Animals & Society College Courses

One goal of both Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PSYETA) and the journal, Society & Animals, is “to stimulate and support an emerging content area within the social sciences and the humanities” in Human-Animal Studies (Society & Animals, 2003). To support that goal and in response to questions students regularly pose about where to study “Human-Animal Studies,” this article provides some answers.

Most notable in the development of recent college courses and programs is the four-year undergraduate degree in Sociology: Animals in Human Society now offered by the Notre Dame de Namur University (San Francisco, California). Cheryl Joseph, Ph.D., program advisor, reports the new major combines academic study with a two-semester internship at facilities such as “shelters, sanctuaries, nature reserves, wildlife museums, and therapy settings.” The focus of the curriculum is on the human-nonhuman bond at the personal, institutional, and global level. The curriculum includes a wide range of topics from the roles of companion animals in human health to various forms of animal exploitation (C. Joseph, personal communication, 2003).

At the time of this writing, The Notre Dame De Namur program has not been added to the list of college courses maintained by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) Animals & Society—An Annotated List of Courses (HSUS, 2003). This HSUS list is an outgrowth of Balcombe’s (1999) research, which found an increasing number of college course offerings in Human-Animal Studies. The HSUS list is the most broad-based resource that catalogs college courses in Human-Animal Studies. It is comprehensive in scope and contains courses from 15 different academic disciplines. It is available on-line at http://www.hsus.org/ace/11317. The HSUS list also can be downloaded and saved as a PDF document.

The HSUS list provides course titles, content, instructor name, and contact information. The currently available version of the list (HSUS, May 2003) has about 90 courses listed. It can be viewed by either subject or geographical area (state/country). It is a
useful resource for students searching for courses and for instructors who may be considering developing a course.

It is very simple to submit course information to the list. Instructions are provided on the HSUS website. One may notify the HSUS “either by e-mail (ari@hsus.org), telephone (301-258-3042), fax (301-258-7760), or mail (HSUS, 2100 L Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20037).” As of July, 2003 the HSUS was preparing to update the list according to HSUS Research Assistant Cheryl Ross (C. Ross, personal communication, 2003).

Course information submission should include the following: Institution, City, State; Course Title; Instructor(s); Instructor contact information; Summary of course; Website of course, if applicable.

It takes only a few minutes to send this information via e-mail to the HSUS. If everyone who teaches an “Animals and Society” course would submit information on their course(s) we would have a much clearer picture about the breadth and depth to which Human Animal studies course offerings have progressed at the college level.

Two additional Internet forums also provide Human-Animal Studies college course information. The newly formed Animals and Society Section of the American Sociological Association (ASA) maintains a college course syllabus section on its web page (http://www.asanet.org/sectionanimals/). There are currently five syllabi listed. The Animals and Society Section welcomes the submission of other relevant syllabi. The Animals and Society Section list is not limited to sociology courses, and one does not need to be a member of the ASA for the course information to be accepted for the website. To submit a syllabus for the website, send syllabus via e-mail to Sabrina Oesterle, soe@earthlink.net (S. Oesterle, personal communication, 2003).

The Center on Animal Liberation Affairs (CALA) also maintains a list of college courses at http://getvegan.com/CALA/syllabi.html. The current CALA listing is more than 20 courses long and includes philosophy, animal science, history, ethics, sociology, law, and other disciplines. CALA is searching actively to expand its listings with the goal of demonstrating “that animal liberation is an important contemporary movement that is having a marked impact upon numerous academic disciplines” (R. Kahn, personal communication, 2003). To submit an Animals and Society syllabus to CALA, send the material in electronic form to Richard Kahn via e-mail address: rvkahn@ucla.edu.

It would be a great benefit to the promotion and development of Human-Animal Studies if everyone who teaches relevant courses would submit course information to all the appropriate forums. Additionally, when an instructor relocates or a class is