

Department of Anthropology
ANTHRO 2267B-650 – Anthropology of Zoos
BRIEF COURSE OUTLINE
Winter 2026

Date: June 17, 2025

Instructor and course information:

Instructor: Dr. Karyn Olsen

Method of delivery: online.

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None.

Prerequisites: None.

Please ensure you have the correct requisites by checking [the Academic Calendar](#).

Course Description:

Modern zoos and aquariums present themselves as key players in conserving endangered species and as educational resources for the 21st century public. Such facilities offer experiences of the natural world and wildlife that people, especially children, might never encounter otherwise. This course relies on an anthropological lens and interdisciplinary approaches to examine the historical development, current contexts, and future potential of zoos. The goal is to deepen your understanding of how zoos work, their complicated history, and the multifaceted challenges and critiques they navigate.

We will start by looking at zoos and aquariums as spaces for human-animal interactions and as reflections of societal values. We will trace the development of zoos from ancient menageries to colonial-era exhibits and then on to modern zoos as conservation- and education-focused institutions. Topics will touch on exoticism, ethical and sustainable zoo design, Indigenous perspectives, the role of technology in zoo experiences, and critiques that advocate for alternatives to traditional zoos. By critically exploring the role of zoos in society, you will gain the tools to evaluate their impact, envision their future, and contribute thoughtfully to discussions about ethical animal care, educating and engaging zoo visitors, and the stewardship of diverse animal life on this planet.

A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course's OWL Brightspace site before the first day of class.

Course Materials:

There is no required textbook or cost for this course. All of the course readings are derived from web/Open Access sources or are drawn from academic journals which will be available electronically through the Western Libraries databases.

Required readings will be available through the Course Readings tool on the course site

Evaluation:

Grades will be based on the following:

- Weekly Quizzes (x10) 10%
- Engagement/Reflection Activities (x6) 15%
- Assignments (x3) 60%
- Online Final Exam 15%
- Total 100%

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