Hist 239: Animals in Human History

Tu, Th. 11AM-12:15PM
Room: King 337

Prof. White
Office Hours: Mon, Th. 2-4PM
303 Rice Hall
(440)775-8337
sam.white@oberlin.edu

Course Goals:
This course will explore the role of domesticated animals in human society from prehistoric times to the present. Students will learn about animals as an often ignored but vital and fascinating part of the human experience; and at the same time, we will examine how a broader historical perspective can help us approach animal issues in the contemporary world. Through a different topic each week, we will examine human-animal relations as a way to think critically about the dynamic interaction between nature and society over time.

For students in the natural sciences: Think of this class as a way to apply information and perspectives from the natural sciences to the study of history and to develop writing and critical thinking skills used in the humanities and social sciences.

For students in the humanities and social sciences: Think of this class as a way to acquire both historical and scientific perspective on contemporary social, cultural, and ethical issues regarding animals. Be prepared to learn (yes, that means memorize!) some basic facts and concepts from zoology, ecology, and evolutionary biology. However, don’t worry—this is not a science class and does not assume any prior knowledge.

Format:
The course will be in a lecture-discussion format. Depending upon the topic, some weeks will involve more discussion and participation than others.

Course Policies:
Attendance: Students are expected to participate in class and complete the assigned readings by the first class each week (except week 1). Much of the material in the lectures may not be covered in the readings but will be on the exams, and so students should obtain notes for any missed classes. If you know you will not be able to attend a class, please let me know as far in advance as possible.

Honor Code: All course work is governed by Oberlin’s Honor Code. If you have a question about how the Honor Code applies to a particular assignment, you should ask the professor in advance of the due date.
**Submitting Work:** All written work must be submitted by e-mail in a MS Word compatible format. I will mark off 7 points every 24 hours late, weekends included, no exceptions unless you can bring in a note from your class dean explaining that you could not submit the assignment. If you know in advance that you will not be available to submit work on a given day, please contact me well ahead of the deadline.

**E-mail:** I will answer short e-mails Mon-Fri 9-5. If you have any questions that require a long answer, please come by my office during office hours instead. I will give feedback on any draft or outline of your class work provided you send it in at least 24 hours before the deadline—the longer I have, the better the feedback.

**Grading:** A(90-100), B(80-89), C(70-79), D(60-69), F (below 60). Plus and minus grades for scores within 2 points of the next letter grade.

**Participation:**
Participation will be 15% of the final grade, based on students’ attendance and class discussion. Students may also earn their participation grade by posting written discussions and current news and journal articles relevant to the class on the course Blackboard site.

**Essays:**
Students must write two essays of about 1500 words each (15% of final grade for each). For the *first essay*, you may choose one of the following options or propose something else, with my approval:

1) Analyze one or more historic works of art in the college museum. Explain what they reveal about human-animal relations in the past and/or how a better understanding of the history of human-animal relations could help us understand the artwork(s).

2) Follow a current news story relating to human-animal relations, describe it, and explain how it fits into the broader pattern of human-animal relations and/or how historical comparisons and contrasts can offer perspective on this contemporary issue.

3) Read a work of historical or non-Western literature or watch a non-Western film that prominently features animals (such as Haruki Murakami’s *Wild Sheep Chase* or Mo Yan’s *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out*, or *The Story of the Weeping Camel*) and discuss what it reveals about the history and role of animals in that culture

For the *second* essay, I will post a list of possible topics, with suggested reading.

**Writing guides have been posted on the course Blackboard site.** For each essay, be sure to incorporate readings and discussion from class. Outside reading is also strongly encouraged: Please contact me or consult the links and references on the course Blackboard site for further reading suggestions.
The first paper is due by 8PM Friday, 3/26, and the second is due by 8PM Friday 4/30.

**Quizzes:**
There will be four in-class quizzes testing factual material (10% each of your final grade). At each quiz, you may bring in up to two pages (single-sided) of notes, but everything in this outline must be entirely of your own creation: Any reproductions from any handouts, web sites, books, or classmates will be a violation of the honor code. The outline may be hand-written or typed (minimum 10-pt font). Bear in mind that writing an outline is one of the best ways of reviewing material. However, it is probably not in your best interest to try to fit as much as possible onto the page, because you may not have the time to find it all during the quiz.

**Final Exam:**
There will be a take-home final consisting of short essay questions covering broad themes spanning the entire course (15% of your final grade).

**Breakdown of Final Grade:**
- 15%: Attendance, participation, Blackboard postings and discussion
- 30%: Essays
- 40%: Quizzes
- 15%: Final exam

**Reading:**
This class has two required course books, both available at the college bookstore:
The first is a little dry, but offers a broad, up-to-date overview of animal studies, with copious photos and illustrations. The second book provides a more eccentric but also more entertaining and thoughtful coverage of many of the same topics.
All other readings will be posted to the course Blackboard site in PDF under “weekly readings.”

**Schedule of Classes:**

**Week 1: Introduction and Prehistory**
2/9: Introduction
2/11: Prehistory

**Reading:**
- Kalof (chapter 1)
Week 2: Domestication
2/16: Theories and debates
2/18: The major domesticates

Reading:
- Bulliet (chapters 5 and 7)

Week 3: Animals as Technology
2/23: Horsepower, war, and agriculture
2/25: Quiz

Reading:
- Bulliet (chapter 6)
- Kalof (chapter 2)

Week 4: Animals in Traditional Cultures
3/2: Ancient and medieval Europe
3/4: Asia

Reading:
- Kalof (chapters 3 and 4)
- Robert Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre"

Week 5: Nomads
3/9: Pastoral nomadism
3/11: Movie, Grass

Reading:

Week 6: To Eat or Not to Eat?
3/16: Taboos and vegetarianism
3/18: Quiz

Reading:
- Marvin Harris (1985). *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (selections)
- Frederick Simoons (1994). *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present* (selections)
- Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (selections from *The Animals Reader*)
- Plutarch, "On the Eating of Flesh" (from *The Animals Reader*)
Week 7: Animal Invasions and Diseases
3/23: Zoonoses and Epizootics
3/25: Invasive species
**First Essay Due Friday 3/26 by 8PM

Reading:

Week 8
**Spring Break**

Week 9: The Modern Transformation of Human-Animal Relations
4/6: Origins
4/8: Humaneness

Reading:
-Kalof (chapters 5 and 6, up to page 144)
-passages on animals from Montaigne, Descartes, Bentham, etc.

Week 10: Animal Welfare and Animal Rights
4/13: Themes and changes from the 19th to the 21st century
4/15: Quiz

Reading:
-selection on animal rights

Week 11: The Evolution of Pets
4/20: Theories and Origins
4/22: Pets from medieval to modern times

Reading:
-Yi-Fu Tuan “Animal Pets: Cruelty and Affection” (from *The Animals Reader*)

Week 12: Industrializing Animals
4/27: Origins of industrial meat production
4/29: Modern CAFOs
**Second Essay Due
**Reading:**
- Bulliet (chapter 9)

**Week 13: New Frontiers**
5/4: Synanthropy, new technologies, and unintended consequences
5/6: Quiz

**Reading:**

**Week 14: Conclusion**
5/11: **Museum visit**
5/13: Conclusion

**No new reading**

**Week 15**
**Reading/Final Exam Period**