

HEB 1440: PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMATES

Spring Semester 2022

Wednesday 9:45-12:15
Peabody Museum 52H



Instructor: Dr. Lara Durgavich; ldurgavich@fas.harvard.edu

Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom

****Please review this syllabus carefully. You are responsible for understanding course policies.****

Course Description: Fill in the blank: Everything I know about monkeys and apes, I learned from _____. *Curious George*? *King Kong*? The local zoo? The Internet? For many people, perceptions of primates (and other scientific subjects) are formed largely by way of films and TV shows, news reports on scientific studies, and headlines on social media. In this seminar, students will examine the workings and impact of science communication by exploring how primates are portrayed in popular culture, and will consider how media influences the science of primatology and public understanding of that science. Course meetings will include discussions with guest scientists, journalists, and professional science communicators, and students will engage with a variety of exercises to improve their own writing and communication skills.

Course Aims – you should learn:

- How studies of primates and human evolution intersect with media, society, and pop culture
- The goals and scope of science communication
- To critically evaluate science in the media
- Skills and strategies to improve your written and oral science communication

Readings: I will post all assigned articles on the course Canvas site. There is also one required book, available via online sellers.

- J. Ottaviani and M. Wicks. (2013) *Primates: The Fearless Science of Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birute Galdikas*.

(Un)Grading: In many contemporary classrooms learning has been replaced by ideas of 'achievement,' creating situations in which students value grades over growth. This process can condition students to be worker-learners who are trained to memorize facts and avoid taking risks for fear that it will hurt their grade.

This course will be different, focusing on qualitative rather than quantitative assessment. You will get feedback (both from me and fellow students) on your writing assignments throughout the semester, but I won't be putting a grade on any of your work. Instead, at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester you will complete a self-assessment form to evaluate your own progress and participation. My hope is that this self-evaluation will help you better reflect on and meet your learning goals. At the end of the semester you will tell me what grade you think you deserve in the class, and while I reserve the right to be the final arbiter of your grade I will place significant weight on your self-assessment.

Please remember that no grades does not mean no work. You will have weekly short writing assignments and two additional essays, and will also consider class participation as part of your self-assessment.

Weekly assignments: Each week you will have a writing assignment that requires you to apply the information/skills discussed in that week's class meeting and/or asks you to complete an activity to prepare for the following week. Completed assignments must be uploaded to the course website prior to the next class meeting.

Blog post: Each of you will write an essay in the style of a blog post. Further details will be provided during the semester.

Final project: For your final project, you will write a long-form piece, in the style of a popular science magazine article, about a topic of your choice. You will also give a talk on your finished article at our class #scicomm conference on the last day of class. Further details about this assignment will be provided during the semester.

Participation: Participation is a crucial component of a successful seminar. You are expected to complete assigned readings so that you can meaningfully engage in class discussions, exercises, and conversations with guest speakers.

****A note on late work:** I will try to be as flexible as I can with deadlines this semester. If you know in advance that you will need extra time on an assignment, please contact me to make arrangements. The sooner you alert me to any circumstances (personal, health-related, family-related, or other) that might affect your performance or work flow, the easier it will be for us to work together to adapt assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Pandemic Pedagogy:

Many of us are continuing to struggle as we enter Year 3 of this pandemic. Please know that while I hope to help you learn everything you want to learn in this class, my primary goal this semester is for you to stay healthy, balanced, and grounded during this ongoing crisis.

Remember that support services are available to all students, so if you need extra help or feel like you're falling behind, do not suffer in silence! Talk to me, and if I can't help you with the problems you're facing, I will help you find someone who can. In short, if you tell me you are having difficulty, I will not judge you or think less of you. I hope you'll extend me the same courtesy.

Academic Integrity: All Harvard University students are expected to be familiar with the Academic Integrity policy detailed in the Handbook for Students, particularly regarding issues such as plagiarism. It is your obligation to know these rules and the consequences that may result from violating them. You can find this information at:

<http://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/academic-integrity>
