

## THE DOG COURSE



VAST 248-02  
Sample Syllabus  
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Pardee 304, X5243

### Course Reading

Budiansky, *The Truth about Dogs: An Inquiry into The Ancestry, Social Conventions, Mental Habits and Moral Fiber of Canis Familiaris*

Coppinger, *Dogs: A New Understanding*

Choron, *Planet Dog: A Doglopedia*

Derr, *A Dog's History of America*

Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*  
(recommended)

Handelman, *Canine Behavior: A Photo Illustrated Handbook*

Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*

Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know*

Knapp, *Pack of Two: The Intricate Bond between People and Dogs*

Lunsford, ed. *The New St. Martin's Handbook*

Quinn, *Dog On It: A Chet and Bernie Mystery*

Morris, *My Dog Skip*

The above books are available at the Lafayette College Store. Publisher info is posted on our Moodle site. Additional reading will be assigned and posted on Moodle each week.

### Other Course Materials

Field Notebook

Digital camera (recommended for field notebook observations, a camera phone is fine for this purpose)

### Course Description

Dogs: Are they "Man's" best friend or "nature's" most successful parasite? Employing a range of perspectives—literary, philosophical, archeological, biological and technological—we will examine how the dog has been "constructed" (figuratively and literally) in human history, and how, in our determinations of the dog's value as hunter, protector, pet, and/or medical specimen, we circumscribe our own identity as "human." Over the course of the semester, we will explore the psychology of animal ownership, the philosophy of animal agency, and the

politics of animal rights. We will consider, as well, ethical problems posed by the technology of breeding and the use of animal models in scientific research. Through consideration of these issues, we will seek to reevaluate our understanding of the complex bond between humans and dogs.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- To identify and analyze the intellectual processes involved in answering a “big question” (“What is the domestic dog?”) from several disciplinary perspectives;
- To identify and analyze the ethical considerations involved in examining such a question;
- To acquire an introductory understanding of dog evolution, biology and genetics;
- To identify and analyze different narratives of the domestic dog’s evolution and the dog’s role in human history;
- To acquire an introductory understanding of Human/Animal constructions and interactions;
- To develop your abilities as a reader and writer of academic discourse;
- To develop your ability to participate in an active learning community.

### **Assessment of Learning**

Your learning in this course will be assessed in the following ways:

- **Writing (50%):** Specific writing assignments explained below.
- **Preparation and participation (35%):** How well you are prepared for class and extra-curricular activities; participation in the campus dog show.
- **Friday Quizzes (15%):** Most Fridays we’ll begin class with a 10-minute quiz on that week’s reading and discussion. I will drop your lowest quiz grade when I calculate final grades. Missed quizzes can only be made up with an excused absence from the Dean’s Office. (You can count a missed quiz as your lowest grade.)

### **Reading Assignments**

You should leave yourself enough time to read and then re-read texts assigned for discussion on a given day. Get in the habit of marking passages you find significant, compelling, or perhaps puzzling.

It is important that everyone have the same editions of the books required for class so that, during discussion, we can all turn quickly and easily to the same page. If you do not buy your books at the college store, please check the ISBN numbers (available on our Moodle site) to be sure you have the same edition I ordered. Wherever you buy your books, be sure you have them in time to fully prepare for class.

Finally, I expect you to bring *to every class* whatever texts are up for discussion (including handouts and any assigned writing); should you forget (it happens), be sure to sit next to someone with whom you can share.

### **Writing Assignments**

- **Short, informal writing in class or for homework** to focus your responses to the assigned texts and/or explore relevant issues as they arise.

- **Field notebook** for recording observations of all things dog-related: e.g., dog behavior, dog-human interactions, dog-related current events, scientific discoveries about dogs, etc. 2 entries/wk.
- **4 blog posts (about 350 wds/post)** revised from field notebook entries and uploaded to our course website, a link to the website is also posted on Moodle). Each of you will be assigned specific weeks to post. You are welcome to post more than 4 times. Additional posts and comments on other posts will count toward your class participation grade.
- **Research project:** A semester-long investigation into the history of a dog breed and the consequences of domestication for that breed. This project has several parts:
  - **An annotated bibliography of research-in-progress due at the beginning of wk 4.**
  - **An interview with a local dog owner, completed before week 6, and a 5-minute podcast (audio-essay) based on the interview, draft due wk 10, final version due May 3).**
  - **A scientific poster on the history of your breed, draft due wk 11, final version due wk 13.**
  - **A 20 pp research paper, written in several drafts, which will be due in wks 6, 12, and 14.**

I will not put grades on individual writing assignments. Instead at midterm and the end of term I will ask you to prepare a portfolio of selected pieces of your writing as well as some reflection in writing about the material in your portfolio. At those times, you will receive a letter grade for your portfolio and an estimate of your grade in the course so far. I will give you more information on preparing portfolios as the deadlines approach.

Late assignments will not be accepted unless specifically excused by me. In general, you will not be able to make up the informal writing assignments: These assignments are intended to generate class discussion, and it doesn't do any good for you to write them after the discussion has already occurred. However, if you are late with an assignment due to illness or an emergency, see me about it as soon as possible.

Proofread any written work (including blog posts) before you turn it in. If an assignment seems to have been poorly or hastily prepared, I will return it to you for corrections before we spend time reading or commenting on it. You will find the list of **20 Most Common Surface Errors** in your St. Martin's handbook a helpful reference.

You are responsible for reading and abiding by the college's "Principles of Intellectual Honesty," which are explained in your student handbook. In this course, we'll

follow MLA rules. If you have any questions about how to use or cite sources, check your student handbook, your St. Martin's handbook, or ask the WA or me. Instances of plagiarism will be dealt with according to the procedure outlined in the most recent version of the student handbook.

### **Writing Associate**

You will be meeting with \_\_\_\_\_, the Writing Associate (WA) for our course, four times over the course of the semester during weeks I will announce in advance (usually a week before the assignment is due). Samantha is not an editor or proofreader, but a trained reader who will engage you in the kind of thoughtful discussion about writing that leads to productive revision. Her contact info is listed on p. 1 of this syllabus. She is obligated to inform me of any late or missed appointments.

### **Co-Curricular Events**

A number of co-curricular events have been planned. Others may be added. Unless otherwise specified, your attendance at these events is required. During the semester, we'll take two field trips: one to the Canine Learning Experience in Allentown on **Sunday, Jan 30**, and a second to the Lakota Wolf preserve at a date TBA. We'll also watch the cable broadcast of the Westminster dog show finals on **Tuesday, Feb. 15, from 8-11 PM** (location TBA). Several Lafayette professors and staff members will also be joining us throughout the semester for lectures and discussions. And we will have several research and tech sessions in the library. When possible, co-curricular events will be scheduled during class time or over the lunch hour. When those times are impossible, you will be notified in enough time to plan your schedules accordingly.

### **Campus Dog Show**

Both sections of VAST 248 will sponsor a campus dog show, scheduled for the last Wednesday of the semester (May 4) from 11-2. (Rain date is May 6, 11-2). You will be responsible for planning the various parts of this event, and you are expected to attend for the duration of the show (unless you have another class). An important component of this show will be the public display of your research posters.

### **Preparation, participation and Attendance**

Class meetings will be conducted as discussions. Your contributions to class discussion are important, then, not only to your own learning process but also for how others learn from you. For these reasons, preparation and participation are worth a significant part of your grade (35%). By "participation," however, I do not mean simply showing up to class, the occasional comment made in class, or talk for the sake of talking. Rather, I'll view your participation as an indication of your level of engagement with the course. Here are 2 ways you should be able to demonstrate that engagement:

- *informed* participation in class on a *regular* basis: i.e., your comments in class reflect thoughtful preparation of the assigned reading and or writing and demonstrate that you are paying attention to the trajectory of the conversation; you speak up often enough to be a presence in the class; your contributions to discussion make it possible for others to participate and to learn

- evidence of sustained critical thinking about issues, questions or concepts discussed in class and *regularly demonstrated in your writing*

Of course it goes without saying that when you don't come to class, you can't be part of the discussion, you won't understand the relevance of the reading and writing assignments, and you will fall behind. Thus, uneven attendance will affect every other aspect of this course on which you are evaluated. Because I often begin class by asking for responses in writing to a particular question or passage from the assigned reading, you will have the same difficulties if you arrive late.

Because our class will be conducted mainly as discussion rather than lecture, if you are absent, I will not be able to hand you notes or an outline or easily recap what you missed. The way discussions work as venues for learning is that they create opportunities for participants as a group to talk through complicated issues and ideas—to pose questions, struggle over difficulties, and explore tangents. When you miss class you miss out on the opportunity to participate in this process.

Although missing class because of religious holidays is not an absence, you still need to notify me ahead of time so that you will not fall behind. Missing more than three class periods, for any reason, will adversely affect your grade. This does not mean you are "allowed" to miss three. It means that missing more than three, the equivalent of a week's worth of class, will likely make it difficult for you to catch up.

### **Requests for Accommodation**

In compliance with Lafayette College policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you require as a student with a disability. Except in unusual circumstances, requests for academic accommodations need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester so that arrangements can be made. Students must register with the Office of the Dean of the College for verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

### **Schedule of Assignments**

Below is an outline of our course schedule. Specific details about for each week (including details about reading and writing assignments and co-curricular events) will be posted on our Moodle site, so please check there on a regular basis. In general, expect to write 4-5 pages (about 1,000-1250 wds)/week (including writing in your field notebook and posting on our course website). Quizzes will be given each Friday during the first 10 minutes of class.

#### **WEEK 1 (Jan 24, 26, 28)**

Introductions. Why Dogs?

Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, pp 81-100

Sun., Jan 30. 10:00 AM. Field Trip to Canine Learning Expo, Allentown PA.

#### **WEEKS 2-3 (Jan 31, Feb 2, 4, 7, 9, 11)**

Inside of a Dog

Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell and Know*

Quinn, *Dog on It*

Skillman Library: finding sources for your research project (lunch time session, date and location TBA)

Due: Dog breed choice for research project (Feb 4)

Introductory WA Meetings (a sign-up schedule will be provided)

**WEEKS 4-5 (Feb 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25)**

Why We Love Dogs

Knapp, *Pack of Two*

Psychoanalytic paradigms

**Westminster Dog Show Finals, 2/15, 8 PM** (location TBA)

Due: Working bibliography, annotated, 10 items min. (Feb 18); Dog owner interviews recorded by Feb 25.

**WEEK 6 (Feb 28, Mar 2, 4)**

Do Dogs Love Us?

*The Truth about Dogs*

Audacity Workshop (noon-1, Mar 1-2, sign up for one session)

WA Meetings

Due: 5 pp draft of breed history

WA Meetings

**WEEK 7 (Mar 7, 9, 11, 21, 23)**

Introduction to Ethical Issues

Due: Midterm portfolio (including revised breed history, updated bibliography, preliminary analysis of your owner interview)

\*\*Instead of class on F Mar 23, we will join the other class on Thursday evening, March 24, to screen a film. Details TBA.

SPRING BREAK! ☺

**WEEK 8 (Mar 21, 23, 25)**

Ethical Issues cont.

Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*

**WEEK 9 (Mar 28, 30, Apr 1)**

Evolutionary and Genetic Record

Coppinger, *Dogs* (on reserve)

Darwin (selections, on reserve)

Due: 5 pp on the consequences of domestication for your breed

**WEEK 10 (Apr 4, 6, 8)**

Animals in Medical Research

Selections from *Animal Experimentation*

Due: "draft" of your podcast  
WA meetings

**WEEKS 11-12 (Apr 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22)**

What History Teaches Us

*A Dog's History of America*

Due: Draft of your breed history poster (Apr 11); complete draft of your research paper (Apr 18)

WA meetings (Apr 18-22)

**WEEK 13 (Apr 25, 27, 29)**

Giving Dogs the Last "Woof"

Auster, "Mr Bones" (posted on Moodle)

Morris, *My Dog Skip*

Due: Breed history posters (Apr 25)

**WEEK 14 (May 2, 4, 6)**

Campus Dog Show!

Due: final version of your podcast (May 2)

Final portfolios due May 13