

NCLC 475/WMST 600: Animal Rights as Ecofeminism

3 credits

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Over the past 30 years, much of the most influential scholarship and activism regarding animal exploitation and animal rights has been produced by people also deeply engaged in feminist, and particularly Black feminist and ecofeminist, scholarship and activism. Drawing on the history of people working at this nexus, this class is designed to integratively and intersectionally apply the ecofeminist lens to an exploration of various forms of animal exploitation and abuse, including the use of animals for mass food production, mass clothing production, pharmaceutical and medical testing, cosmetics testing, and entertainment and sport. Similarly explored through the ecofeminist lens will be the methods and strategies used by organizations and movements in order to eliminate animal exploitation.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students who take this course will:

1. deepen their practical understandings of intersectionality by applying an intersectional lens feminism and animal rights, as well as racial justice, queer rights, economic justice, and other movements for social justice;
2. develop a deep and complex understanding of contemporary issues in animal rights through feminist theory, ecofeminist theory, and other critical theories;
3. apply this understanding to imagine strategies for disrupting systems of animal exploitation and abuse; and
4. participate in community education activities regarding animal rights.

Required Texts

Gardner, E. (2011). *Women and the animal rights movement*. Rutgers University Press.

Gruen, L. (2011). *Ethics and animals: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Harper, B. (2010). *Sistah Vegan: Food, identity, health, and society: Black female vegans speak*. Lantern Books.

Additional articles as assigned below.

Learning Activities (Assignments)

Animal Exploitation Footprint Project (due midnight, Feb 6, 250 points)

The purpose of this assignment is to facilitate reflection on the ways in which animals are exploited by considering how we contribute to their exploitation. During the first several weeks of class we will introduce a wide variety of forms of animal exploitation for human profit, from animals used as entertainment to animals used for cosmetics testing. Your job is to inventory your own life and the ways in which you contribute to this exploitation either directly or indirectly. We all participate in one way or another, so this is not about self-loathing, but instead an opportunity to consider the scope of animal exploitation.

The heart of your project should revolve around this quotation from an essay by Jennifer Hickman: “Animals do not exist for human entertainment, sport, or utility, and we ought not to deprive them of their vital needs to satisfy our trivial needs.” In what ways do you participate in this deprivation, intentionally or unintentionally? In what ways have you been socialized to distinguish between vital needs and trivial needs? What do you eat? What do you wear? What cosmetics, cleaners, and other products do you use? Dig deeply. Sometimes things aren’t obvious. You might be a vegan, but if you consume a lot of soy or quinoa, how might that impact the lives of animals? How does the production of synthetic leather impact animals? Be sure to incorporate key concepts from class and from readings. And remember, you should not spend one ounce of energy on this project trying to *justify* a particular way you exploit animals. As much as anything, this is meant to be a meditation on speciesism, socialization, and hegemony. We will talk about the complexities later in the semester.

You should include, as well, reflections on one or more goals for how you intend to lighten your animal exploitation footprint.

Your project can take any form that is most helpful for you. You can write a brief essay (roughly 6/8 pages) or a series of poems; compose a written, online, or video photo-documentary; use drawings or paintings or some other art form. If you choose not to write an essay, be sure to include a 2/3 page synthesis of your project that explains it and draws in relevant concepts as well as an additional page listing your sources.

Your project will be graded based upon the extent to which you:

- (1) deeply and complexly map out your exploitation footprint, delving beyond the obvious and surface-level forms of animal exploitation;
- (2) draw on relevant readings, concepts, and discussions from class in order to frame your self-reflection; and
- (3) compose a thoughtful and well-developed project.

Blog or Journal (due last day of class, 150 points)

This assignment has two primary purposes. First, it is meant to provide an opportunity to journal about the sometimes-difficult-and-disturbing images, readings, and discussions on awful conditions for animals. Secondly, it is meant to help us practice *noticing* both the forms of animal exploitation around us and the imagery and socialization toward speciesism (and how this intersects with forms of human exploitation like sexism, racism, heterosexism, imperialism, and poverty). You are responsible for writing about one entry a week, reflecting on what we discussed in class (rather than repeating what we talked about in class) and documenting what you’re seeing outside of class that relates to class. You are encouraged to incorporate photos of things you see day to day or links to things you see online. If you are more familiar with human

justice issues than animal rights issues, I encourage you to use the journal as an opportunity to explore connections among the issues.

Your journal will be graded based upon the extent to which you:

- (1) challenge yourself to reflect deeply and critically;
- (2) make connections across topics and issues, modeling intersectional thinking;
- (3) draw on course concepts and discussions; and
- (4) complete at least 12 journals or blog entries over the course of the semester.

Intersectional Analysis Essay (due April 7, 300 points)

The purpose of this assignment is to apply an intersectional/ecofeminist framework to a focused analysis of a specific animal exploitation concern. You will choose an industry or corporation to analyze critically, examining its animal exploitation footprint and how it intersects with other forms of exploitation. This will require some investigative work on your part, because much of the damage done by industries and corporations are hidden behind “corporate responsibility” propaganda. So be ready to dig deeply.

Your essay should be roughly 8/12 pages long. You have the freedom to focus your essay how you wish, but be sure to consider *digging-deeper questions*. For example, if I decided to write about industrialized pig farming, I might consider, not just the obvious ways the industry is abusive to pigs, but also:

- (1) How is pig farming abusive to low-wage workers and the environment? Who feels the greatest impact of the environmental and worker exploitation (across race, class, etc.)?
- (2) Who are the beneficiaries of this exploitation and abuse? How do they justify it? How do they create the conditions that allow it to happen?
- (3) Beyond abuses during production, what are other ways in which the products of industrialized pig farming are harmful? What impact does it have on community health? Whose health is at highest risk and why?

You do not need to answer these specific questions and you should not try to answer to many questions in your essay. Make sure you have a central focus (or “thesis”) and make clear analytical arguments. You should plan on drawing on course readings as well as an additional 5/10 sources, at least 3/6 of which should be *scholarly sources*, which means peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and research reports, but not magazine articles, blog entries, or Wikipedia.

Your essay will be graded based on the extent to which you:

- (1) have a clear and consistent central argument;
- (2) provide deep analysis that gets beneath the obvious surface;
- (3) address your topic with an intersectional lens; and
- (4) compose a well-written, well-organized essay.

Building a Local Campaign (due April 21 or 28, 300 points)

The purpose of this assignment is to apply what we’ve discussed and learned in class to a localized animal rights issue. Working in groups, you will identify a contemporary animal rights issue and develop and (partially) deliver a campaign on that issue that is grounded in the principles of ecofeminism and intersectional activism. The elements of your campaign will differ depending on the issue you choose, but it should include, at a minimum, the following: (1) a

web page (can be a blog or wiki), (2) the use of social media (such as facebook or twitter), (3) educational materials (which may be incorporated into the web page or social media component), and (4) some sort of action. The action could be educational, or protest-centered, or just about anything else, but whatever you choose to do must be within the confines of the laws and rules governing the space in which you are doing it. Be sure to find a way to document the action in photographs or images or video or in some other manner.

As your final assignment your group will present its campaign in a 20-minute presentation on one of the final two class periods. You will share why you chose to work on the issue you worked on, walk us through the materials and media you created, and describe the “action” you took, mapping all of it to the ecofeminist framework. You also will share what you learned from the process.

In order to prepare to create your campaign, you will be expected to examine other campaigns on the same issue and to review existing scholarship on the issue.

In addition to the presentation, your group will turn in a 5 to 6 page paper in which you summarize your project, situate it in reference to existing scholarship, and explain how it reflects an ecofeminist approach.

Your project will be graded based upon the extent to which your group demonstrates the following:

- (1) you develop components of a comprehensive animal rights campaign, including the components described above;
- (2) you create a campaign that is consistent with an ecofeminist approach, and demonstrate this by situating your campaign within the existing body of scholarship on the animal rights issue you chose and the ecofeminist framework;
- (3) you complete and document an animal rights “action” that is reflective of an ecofeminist approach; and
- (4) you deliver an engaging presentation and summary paper.

Grading

A = 940-1000	A- = 900-939	
B+ = 870-899	B = 830-869	B- = 800-829
C+ = 770-799	C = 730-779	C- = 700-729
D = 600-699	F = 599 or lower	

Tentative Class Schedule (NOTE: From semester to semester, the topics will change depending on what is prevalent in current events.)

Date	Topic(s)	Readings & Assignments
1/20	- Introductions of course and each other	
1/27	- Grounding theories and frameworks	Harper Ch 3, 19, 24;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Animal liberation, rights, protection, and welfare ○ Intersectionality and meta-intersectionality views of animal rights 	Rachels, “Do Animals Have a Right to Liberty?”; Gruen Ch 1
2/3	- Mapping out a feminist and ecofeminist framework for examining animal exploitation and advocating animal rights	Harper Ch 2, 21, 23; Mallory, “Locating Ecofeminism in Encounters with Food and Place”; Dixon, “The Feminist Connection between Women and Animals”; Gruen Ch 2; Gardener (get started)
2/10	- An historical view of women’s animal rights activism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The current and intersectional state of gender, race, and queer politics in animal rights 	Gardner (all)
2/17	- Garment production - Anti-fur and anti-leather movements (comparative analysis)	PETA, “Inside the fur industry”; HSUS, “Fur in Fashion”; IDA “Fur Farms”; Deckha “Disturbing Images”
2/24	- Factory farming and food production - Visit by Ashley Rhinehart, HSUS	Gruen Ch 3; Goodland & Anhang “Livestock and Climate Change”; Mason “Brave New Farm”
3/3	- Feminism and the vegan movement	Harper Ch 4-7, 15
3/17	- Animal testing - Movements against animal testing and vivisection - Visit from Justin Goodman & Alka Chadna, Peta	Gruen Ch 4; DeGrazia “On the Ethics of Animal Research”; Collard “Freeing the animals”; Brown “A new model of empathy”; Balcombe “Laboratory-rodent welfare”

3/24	- Hunting	Gunn, “Environmental Ethics and Trophy Hunting”;
3/31	- Entertainment - Movements against the use of animals for entertainment - Organizing circus protest	Gruen Ch 5; Jameson “Against Zoos”; Nelson “The cruellest show on earth”; Bershadker “The abomination of greyhound racing”
4/7	- Organizing circus protests	
4/14	- Criminalization and terrorization of animal rights activism Connections with history of feminist activism	Gruen Ch 7; ALDF “Interview with Will Potter”; Potter, “First Ag-Gag Prosecution”
4/21	- Final Presentations	
4/28	- Final Presentations	

Policies and Information

1. Please arrive to class on time. Two tardies will be considered an absence for the purpose of participation grading.
2. Please attend class. Each member of the Community is allowed one absence, no questions asked. Because the class is built around interaction and dialogue, attendance by each member of the Community is critical. So when you miss more than one class, your grade will be affected. An absence is excused when due to serious illness, religious observance, participation in University activities at the request of University authorities, or compelling circumstances beyond your control. We reserve the right to request evidence when you will be absent for one of these reasons.
3. When you miss class, it is *your* responsibility to arrange to make up the day’s work. You must approach us about the absence and inquire about ways of making it up.
4. Engaged and respectful dialogue is encouraged. Demeaning, intolerant, and/or disruptive behavior or responses at any time will affect your participation grade.
5. You are responsible for completing individual and group assignments on time (defined as turning in all assignments in person at the beginning of class). Assignments submitted late will lose one letter grade for each day they are past due, including Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

6. In compliance with a University-wide initiative, we will correspond electronically with students only through their GMU assigned email accounts. Please check your email account regularly for updates and important announcements; checking your email during University closings is especially important as we will alert you to schedule changes via email.
7. George Mason University has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental principles you must follow at all times are: 1) all work submitted must be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and 3) if you are uncertain about citation rules or assignment guidelines, ask me for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. If you feel unusual pressure or anxiety about your grade in this or any other course, please let me know and also seek help from University resources. The University provides a range of services to help with test anxiety, writing skills, study skills, personal issues, and related concerns.
8. All papers must be typed, double spaced on 8.5" x 11" paper using 12 point Times New Roman font with 1" margins. Multiple pages *must be stapled before class*. Additionally, all papers and other assignments should be documented properly in accordance with an accepted citation manual (e.g. The Chicago Manual of Style, The APA Manual of Style, The MLA Style Manual).

GMU Student Resources

Center for Service and Leadership (Center for Leadership and Community Engagement): The Center for Leadership and Community Engagement is a central contact point at George Mason University for information on experiential learning, service learning, and leadership development. The Center's webpage provides exciting and useful material including the Student Service Learning Handbook, information on writing learning objectives, instructions on completing a learning objectives contract, and lists of experiential learning opportunities.

New Century College On-Line Writing Guide—<http://classweb.gmu.edu/nccwg/index.html> This on-line guide is tailored specifically to New Century College students.

GMU Writing Center: Robinson A116; 993-1200; writingcenter.gmu.edu
<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Office of Disability Services: Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance, should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 222; 993-2474) to determine the accommodations you might need; and 2) talk to me to discuss reasonable accommodations.
<http://www.gmu.edu/student/drc>

Student Technology Assistance and Resources (STAR) Center: Johnson Center 229; 993-8990;
<http://www.media.gmu.edu>