First-year Honors Seminar Proposal
Animal Homelessness: Problems and Solutions

What does it mean to be “homeless” if you aren't a human being? How does animal homelessness compare with human homelessness here and elsewhere in the world? How many animals today can be described as homeless? If reducing that number is a desirable goal, what strategies might we use to achieve it? Closely tied to the problem of animal homelessness is the problem of animal overpopulation. One widely used strategy for curbing animal overpopulation is euthanasia of homeless dogs and cats who are not adopted from shelters; another is the round-up and culling of wild herds of horses. Opposing these methods, proponents of the “no-kill” movement advocate more aggressive adoption, fostering and sponsorship initiatives or sterilization programs.

This inquiry-based seminar is intended for honors students who want to learn about the environmental and ethical issues surrounding animal homelessness. Short readings, films, and lectures will provide an overview of animal homelessness during the first 1/3 of the semester. In the final 2/3 of the semester students, with the instructor’s guidance, will devote their time and energy to formulating their own questions about animal homelessness and designing their own research strategies to search for answers.

Desired outcomes of the class: In addition to understanding the environmental and ethical dimensions of animal homelessness, students will gain practice in preparing their research for conference presentations. Students are invited to collaborate with the instructor or otherwise contribute to her current scholarly project: researching and writing a position paper on animal homelessness for the Animals and Society Institute.

Final grades will be determined on the basis of participation and weekly short writing assignments as well as a presentation of student research findings at the end of the semester.

Week 1: Introduction to the problem of animal homelessness and research as inquiry
Week 2: selections from Nathan Winograd, Redemption and Irreconcilable Differences
Week 2: Animal Welfare organizations and their websites: HSUS, Best Friends, Humane Alliance, North Shore, Friends of Animals; Proceedings of Animal Welfare conferences; ASPCA
Week 3: Animal Sanctuaries here and abroad
Week 4: Shelter visit—local animal homelessness
Week 5: Animal Studies: Academic sources of information on homelessness (ISAZ, Animals and Society)
Week 6: Student Proposals
Week 7: Individual conferences with the instructor
Week 8: Using library sources to advance your inquiry
Week 9: Local authorities (rescue and shelter groups, Spay-neuter groups, veterinarians)
Week 10: Student progress reports on questions, research design, possibly preliminary findings
Week 11: Student progress reports
Week 12 and 13: Individual conferences with the instructor
Week 14 & 15: Student presentations.