

# Critical Experiential Education in the Honors Classroom: Animals, Society, and Education

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**P**arker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, scholars of higher education, have described the purpose of higher education:

Our colleges and universities need to encourage, foster, and assist our students, faculty, and administrators in finding their own authentic way to an individual life where meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action, where compassion and care are infused with insight and knowledge. (56)

The role of higher education is not only to prepare students for a career: it should assist and support them as they begin an adult life, which includes contributing to society and a community, participating in a democracy, forming relationships, clarifying their values and beliefs, and finding meaning and direction in the world. However, as higher education becomes more tightly linked to job and career preparation in both the public imagination and the

actual practices of institutions, students are not surprisingly focused increasingly on credentialing (Arum and Roksa; Blum; Selingo, “College” and “There is Life”). Within honors classrooms and curricula, faculty have observed students becoming afraid of taking risks as they fear failure and “new challenges that might threaten their GPAs and hopes of medical or law school” (Wintrol and Jerinic 47). Yet, as Folds-Bennett and Twomey remind us, Palmer and Zajonc’s beliefs about the larger purpose of higher education are particularly important in an honors education, which is concerned in part, as they write, with “providing experiences through which students deeply engage ideas and content so that both their analytical abilities and core beliefs and values are transformed” (85).

One approach to addressing the challenge posed by Palmer and Zajonc is the pedagogical philosophy of “engaged learning.” As Folds-Bennett and Twomey discuss, engaged learning builds on Kolb’s influential 1984 work in experiential education, emphasizing the centrality of concrete experience combined with conceptualization, reflection, and experimentation. In practice, engaged learning encompasses many approaches, including service-learning, community-based research and engagement (Camp), and the incorporation of experiential education into classroom-based courses. Engaged (or active) learning has a long history in honors education (e.g., Braid and Long; Machonis; Long), particularly the well-known honors approach called *City as Text*<sup>™</sup>, which explores and analyzes the space and place of a city as a text for authentic experience: learning, writing, and understanding the power of seeing oneself as an agent of change (Long). Given the challenges inherent in today’s honors classrooms, we need honors pedagogies that continue in this tradition of seeing honors classrooms as dynamic learning places that promote and encourage authentic engagement, not solely credentialing for graduate school and future careers. I offer as one form of engaging learning—critical experiential education—the pedagogical philosophy for an honors seminar I taught in the fall of 2015, *Animals, Society, and Education*.

As an education professor with many years of experience working in student affairs, I understand and value experiential education. I regularly use both reflection on prior experience and other forms of engaged learning, e.g., service-learning, in my courses (Dolby, “Rethinking” and “Developing”). As I designed *Animals, Society, and Education*, I recognized that in order for students to actually learn about animals, experiential education needed to be woven into the course assignments on a regular basis; reading, writing, discussion, and films were not enough. *Animals*, after all, are a constant

part of the human experience: dogs and cats are treasured members of our families while other animals appear on our plates at breakfast, lunch, and dinner (Herzog). We watch animals for entertainment at circuses and dissect them in high school biology classes (Dawn; Hart, Wood, & Hart; Solot & Arluke). Animals even turn up in places that we would never expect to find them: for example, bits of cow are in hundreds, if not thousands, of everyday items in our homes, including paint, toothpaste, and tires (Hayes & Hayes). Despite animals' presence in our lives every day, we generally spend very little time thinking about our relationship with them, reflecting on what we have learned about them, or trying to see the world from the perspective of a bee, a pig, or a horse.

Each individual's personal experience with animals is significant, and I brought my own experience into the design and teaching of the class. In addition to having four cats at home, I had been a volunteer at our local animal shelter for eight years by August 2015, when I began to teach the honors seminar, and I had spent thousands of hours immersed in the everyday worlds of animals. These experiences helped me to shape the two related pedagogical components from *Animals, Society, and Education* that are grounded in an experiential education philosophy: the use of reflection to understand how students made sense of their relationships with animals and an assignment I specifically designed for the class called "A Day in the Life of an Animal." Although the class included other experiential education components, such as a visit with two vendors at the campus farmers' market and role-playing activities that allowed students to act out multiple worldviews different from their own, the pedagogical value of reflection and of the specific assignment might be of greatest value to honors teachers who are considering such a course.

## **ANIMALS, SOCIETY, AND EDUCATION: AN HONORS SEMINAR**

At my home institution, Purdue University, faculty who wish to teach interdisciplinary honors seminars submit proposals to a subcommittee of the honors college, who review the proposals and make recommendations to the honors college. These seminars, which are designated "HONR," are specifically designed to be interdisciplinary and thus are significantly different from honors courses that are located within particular departments on campus. When I proposed *Animals, Society, and Education* in the fall of 2014, I described the purpose of the course in the syllabus "to examine the

relationship among animals, society, and education. We will examine how humans are socialized to understand their relationship to different species and types of animals through formal and non-formal education, and the different roles and purposes of animals in society.” The course started by investigating and analyzing the different roles of animals in human society (e.g., pets, food, pests, and entertainment) and in education, then moving on to discuss current scientific advances in the areas of animal sentience, cognition, and emotion; the paradigms of animal welfare and animal rights; and the changing status of animals in society. The course drew from the fields of education, veterinary medicine, sociology, animal science, and political science, among others (the course syllabus is available from the author or at <https://www.animalsandsociety.org/dolby-animals-society-and-education/>).

Nine students enrolled in the class, which I taught during the fall semester of 2015. Students ranged from first-year to senior and represented the colleges of liberal arts, agriculture, science, and pharmacy (no education students enrolled). All of the students were women: two were African-American, two were Asian-American, and five were white.

I submitted an application to my institution’s human subjects review board (IRB) to use student writing and presentations (including in-class free writing, posts on the Blackboard Learning system, and all submitted presentations and papers) in published research. The study was designated as exempt in May 2015. The student writing was analyzed using what Hatch refers to as an “inductive” approach to qualitative analysis, in which the categories and themes emerge from the data instead of following narrowly structured pre-existing research questions (161–79). In this research, I was generally interested in understanding how the pedagogical approach I used in designing and teaching the class shaped students’ learning; the specific analysis of the student writing emerged from the data as I read, reflected, and developed a coding scheme. My research focused on two types of excerpts from student writing: (1) written work submitted for a grade in the course, for which I use pseudonyms to protect student identity, and (2) excerpts from students’ “blue books,” which allow students to provide anonymous, weekly feedback to me. I distributed the blue books at the beginning of the semester, and each student created a symbol for her book that only she would recognize. Once a week, for about five minutes at the end of class, students had unstructured, free writing time in their blue books. I responded to each student and thus had a dialogue with her throughout the semester that was both anonymous and outside of the grading structure, so these comments are not attributable to particular students.

Because of the small number of students enrolled in the course, I am unable to draw conclusions about specific demographic groups (college/major, race/ethnicity); instead I focus attention on the learning outcomes of the students as a whole. However, the diversity of student majors was a strength of the course, and students' final projects often reflected their career interests; for example, a student in animal science completed a final project on welfare issues in the cattle industry while a student interested in a small-animal track in veterinary school researched the effects of companion animals on human health.

## EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Roberts makes an important distinction between “experiential learning” and “experiential education.” Experiential learning (or what he terms “learning by doing”), as he describes it, “can be seen as a *method* or *technique* that any teacher might employ to meet certain instructional objectives” (4). Although Roberts discusses the merits of experiential learning as an instructional technique, he says that experiential education goes beyond the application of a method within a classroom context and is instead a philosophical approach to pedagogy. Within this larger framework, Roberts identifies four predominant strands (or, as he call them, “currents”): romantic, pragmatist, critical, and normative.

Drawing on the intellectual legacies of Western scholars such as Rousseau, Whitman, and Thoreau, the romantic current focuses on autonomous individual learning through direct, transcendent experience, generally in an outdoors/nature or wilderness environment. An underlying assumption of this strand is that such experience alone will be enough to stimulate educational possibilities: for example, that simply hiking up a mountain or fording a river is educational in and of itself. In contrast to the romantic current, Roberts's pragmatist current is rooted in Dewey's philosophical orientation to the notion of “experience.” Here experience is not individual but instead based in a community and social ethos that is always oriented toward a larger project of democracy. The pragmatist current of experience is not assumed to be automatically educative; instead, it must be linked to and situated within a larger theoretical framework to have meaning. In Roberts's third strand, the critical current, he writes that “we might examine how power influences and dictates interactions and decision-making” (69). Concerned with social justice, the critical current is grounded in the intellectual history of the Frankfurt

School and in critical education scholars such as Freire and Giroux, centering the individual as the locus and active agent of change. In the fourth and final strand, the normative, experience becomes a market-driven product that is packaged and delivered to a consumer. For example, as Roberts discusses, companies might send employees on ropes courses to promote teamwork and collaboration, and high schools might require service-learning experiences for students without broader conceptualization of or reflection on its purpose. Roberts is particularly concerned about this increasingly common approach to experiential education because it is hyper-focused on consumption—of experience, in this case—with any broader educational purpose subsumed by market forces.

Using Roberts's mapping of the field, I situate my approach to experiential education in *Animals, Society, and Education* largely within the critical current. While Roberts's discussion of the critical current focuses solely on human relationships of power and dynamics of social justice, I expand that strand to include human relationships with animals. The course very specifically asks students to use their past experience through reflection and their present experience through course assignments to re-imagine and re-think both their personal relationships with animals and the assumptions that undergird the larger society's understandings of animals and the human-animal relationship.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN ANIMALS, SOCIETY, AND EDUCATION**

Animals are with us everywhere, including on our campuses: in laboratories, in the dining halls on our plates, occasionally in the residence halls as service or support animals, and buzzing around our heads as we walk from building to building (Dolby, "Animal Research"). Trying to incorporate structured experiences with animals into a classroom-based course is nevertheless difficult. I used two approaches, reflection and experiential education, to access our experiences with animals as rich sources of data for us to discuss and analyze together. First, very early in the semester, students wrote an essay in which they reflected on their own upbringing and socialization toward animals. Second, I designed an experiential education assignment, "A Day in the Life of an Animal," that required students to apply what they had learned in class about animal cognition and emotion by spending a minimum of four hours alone with an animal of their choice and then preparing an oral presentation, through the eyes of that individual animal, to share with the class.

## Critical Reflection

In the first written assignment for the course, “What I Have Learned about Animals,” students reflected on what they had learned to this point in their life about animals, animals’ varied relationships with humans, and animals’ place in human society. As this was an elective course, many of the students who chose to enroll had already started to think about the role of animals in their lives and were able to identify the major forces of socialization that had shaped their perspectives. For example, Emily wrote,

A big influence on my love of animals was definitely my parents. My mother and father are two very big-hearted people who have giant soft spots when it comes to animals. In our family, a pet is not a pet, but an undeniable member of the family. Our pets have always been loved enormously up until the end and when an animal in our house passes away, their loss is greatly mourned and their presence is never forgotten.

In sharp contrast, another student in the class, Morgan, grew up in a family with very different attitudes towards animals,

I did not grow up in a household where pets were considered family. My mom found them to be messy, stinky, and a huge responsibility. Her love of animals came from her collection of fur coats she would purchase. Animals being considered part of the family didn’t occur to me until I entered other people’s homes.

A third student, June, reflected that her perspective about animals growing up was largely shaped through media representations. She wrote,

After watching the movie *Jaws*, sharks became the top of my most terrified animals list. When I went surfing in Hawaii, I was generally petrified that I would be attacked by a shark. . . . Frankly, my fear is irrational because the chances of being attacked by a shark are way less than getting into a driving accident.

Students also expressed conflicted feelings and emotions about animals raised and used for food, a theme that would be explored in-depth throughout the course. Elizabeth, who was raised in a small farming community, wrote,

Though I did not grow up on a farm, I was raised in a very rural community, and many of my friends were raised on farms. Because of



this, I have always viewed production animals, like cattle and swine, as animals that are meant for showing in 4-H and then being taken to slaughter or used for some other purpose like milking. I know what happens when animals are slaughtered and have always accepted that as okay because of how I was raised and the way my community felt and acted about the situation. In one of my high school agriculture classes, we watched several videos of animals being slaughtered and we had discussions about the topic. My teacher and classmates acted very unemotional about the process so I quickly became the same way. Overall, my feelings are very indifferent as long as the animals are being treated fairly in the process. I start to have stronger feelings for production animals when I hear of deficient slaughtering practices and animals treated inhumanely.

Nicole wrote about her mixed feelings about cooking and eating lobsters,

I also grew up eating seafood on the East Coast. In Connecticut, we bought our lobsters live from the docks, took them home and boiled them. I always hated being a part of the actual killing of the lobster (I even researched the most humane way to do so), but loved being a part of the eating of the lobster. Boiling lobster is the only experience I have “killing” my own food, and I would say it was a fairly negative experience.

Finally, Hannah began to understand through the assignment that she had been socialized to see animals through particular lenses and welcomed the opportunity to explore human-animal interactions in more depth. She wrote,

For the most part, my interactions with animals have been commonplace, deeply rooted by the norms of society. Some wrong actions may have excuses, but it doesn't excuse them from being wrong. So now that I'm becoming more aware of my true interactions with animals, I am on the path of choosing which of my best friends to side with. Does human superiority reign or not? With an open mind to Animals, Society and Education, I hope to figure that out.

Reflection on current issues of animal welfare and animal rights were regularly a part of class discussion. For example, in Indiana as in much of the Midwest, late summer is the time for county fairs; animals are on display as part of 4-H projects, available as food to eat, and used for entertainment. As



the course started that month, our first class-based activity was watching a short video about a popular activity at state fairs: pig wrestling. In the months prior to the class, pig wrestling at county fairs had received significant local and regional media coverage as public concern grew about animal welfare and humane treatment of pigs. Our course began with probing this activity that many students had experienced or watched—maybe even the previous week. Reflecting later on that first video and the discussion that followed, Emily wrote,

[W]e could look at hog wrestling. If you just saw them doing it, you may look at it and think it is a tradition, it is what they have always done and they know what they are doing. But, if you put a dog in a pig's place, what would the reaction be? Probably disgust and rage, and everyone would want the animal out. This gives another perspective when analyzing, because if we look at the dog this way, how can we allow the pig to go through the same thing?

The focus of the conversation about pig wrestling was not to decide whether it was right or wrong but instead to raise critical issues that we could explore as a class throughout the semester, whether specific questions about pigs or general questions that could be applied to multiple animals. We generated several important questions during that discussion: What is the cognitive complexity of a pig? Why is pig wrestling considered entertainment? What is the pig experiencing? What is the human experiencing? What is the point/goal/benefit for the pig and the human? What is the psychological trauma to the pig? Does it matter if the pig is harmed if we are just going to kill it for food later? What are we teaching children about their relationship with animals?

In a similar manner, the course focused on moving students beyond binaries and either/or thinking to examine issues from multiple perspectives. For example, many students came into the class thinking dualistically about eating meat, believing that you were either a meat eater or a vegetarian. In class, however, we examined food choices through a more complex and critical approach, discussing the conflicting values and decisions inherent in being a vegetarian, vegan, or conscious omnivore. Reflecting on this pedagogical approach, Samantha wrote,

A new way of thinking that I've learned from our discussions and readings is that everything is not always binary, and there can be many more ways than just two ways to look at a certain issue. . . . I've learned to be more open-minded and reflective about things that I've

never even considered before. For example, the dichotomy of food consumption is not simply you're a vegetarian or you eat meat.

Amanda was able to also move beyond dichotomous thinking and connect the animal welfare issues addressed in the class to human issues of inequality and discrimination,

[I]t's good to look at a topic from more than the binary positions. For example, meat eating tends to be polarized to meat eating vs. ethical veganism, but that misses a lot of important points outside the debate. I think Herzog demonstrated that very well by comparing cockfighting and broiler hens. Do we pretend we care about animal welfare when we regulate cock fighting, or are we more motivated by racism, war-on-drugs, illegal gambling? We don't stringently regulate horse racing, a rich, white people activity, despite its cruelty.

The course also used videos to foster critical conversations about other animal welfare and rights-related issues such as cat declawing, the captivity of marine mammals, puppy mills, and fur farms. While it is clearly impossible to provide students with experiences in all of these areas, reflection on past and present relationships with animals allowed students to bring their experiences into the classroom and to consider the wide range of ways that humans use animals in contemporary life.

### **Critical Experiential Education: "A Day in the Life of an Animal"**

The central experiential education assignment for this course, "A Day in the Life of an Animal," asked students to spend four hours alone with an animal who is not their own pet and to try to understand what it is like to live life as that animal. In preparation for the assignment, students read widely in the fields of animal cognition and emotion. During the weeks directly before students were to complete their experiential assignment, we focused on readings about the field of cognitive ethology, which uses naturalistic, humane, observational methods to study animals' lives (Bekoff). In contrast to earlier modes of animal study that attributed animal behavior primarily to instinct, cognitive ethology assumes that animals have intellect, make purposeful decisions, and form emotional bonds and attachments. The class had already spent many weeks discussing the new research in animal cognition and emotion, so students were familiar with these concepts. For example,

we discussed the emotional and intellectual worlds of dogs, cats, birds, fish, primates, and pigs.

Through the readings on cognitive ethology, students began to understand that the project asked them to conduct fieldwork much in the way a scientist would. For example, Samantha wrote,

After reading through chapter 2 [of Bekoff], I realized that our “Day in the Life of an Animal” project is pretty much small scale cognitive ethology fieldwork. I have been trying to figure out how to approach the project, and now I have a better/clearer idea. . . . I thought of the project in a different way, and I realized that as I’m spending time with the hedgehog and observing his behavior, I have to try harder to see the world from his point of view based off of the patterns of behavior he uses in varying situations. I have to try to decipher his emotions, beliefs, thought processes, and self-awareness in a more hedgehog-centric way.

Similarly, Hannah reflected,

One of the barriers I’ve come across since enrolling in this class was connecting to animals. It has been a challenge to take on their perspective when throughout my life, I’ve focused on the physical aspects that make us different. However, Bekoff’s analysis of animal happiness, deceit and more are feelings I myself have experienced. The fact that foxes bury the dead and grieve similarly to humans gives me proof that our ways of thinking may not be so different. Believing in the complex nature of animals is key to the Day in the Life project. It would be wrong to attribute every animal’s action to instinct. Rather, I’ve learned to analyze their behaviors on a higher level and closer to that of humans.

After completing the assignment, students prepared a short (12–15 minutes, including discussion) presentation from the point of view of the animal. Students were asked to describe the daily life of the animal: what he or she does, likes, and dislikes; his or her personality, how “smart” she or he is and in what ways; and what makes that animal a unique individual. Presentations included photographs, videos, and audio recordings, all to explain to the class what life is like as that animal. Animals that students learned about included traditional pets (such as dogs, cats, and rabbits), non-traditional pets (a goat, a hedgehog), and a cat living in a local animal shelter while awaiting adoption.

Many students went well beyond the minimum expectations for the project. For example, the student who studied the hedgehog stayed overnight in her friend's apartment so that she could sleep in the same room as the hedgehog and be there when he was at his most active and alert. Another student, who studied a friend's cat, made a clear effort to see the world from the exact same perspective as the cat, trying to look out the window with her and follow her movements throughout the four hours.

As a student anonymously reflected in her blue book about cognitive ethology and the "Day in the Life of an Animal" project,

Cognitive ethology is an interesting subject that I will take into consideration for the rest of my life whenever thinking about animals. I think that now maybe I'll even (subconsciously or consciously) try to study all of the animals in my life to see if I can observe greater depths of emotions, perceptions, and self-awareness in them. Cognitive ethology and all of the stories have definitely changed my perception of animals.

While "A Day in the Life of an Animal" was the central, planned, experiential component of this course, we also visited the campus farmers market during one class, met with two of the farmers there, and had the opportunity to ask them questions about their relationships with the animals that they raised and ultimately slaughtered for food. I also regularly incorporated debates and other activity-based exercises into the class and encouraged students to do final projects that involved actively talking to and interviewing people, not solely library-based projects. For example, one student, who did her project on organic farming, spent time at local farms. Another student, who was interested in the health issues and concerns surrounding genetically modified organisms, spent several hours talking with a local farmer who has background and training in the medical professions. Thus, in multiple ways, the structure of the course encouraged students to have experiences and conversations that immersed them in the real lives of both humans and animals.

## **LEARNING FROM CRITICAL REFLECTION AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION: RAISING NEW QUESTIONS ABOUT ANIMALS AND HUMANS**

Critical experiential education, as Roberts discusses, situates the individual as an agent of change. Significantly, however, the desired change is

not solely at the individual level but instead connects the individual to larger societal structures and inequities, grounded in Freire's theory of praxis. As a whole, the course asked students to examine their relationships with animals, apply their new knowledge and insights to reshaping their individual choices, and then understand how those choices are intertwined with broader societal issues concerning humans' relationships with animals.

Many students began to examine and explore critical perspectives by discussing course activities and readings with friends and family and to examine their own choices regarding their relationships with animals. One student wrote in her blue book, "Because of this class, my roommate and I had an hour-long conversation about chickens." Another student reflected, "This class and the books we read are allowing me to have so many interesting conversations with people. Reading about [Hurricane] Katrina [and its impact on animals] really opened my eyes—I had no idea all of that was going on." A third student was particularly enthusiastic about the class field trip to the campus farmers market. She wrote,

This class is one of the highlights of my week! I had a whole conversation with my family about the truth of the whole 'organic/free-range' thing. . . . Going to the farmer's market was a really refreshing way to learn. All parts of this class are refreshing, but that was especially cool!

After watching and discussing a film about the cruelty of cat declawing (*The Paw Project*), one student discussed her family's decision to declaw their cat many years ago:

In terms of the Paw Project/declawing, it made me really sick to think about how my last cat was declawed. She had some biting issues and towards the end of her life was urinating all over the place. Looking back I hate to see that we caused her that pain, and I wish more people knew what I just learned.

Two students, Hannah and Nicole, wrote about being able to apply a new, critical way of looking at the relationship between humans and animals. Hannah wrote,

Prior to this class, while reading the course title "Animals, Society, and Education," I never consciously registered that I actually am an animal. Though it makes sense biologically, our American culture generally doesn't acknowledge this and creates a rift between

humans and non-human animals, the former often characterized as a superior, dominant species. . . . I now find it important to consider the animal kingdom a complex continuum rather than a pyramid with humans on top.

Nicole was particularly affected by watching the film *Blackfish*, about orca captivity at Seaworld:

This class has taught me to look at things from the animal's point of view. We live in a culture that is very human-based, humans above all, the human race rules all other races. When we watched *Blackfish*, I got to see the emotional damage inflicted on a whale when her baby was taken away.

## USING CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN THE HONORS CLASSROOM

Susan Blum, in her anthropological study of why college students love to learn and hate school, draws a contrast between what she terms “learning in school” and learning “in the wild” (211): “learning in school” is a conventional, content-based approach to education that includes lectures, an emphasis on grades and tests, and extrinsic motivation; learning “in the wild” is active, involved, real, and grounded in intrinsic motivation. Critical experiential education attempts to bridge the gap between the two kinds of learning by bringing some of the real-world education of the wild into a classroom setting. In the context of critical experiential education, my class prompted students to apply what they had learned to creating changes in the way that humans interact with animals. On an individual level, many students began to understand that the ability to make changes for animals was one of the most important lessons of the class. Hannah understood that she needed to ask more critical questions and seek out additional information instead of simply believing everything she was told:

I realized that I had just been going along with what everyone else told me, not actually seeking out the facts for myself. This is because I would much rather be in the dark regarding difficult issues such as this one [farm animal welfare] than find out the horrible truths. Still, I need to take it upon myself to actually find the information that is true, rather than rely on what companies or lay people tell me.

That way, I can make decisions based on fact, not distorted truth or opinion.

Samantha directly connected what she was learning in the course to her ability to make change in the world:

Is the purpose of this class to come to a greater understanding about the relationships we have with animals or is there another overarching goal to reach? I'd like there to be some sort of change that comes out of it, instead of me getting upset over animal cruelty/animal rights and all the things I'm learning about but then not really doing anything about it. Maybe the point is that the change has to come from my own introspection and subsequent decision to actively do something?

Students were also encouraged to understand that they could come together, as a class, to share what they had learned with other people in order to contribute to the process of making changes in the lives of animals. At the end of the semester, students collaborated on a final class project, creating a handout with suggested practices that would assist animals and heighten human consciousness about human-animal relationships. The handout, which was distributed at end-of-semester presentations that were open to friends and colleagues, provided students the opportunity to understand that all of the “wild” experiential learning that they had done in the course could immediately be applied to their lives—as quickly as the next time they had a meal. Some of the suggestions the students proposed included: Don't eat meat from factory farms. If you don't know the source, don't eat it. Don't buy beauty products that are tested on animals. Don't support the use of captive animals as entertainment. Educate yourself and others about the benefit for the environment by adopting a conscious omnivore/vegetarian or vegan diet. This holiday season, ask friends and family for donations or gifts to shelters instead of personal presents.

While the class was specifically focused on animal-human relationships, many students also made the connection to ending discriminatory practices among humans such as racism. They thus included these suggestions: Learn more about other cultures you are not familiar with or do not understand. Ask questions, and LISTEN to the answers. Become an advocate and ally for people of color.

Blum and Palmer and Zajonc, among many other scholars, argue that institutions of higher education need to refocus on learning instead of schooling,



recommitting to intrinsically motivated education that is less focused on the process of credentialing and more concerned with learning for life and a sustainable future for the planet. Such concerns echo through the literature on honors education as honors students have proven themselves to be particularly adept at “doing school” (Pope) and are often uninterested in taking the types of risks that can lead to meaningful learning (Wintrol & Jerenic).

At core, critical experiential education asks that we teach and learn not only to understand the world but to transform it: that we constantly strive to make the world a more humane and just place. Historically, honors education has contributed to this process of social change through engaged learning approaches that allow students to see themselves as people who can create new ideas and possibilities, and our responsibility as honors teachers and administrators is to support our students in pushing beyond the objectives of getting A’s in order to take risks. In taking those risks in *Animals, Society, and Education*, students were able to reflect on the larger context of the class and the meaning of higher education in relationship to finding purpose, awareness, and direction in life, seeing themselves as people who are willing to grow through new and challenging experiences and who are able to contribute and create new possibilities in the world.

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