fieldwork and research on a local plant or animal species.

Students will develop Web tools to map and archive their fieldwork and present it to other scholars.

## **Accessible Education**

If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon and request that the Accessible Education Center send a letter explaining what accommodations may be helpful to you in this course.

## **Inclement Weather**

If inclement weather makes traveling to campus difficult, I will notify you by email and/or voice mail about whether we are holding class. If the weather is bad, check your email for a message from me. Whether or not I decide to hold class, you should use your own judgment about the safety of traveling to campus.

## **Schedule**

### **3/31 Course Introduction**

#### Questions of Ethics

#### **WEEK 1**

**4/2** Joy Williams, "The Animal People"; Tom Regan, "The Rights of Humans and Other Animals" on Blackboard

**4/4** *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Rene Descartes , Excerpt on Blackboard

#### **WEEK 2**

**4/7** *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Jeremy Bentham, Excerpt on Blackboard

**4/9** Student Assignment: Watch **Food, Inc.** (dir. Robert Kenner, 2008). The film can be streamed or downloaded at: [http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/food\\_inc/](http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/food_inc/)

**4/11** Virtual Discussion Section: Blog about Food, Inc. with Professor on Blackboard

#### **WEEK 3**

#### Spectatorship and Scale

**4/14** Watch Film: *Microcosmos* (Dirs. Claude Nuridsany, Marie Pérennou, 1996)

**4/16** Jonathan Franzen, "My Bird Problem" (2005) on Blackboard

**4/18** Michael Pollan, "The Intelligent Plant" (2013), Ursula LeGuin, "Vaster than Empires and More Slow" (1972) on Blackboard

#### **WEEK 4**

**4/21** John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?"(1977), Elizabeth Bishop, "The Moose" on Blackboard

**4/23** Discuss Film: *Grizzly Man* (dir. Werner Herzog, 2005) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

## 4/25 In-Class Midterm

### WEEK 5

#### Science, Observation, Experiment

4/28 E. O. Wilson, "Bernhardsdorp" (1984), Henry David Thoreau, "The Pond in Winter" (1854)

4/30 Jonathan Silvertown, "A New Dawn for Citizen Science," *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* (2009), Lynda Lynn Haupt, "The Bestiary's Bestiary: A Note on Process," "A New Nature, A New Bestiary" (2013), Philip Fisher, gloss on "Wonder" from *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (2003)

5/2 **FIELD STUDY (LAB) DAY** Record Observations in Virtual Section on Blackboard

### WEEK 6

5/5 Sy Montgomery, "Deep Intellect: Inside the Mind of an Octopus" (2011) from *Orion Magazine*; D. Graham Burnett, "A Mind in the Water: The Dolphin as Our Beast of Burden" (2010) from *Orion Magazine*

5/7 Vicki Hearne, "A Walk with Washoe: How Far Can We Go?" from *Adam's Task* (1982); Barbara Smuts, "Encounters with Animal Minds," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, nos. 5-7 (2001)

5/9 Watch Film: *Project Nim* (Dir. James Marsh, 2011) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

### WEEK 7

#### The Cultures of Animals

5/12 Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy, "Grief, Sadness, and the Bones of Elephants" (1996); Barbara Gowdy, *The White Bone* (2000)

5/14 *The White Bone*

5/16 Virtual Discussion Section: Blog about *White Bone* on Blackboard

### WEEK 8

5/19 Excerpts from Les Murray, *Translations from the Natural World* (1994) on Blackboard

5/21 *Being Caribou* (Leanne Allison and Diana Wilson, 2005) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

#### Reform, Resistance, Revolution

5/23 Jonathan Safran Foer, "Hiding/Seeking"; "Seven Future Visions of In-Vitro Meat," on Blackboard

Next Nature Lab, The Netherlands (<http://www.nextnature.net/lab/>)

## **Student Portfolios Due to Professor**

### **WEEK 9**

**5/26 MEMORIAL DAY HOLIDAY**

**5/28** Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation or Animal Rights"; Martha Nussbaum, "The Moral Status of Animals" on Blackboard

**5/30** *Sharkwater* (Dir. Rob Stewart, 2006) **STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION**

### **WEEK 10**

**6/2** Grant Morrison and artist Frank Quitely, *WE3* (2011)

**6/4** *WE3*

**6/6** Nathaniel Rich, "The Mammoth Cometh: Bringing Extinct Animals Back to Life" (2014)