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


4/4 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/

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)


WEEK 4


4/23 Discuss Film: Grizzly Man (dir. Werner Herzog, 2005) STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION
4/25 In-Class Midterm

WEEK 5

Science, Observation, Experiment


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

WEEK 6


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

WEEK 7

The Cultures of Animals


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


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

**WEEK 10**

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

6/4 *WE3*