EYE 129, The Chicken Course
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EYE  Course Proposal
Course proposals should include the following:

1. A narrative describing the following:
a. how each of the learning outcomes and course characteristics will be addressed in the course
b. for each learning outcome, describe at least one example of a concrete assignment students will complete to achieve the learning outcome
c. how student learning will be assessed in relation to learning outcomes.

2. A course outline showing organization of topics, central questions, related readings and assignments, etc.

Overview
The narrative below addresses each of the specific outcomes with respect to course design, assignments, and assessment. To avoid extensive repetition, however, we offer here an overview of the course structure. The course is built around a series of sequenced assignments that are constructed to provide students with multiple opportunities for engagement with core concepts, questions, and readings. The elements are intended to build on each other, such that each subsequent encounter with the material provides the student with a richer, more nuanced, and/or more complex understanding. The basic components include:

a. Reading. We expect students to read (or view) required texts prior to class. In the case of more difficult texts, a short lecture in advance of the reading prepares students to focus on key elements. In the case of less challenging texts, students read “cold” without any prior preparation via class lecture.

b. Low-stakes writing. Low stakes writing—“writing to learn”—is central to the achievement and assessment of learning outcomes. Low stakes writing sometimes takes the form of brief, in-class writing. More often, it takes the form of focus questions. Focus questions—assigned for most class periods and described on the syllabus—require students to bring written answers to class; their answers—together with the texts—are the foundation for class activities. The questions draw on Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives, are keyed to the assigned text(s), and guide students’ reading by providing structured opportunity for comprehension, application, integration, and reflection. Students may add to or revise their answers as we work in class. Focus questions are collected at the end of class, reviewed and assessed.

Throughout the semester, these provide a significant opportunity for formative assessment. The student’s original answer together with subsequent changes, additions, etc. made in class provide indicators of progress toward learning outcomes.

c. Guided conversation and discussion. Class time frequently involves guided conversation, in which the instructor poses questions related to the text(s) and the focus questions. By sharing their individual responses, students collaborate to develop more accurate, detailed, and/or nuanced understandings and to ask (and answer) more complex questions. The focus questions enable students
to own the material and to contribute more meaningfully to conversation; they also ensure that students do the reading prior to class. Ideally, guided conversation and other class activities (discussion and collaborative work) enables a student to consider her/his individual perspective in the context of the perspectives of other students, as well as that of the text(s), and to refine her/his original ideas. The small size of the class and high level of interaction between students and the instructor mean that guided conversation and discussion also provide opportunities for formative assessment (progress toward learning outcomes).

d. **Collaborative learning groups.** In class, students work in small, collaborative groups (structured to promote interdependence and accountability) to complete tasks begun prior to class (in assignments and/or focus questions).

e. **Formal (argumentive) essays.** Formal essays—one for each of the three main sections of the course—are a significant place for summative assessment. In these essays, students’ mastery of each of the outcomes is assessed using a rubric.

### Learning Outcomes: EYE course

**Students will**

1. **employ a variety of perspectives to explore a significant question about the interrelationship between human culture and the natural world;**

*How is the course designed to achieve this outcome?*

Chicken—Gallus gallus domesticus—is a domesticated fowl, a creature of both nature and culture. Its domestication, the use of chicken for food across the globe, and its preeminent place in the culture of societies around the world are the source of many questions. The course is organized around three significant ways we encounter chickens in our society: as food, as the object of policy and politics, and as cultural symbol. Each section of the course, then, offers a different perspective or frame for Chicken. Within each section, moreover, students read, hear and view materials from different disciplines and from popular culture which emphasize disciplinary perspectives (sociological, political, environmental, cultural, and anthropological), and different conclusions and points of view.

*What assignments do students do that contribute to this outcome? How will student learning be assessed in relation to the learning outcome?*

In reading, film, class discussion, and formal and informal writing, students are exposed to these different perspectives and are guided in exploring how they might integrate different perspectives in the course of developing their own reasoned positions on questions relating to Chicken.

For instance, in the section of the course focusing on egg production, students hear and read an NPR report on current legislation to improve conditions for laying hens. Through the reading and in guided conversation in class, students see how this legislation is supported by interest groups (the Humane Society of the United States and United Egg Producers) that have historically been on opposite sides of debates about animal welfare. In addition, they write an essay evaluating the legislation; in doing so, they consider the perspective of egg producers and animal welfare advocates, as well as their own values and perspectives as consumers and citizens. To assess the essay in relation to this outcome, a rubric is used to determine the extent to which the student explicitly identifies the interests of multiple
2. pose and explore questions in areas that are new and challenging;

How is the course designed to achieve this outcome?

The course designers deliberately play with the humor associated with the idea of a “chicken course” to engage students in an interdisciplinary and rigorous exploration of an apparently mundane, ordinary aspect of contemporary life. While “chicken” is not necessarily a “new and challenging” area, the idea that that something so mundane in fact has multiple layers of meaning and complexity (and is the object of extensive scholarly study in a dozen disciplines) is new and challenging for students. The course is also designed to (a) model how processes of intellectual curiosity and scholarly inquiry—posing and exploring questions—can be applied to unusual subjects and (b) show how university-level scholarly work enriches understanding of everyday lives and experiences, and understanding of the broader contexts within which everyday life is lived.

What assignments do students do that contribute to this outcome? How will student achievement of this outcome be assessed? How will the instructor know if the student has achieved this outcome?

In one assignment, students examine the “Poultry” chapter from two Boston Cooking School (later Fanny Farmer) cookbooks—one from 1923 and the other from 1990—to see how advice given to home cooks has changed. Students explore familiar artifacts—recipes and cookbooks—in new ways, and collaborate with classmates in posing and answering questions one normally does not consider in encounters with cookbooks (Who are the authors of and intended audience for these books? How has the cooking advice related to poultry changed? What might account for these changes?). Students address these questions individually (in a short assignment completed prior to class) and collaboratively (in small groups in class, and in larger class discussion). The assignment enables students to begin asking and answering new questions prior to class in a low-stakes context. The EYE learning outcomes are reinforced and further developed in collaboration in class. Student achievement
of this outcome is assessed using the rubric for Praxis Assignments (attached).

More generally, student achievement of this outcome is assessed through regular review of focus questions.

3. describe, explain and analyze course concepts, orally and in writing;

How is the course designed to achieve this outcome?
Throughout the course students describe, explain and analyze course concepts, orally and in formal and informal writing. Conceptualization involves identifying patterns of similarity and difference, and it involves thinking abstractly (beyond the concrete and particular). The course anchors learning in the concrete and familiar in order to engage students, and offers an array of reading and visual materials as a basis for conceptualizing, i.e. for developing skills in more abstract thinking.

For example, the concept of animal welfare is an important theme threaded throughout the course. In multiple contexts (readings and videos, class discussions and small group collaboration, informal writing) students consider what animal welfare means in the contexts of large-scale poultry and egg production and in the context of small-scale (backyard) production, how animal welfare might be improved in large-scale production, and whether small-scale production necessarily improves animal welfare.

What assignments do students do that contribute to this outcome? How will student achievement of this outcome be assessed?
As described in relation to Outcome 1, students hear and read an NPR report on current legislation to improve conditions for laying hens and they write an essay evaluating the legislation; in doing so, they consider the perspective of egg producers and animal welfare advocates, as well as their own values and perspectives as consumers and citizens. To assess the essay in relation to Outcome 1, the student must explicitly identify the interests of multiple stakeholders, identify the similarities among those interests, and identify the points of contention. In relation to Outcome 3, students must operationalize “animal welfare” and use these criteria to evaluate the legislation.

In their final essay, students compare and contrast cockfighting and large-scale poultry production on measures of “animal welfare.” In order to compare these two practices, students must be able to state and defend their definition of “animal welfare” as well as other course concepts. The attached rubric for analytic essays enables the instructor to assess learning in relation to this outcome.

4. reflect upon and link learning in the course with other learning experiences (for example co-curricular experience);

The Chicken course is linked to ENG 100: College Writing and to ESP 101-102; the instructors of all three courses together specify points of intersection between/among the courses. The EYE course thus includes opportunities for students to reflect upon and connect their learning in the three courses. One such opportunity for individual reflection involves focus questions which explicitly ask about material in linked courses. For example, one focus question asks students to describe how and why
their reading of an essay in College Writing influences their interpretation of a video on bird flu they watch in EYE 129.

In addition, “The Chicken Course” includes co-curricular opportunities as described in course characteristic 3 below. Instructors for all three of the linked courses meet prior to the start of classes to deliberately link learning in the courses and co-curricular experiences, and during the semester to identify specific opportunities for integration.

More generally, focusing on a topic like Chicken in an academic setting has the effect of providing students with a kind of sensitivity or “radar” that they wouldn’t have otherwise; they will start to “see” Chicken in places and in ways they never before noticed. These kind of “aha” moments (what feminists in the 70s called “clicks”) are often revealed spontaneously in a classroom where students feel encouraged to voice these connections. More structured opportunities for reflection and making linkages are built in to focus questions.

Assessing this outcome will be done in a formative way throughout the semester through focus questions. A summative assessment of this outcome will occur in the final essay described above, and through the application of the attached rubric.

5. recognize that an individual’s viewpoint is shaped by his or her experience and historical and cultural context;

The course design facilitates this outcome by deliberately introducing students to a variety of different perspectives and views on Chicken. Some of these views are shocking, surprising, and/or puzzling to 21st century New Englanders. The course provides appropriate historical and cultural background/context material so that students imaginatively occupy differing subject positions; this is an essential part of the process of evaluating different perspectives and developing and articulating one’s own view.

The course begins and ends with units on industrial poultry production and cockfighting. While the practice of cockfighting is generally disapproved (and is illegal in all 50 states since 2008), the practices of industrial poultry production are at least tacitly condoned each time a student eats chicken. Why this should be so—one practice condemned and the other condoned-- and whether the two practices have anything in common is the subject of the final essay. Course materials in the form of reading (“Enter the Chicken,” by Burkhard Bilger) and video (a segment of the 1977 miniseries “Roots” and a documentary on cockfighting), as well as focus questions and guided conversation help students to appreciate the way that historical and cultural context shape individual and collective views.

Students achieve this outcome through successfully completing the work in relation to Outcome 1, above. In developing their own reasoned position on Chicken, they explicitly consider multiple perspectives. In addition, focus questions throughout the semester provide a means of formative assessment, and the final essay provides a basis for summative assessment of this outcome, using the attached rubric.
6. develop and employ skills to locate and critically evaluate information relevant to course questions (i.e., information literacy2);

In each of the three sections of the course, students must find and use information outside of that specifically assigned. In the first section, they use academic resources available through the library to locate a peer-reviewed article on health outcomes among commercial laying hens. In the second section, students are assigned a city/town and investigate whether the city/town has ordinances regulating the keeping of chickens. This develops skills in seeking information outside of the context of the university and online databases.

In the third section of the course, students locate a chicken story (myth, fable, tale) from a culture outside of the US. These are shared with classmates and used to revisit several of the learning outcomes. In a sequence of activities (which includes a focus questions, then collaborative work in class, and finally a formal written assignment) students compare and contrast a story from another culture with one from the US. In collaborative work, students use key concepts to develop a more systematic and focused comparison and contrast (Outcome 3). In the written assignment, the comparison/contrast is used as a catalyst to pose new questions (Outcome 2) and to locate different stories in their historical and cultural context (Outcome 5).

Student achievement of this outcome will be assessed on the basis of their successful completion of these research assignments using the rubric for praxis assignments.

7. engage in respectful dialog with others that honors diversity; and

As described in the overview and in relation to several of the outcomes, students engage in dialogue with classmates and instructors, and such dialogue is premised on respect for different views. Instructors model respectful questioning, listening, and debate; take seriously the responsibility to incorporate a wide variety of subject positions, views, and perspectives; and take seriously the obligation to create a safe place for students to develop and test ideas, even unpopular ones. Guided conversation is a carefully structured kind of discussion in which students are coached through a series of questions (many of which they will already have written about as “focus questions”). The process makes explicit different interpretations of texts/materials and enables students to share written answers with one another; instructors deliberately forge connections between and among students’ comments, so that guided conversation is more coherent, cumulative, and intentional than open-ended “discussion.” In addition, the links between EYE 129, ENG 100, and ESP 101-2 foster community and contribute to respectful interaction among the students, especially as students will see classmates in different settings and disciplinary contexts.

Some indicators of this outcome include (a) the liveliness of class discussion, (b) diversity in responses to formal writing prompts. More formal assessment of this outcome will occur through student completion of self-assessment at mid- and end-of-semester. In these self-assessments students will be asked to reflect on their capacity for respectful dialog and the extent to which capacity has expanded as a result of their participation in the course.
8. identify dispositions and behavior that foster academic success and recognize university resources and services that support learning and personal growth.

The course designers have extensive experience teaching introductory level courses in the Core and in their home disciplines, in teaching writing-intensive courses, and in advising and retention initiatives. Instructors take care to sequence learning experiences and to introduce a variety of strategies that can contribute to academic success so that students can experiment and reflect on which work most effectively for them. University resources to support learning and personal growth are identified on the course syllabus and on Blackboard.

Students self-assess early in the semester to identify areas they might need to work on and to establish priorities for the semester. On the basis of this assessment, and as needed throughout the semester, students are directed to relevant university resources and services. Instructors in the linked courses meet regularly so that the development of successful dispositions and behaviors is reinforced across multiple classes, and so that students have a better understanding of their own strengths and areas for improvement as learners. A similar self-assessment at the end of the semester permits students to map their progress as learners and set priorities for subsequent semesters.

In addition, each formal essay assignment includes a self-assessment component as well as peer review. Self-assessment in the essay-writing process gives students practice in learning to identify their own strengths and areas for improvement. Instructor review of these self-assessments of written work in the context of each actual essay is another means for assessing this outcome.

Course Characteristics

EYE courses should

1. focus on a theme that engages first year students;

We deliberately play with the humor that comes with the idea of a “chicken course” to engage students in an interdisciplinary and rigorous exploration of an apparently mundane, ordinary aspect of contemporary life. The course is designed to reveal layers of meaning and complexity in something often taken for granted. The course is also designed to (a) model how processes of intellectual curiosity and scholarly inquiry can be applied to (almost) any subject and (b) show how university-level scholarly work enriches understanding of everyday lives and experiences and understanding of the broader contexts within which everyday life is lived.

2. involve pedagogies that actively engage students in their own learning, create substantial interaction between students and between students and instructors, and vary to accommodate different learning styles and learning objectives.

The instructors use a variety of pedagogies, all of which depend on high levels of interaction between and among students and between students and instructors, and all of which aim to engage
students in their own learning. Students read a variety of materials including articles in popular press, scholarly books and articles, websites and blogs, policy papers, children’s tales, essays, etc. We use video (including scholarly documentaries, popular clips, and historical footage). Classes include mini-lectures, small-group collaborative activities, large-group discussions, guided conversations, in-class writing assignments, and “think-pair-share” activities. Choice of pedagogy depends on the learning objectives of the particular class and/or course unit, and the course overall is designed to accommodate different learning styles.

3. include co-curricular experience as a form of learning;

Students have a calendar or menu of co-curricular events available to them. Use of Blackboard (announcements and calendar) ensures that students know about the many relevant opportunities for co-curricular engagement. It is too early to identify specifics, but possibilities include academic/scholarly talks and lectures and workshops by agricultural extensions, farmers, and practitioners.

The course also includes one or more field trips to be co-ordinated with ENG 100 and ESP 101-2. One such trip is travel to Common Ground Fair in Unity, ME where students will see dozens of varieties of prize-winning chickens, talk with chicken fanciers, learn how small-scale production is part of a sustainable agricultural system, and learn about the opportunities and challenges of poultry production in Maine. An alternative is the Cumberland County Fair in Cumberland, ME. Students who cannot participate in these more travel-extensive field trips will be given the option of attending a local farmers’ market or visiting a local independent farm.

4. include reflective self-appraisal (e.g., reflection papers, journals, self-assessment, portfolio);

Students in the course have frequent opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment. Focus questions are designed to (a) help students use informal writing as a learning activity, and (b) to provide students with a low-risk opportunity to explore ideas and examine their own preconceptions, reactions, and biases. More structured and formal self-appraisal is built in to the process of writing and revising essays. Students engage in guided peer review and self-assessment to develop skills in evaluating and improving their own arguments and writing skills.

5. provide syllabi that include explicit reference to course objectives, explanation of university policy regarding plagiarism, and university and course policy regarding students with disabilities;

The attached course syllabus includes these elements. The Blackboard site for the course includes additional information and resources related to college life and learning (plagiarism, support for students with disabilities, library resources, academic success strategies).

6. introduce students to the visions, goals and structure of general education, minimally with a statement on the syllabus which describes them;

The syllabus incorporates the Vision and Goals for general education at USM and connects these explicitly to course level outcomes. The course outcomes as stated on the syllabus weave together
the EYE outcomes and course-specific outcomes, further articulating how learning in the course will be connected to USM’s vision and goals for general education.

7. normally limit enrollment to 25; and
When offered as a linked course, enrollment is 20; when not linked, enrollment is 25.

8. be designed by teams of 2 to 5 faculty from different disciplines
The course has been designed primarily by two faculty, one from Environmental Sciences (Rob Sanford) and the other from Sociology (Cheryl Laz). We have, in addition, shared the syllabus and consulted with faculty from other disciplines.