

Summer Assignment: AP Capstone Seminar (2023)

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At its core, AP Seminar is a research course in which you will explore a variety of real-world issues through various lenses. Within those lenses, you will analyze a range of perspectives from stakeholders concerned with the issue in question and formulate your own arguments and solutions for those issues.

As an introduction to the course and to practice your skill in academic research, your task is to analyze a source on our first topic of zoology and to research and briefly analyze an additional article of your own that deals with zoology, including animal welfare, conservation, education, legislation, hunting, animal ecosystems, etc. Broadly speaking, you'll be researching a modern issue concerning animals in a context of your choosing.

Once the school year begins, your researched article will be shared and discussed with your classmates. These discussions will serve as a springboard to the process of inquiry, leading the class to further research a real-world problem and come up with a reasonable, logical solution for an issue in the world of zoology.

Below you will find the steps to completing this assignment.

Assignment

1. Read the article below titled "Zoos Need to Change" by Rafael Miranda. Then, write a 250-word, one-paragraph summary and analysis in a Word document that includes:
 - a. A summary of the article's **main idea/central thesis**.
 - b. A summary of the article's **primary reasons** used to support that central idea.
2. Research the internet for an additional contemporary article (published within the last ten years) that offers a single perspective (one person's unique opinion/argument) about zoology. In short, make sure it's someone's perspective about animals (or a specific species) where they are making an argument. There are no specific requirements regarding where to get your source nor how long it should be, but use your best judgment.
3. Print out your source. Annotate the margins of the document for its **claims** and **evidence**. Keep your annotated source for future reference in class.
4. In the same Word document used for #1 above, start a new section with the title and author of your own researched article and write a paragraph that **summarizes the main idea/central thesis** of the source.
5. In a second paragraph, **explain the article's reasons** that support the main idea of the source. You may use direct quotes or summaries of specific points made in the article as support.
6. At the end of the word document, compose a **bibliographic entry** for your researched article, such as one you would include on a Works Cited page.
7. Save this document digitally so that you can access it during the first week of class.

When I was young, my parents took us to a zoo: the kind where you could see animals locked up in cages. I remember looking in admiration at a pair of bears in a cage, stretching out their paws for food. Things have changed. My kids would be horrified to see animals in jail like that. Today, we expect animals to be held in more natural settings, and for zoos to do more to make the world a better place. In order to justify the animals' captivity, we expect zoos to help with conservation.

Zoos can host great conservation work. Sometimes they act as a kind of Noah's ark to hold and protect endangered animals. There are about 40 animal species listed as “extinct in the wild”; they exist mainly in captive collections, including at zoos. These collections are used for study, to start breeding programs and, when possible, to reintroduce the animals to the wild.

But not enough zoos do enough of this. I support the recommendation made by some researchers that zoos should assign at least 10 percent of their income to biodiversity conservation. Sadly, a 1999 study from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums showed an average expenditure of only 0.1 percent. That's 100 times less. Of course, some zoos do a lot. Perth Zoo in Western Australia, for example, reported in 1999-2000 that it spent more than US\$1 million breeding seven threatened species for reintroduction (including the western swamp tortoise, the chuditch marsupial, and the striped numbat), compared with their income of nearly \$6 million. In other words, they spent at least 18 percent of their revenue on conservation. According to a 2015 World Association of Zoos and Aquariums report, \$350 million is raised annually for wildlife conservation by global zoos and aquariums. That's about the same as what WWF International — one of the most famous institutions in biodiversity conservation — currently spends on conservation programs each year.

Zoos have helped to reintroduce plenty of animals to the wild, including the black-footed ferret in the US, Przewalski's horse in Mongolia, the Guam rail (a flightless bird), and island fox of California's Channel Islands. Zoos can also help during a crisis: When bushfires raged across Australia in the summer of 2019-2020, Zoos Victoria was part of a state-led response to help wildlife.

If zoos were totally dedicated to the function of conservation, we might expect them to mostly house threatened species. But it's clear that almost all zoos host non-threatened species in much greater numbers. Many zoos are focused on the big mammals and birds that draw audiences and help the zoos to make money, including elephants and giraffes; quite a lot of zoos exist solely as an entertainment business. In this day and age, I say that's inappropriate. The possible detriment to the individual animals' welfare is too high a price to pay for entertainment alone.

That's not to say that zoos shouldn't be a business at all. The care and feeding of animals can be extremely expensive: Food expenses for mammals in England's Chester Zoo (which houses tens of thousands of animals) exceed \$700,000 per year. I believe that it's worthwhile for zoos to open their doors to the public to recoup some of this money, and to keep animals beyond the ones they are breeding or studying for conservation reasons in order to attract interest and attention — so long as the animals are kept in morally acceptable conditions that guarantee their welfare.

Opening doors to the public, of course, has a second benefit: education. In the US, 183 million people went to zoos and aquariums in 2022; nearly ten times more than attended professional football games. The opportunity for education is huge. Yet a lot of people don't bother reading educational signs. And while animal shows are popular and good at conveying information, they can also, controversially, involve animal training. Many studies show that people tend to retain knowledge about animals from zoo visits, but whether that translates into pro-environmental action is debatable.

It seems intuitive to me that visiting animals in real life helps to foster an appreciation for the natural world. Virtual-reality goggles and movies about wildlife are worthwhile, but not the same. A friend of mine who works in the Amazon puts it this way: “To love the jungle, you need to smell the jungle.” Full immersion in real-life environments is a powerful experience that’s hard to replicate.

Some zoos have adopted the promising One Plan approach, which encourages zoos to work in collaboration with researchers and local communities on conservation activities. One good example is Zoos Victoria’s conservation breeding program for the Australian eastern barred bandicoot.

All zoos should make conservation their top priority, which will inevitably be accompanied by education and research. Without that, a zoo becomes just a business: one the world would be better off without.

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