

December 15, 2009

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Dear Jill,

It was a pleasure to meet you and your colleagues from Animal Sciences at the Arts and Humanities Curriculum Committee meeting earlier this week. I'm writing to convey to you the reservation that the Committee has with respect to approving Animal Sciences 248/697.xx for the GEC category of Diversity: International Issues (Western, Non-United States). As you know, the discussion was rather informal and, so—as the minutes attest—it did not unfold in a structured way. I will try to clarify and organize the concerns in what follows.

Let me set the context by emphasizing that our Committee's concern is solely with the question of whether this course should be approved for GEC status in the above mentioned category. We are not addressing the quality or value of the course. I cannot venture to express a Committee view on these matters but, for what it's worth, I believe that a course in which students examine differences in human attitudes toward animals in the various roles they occupy in our lives would be extremely valuable and it would be enhanced by the sort of fieldwork that is involved in this course.

However, with respect to the question of recognizing this set of courses for GEC credit in the Western, Non-US Diversity category, the Committee has serious concerns.

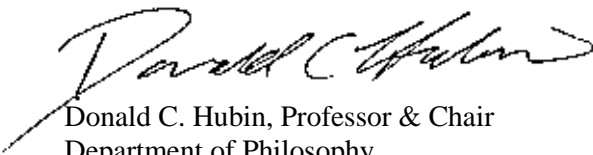
- *Readings:*
  - Several members expressed a variety of concerns about the readings. There is, in the first place, rather little assigned reading for a combined credit hour value of 5 credit hours at the 200 and the 600 level. Setting aside the appendices and preliminary material in the article by Falk *et. al.*, the total number of pages assigned in Anim Sci 248 (which constitutes 2 credit hours) is 60 pages. In Anim Sci 697.xx, the total assigned readings comprise just 21 pages.
  - The content of the assigned readings appears rather disjoint. In 248, for example, there are two readings that address the issue of the role of zoos and aquariums. These provide different perspectives on these roles and the degree to which they are met. But the other readings are on very disparate topics which do not seem to integrate closely with each other. The six page (really only four without the references) article on bio-communication between mother and offspring is a rather technical piece from the *Journal of Pharmacological Sciences*. While the article employs an animal model for learning about brain development, it is unclear how this research is different from any animal research in a way that makes it relevant to the expected course objectives or the GEC learning outcomes relevant to this category of the GEC. If the course objective aimed at here is that of creating “awareness of the role and impact that animals have on our daily lives”—here in the role of subjects of experiments, wouldn't an article that explored the extent and significance of animal experimentation in general be a better text? Ultimately, of course, to receive GEC credit in the relevant category, the Committee would want to see clear evidence of how the readings and other course elements contributed significantly to students' “understanding of political, economic, cultural, physical, and social differences among the nations of the world.” It is not clear to us how much of the reading that is assigned contributes to this learning objective.

- *Field Trips:* While the field trips *can* play an important role in achieving the course objectives and the GEC learning objectives, it is not clear to the Committee from the syllabus *that* they do so and, if they do, *how* they do so. In light of a broad range of different types of field trips, the Committee needs to see much more developed answers to these questions. If the field trips play an important role in accomplishing the GEC learning objectives, it should be made more clear how this is so. Also, in light of the fact that the sites visited could be unrepresentative (and almost certainly won't represent the full spectrum of sites of the sort in the given country), we believe it's desirable, in achieving the GEC learning objectives, to have the field trips occur in the context of background reading that gives students an overview of the way that animals are, and have been, used in that country for the relevant purposes.
  
- *Assignments:*
  - It is not clear to the Committee how the graded assignments in the course contribute to evaluating the students' success in achieving the GEC expected learning outcomes. It appears that the only instrument that evaluates students' mastery of the reading is the quizzes, which have less than 2/3 of the weight of "participation" on three field trips. 'Participation' is not defined and, so, it is unclear whether students will receive points simply for showing up or, if not, on what basis points will be assigned. (The phrase 'active participation' is employed once, but this, too, is undefined and it isn't stated as a requirement for receiving points for participation.)
  
  - In the 677.xx courses, a significant portion of the student's grade is based on what is called a 'reflection paper' which should "capture personal views regarding the human-animal interactions observed while traveling." It is not clear how merely requiring the recounting of such personal views contributes to the GEC learning objectives of developing "an understanding of political, economic, cultural, physical, and social differences among nations." Accomplishing these objectives would seem to require more than personal reflection. It would involve some level of research and, then, analysis.

You will see from the enclosed/attached minutes of the meeting that there were some other issues discussed concerning the naming of Anim Sci 248 and other issues. But I believe that the above conveys in more detail the most significant substantive concerns expressed about the proposal to grant GEC status to these two courses.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions that I might be able to answer.

Sincerely,



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