

## COURSE MATERIALS

### COURSE TITLE

#### **Introduction to Animal Abuse Evaluation and Intervention**

Animal cruelty is not only traumatic to the animal victims, but research has shown that people who engage in cruelty or harmful behavior to animals are more likely to harm humans in the future. This correlation between animal cruelty and risks directed to people, most often observed in the context of family violence, is referred to as the LINK. Although the FBI is tracking animal cruelty cases in its efforts to predict violence, the criminal justice system has been inconsistent in its treatment of individuals who abuse animals and often lacks the knowledge and expertise to effectively evaluate individuals engaged in cruelty toward animals. In Colorado, the courts should be requiring evaluations in cases of animal cruelty but frequently fail to do so. Until recently, there were no academic programs providing training and guidance on how to perform these specific types of evaluations.

The University of Denver is proud to be pioneering cutting-edge research and evaluation in this field. Through the [Institute for Human-Animal Connection](#) (IHAC), which is housed in the Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW), a new program called the [Colorado LINK Project](#) conducts research into this field and has established an evaluation protocol for criminal justice and mental health professionals to gain the skills needed to perform these specialized evaluations. In an effort to educate new professionals in the skills needed to confront animal cruelty as a serious issue and criminal behavior, IHAC, in conjunction with the Graduate School of Professional Psychology and The Graduate School of Social Work, is offering a newly created graduate-level course to 15 Colorado criminal justice and mental health professionals who want to learn more about this field of specialization.

This graduate-level course will examine the concepts of animal cruelty, defining the risk factors at the individual, community, and societal levels. The course covers the dimensions of animal welfare; risk factors; typologies of individuals who engage in animal cruelty; legal considerations; assessment procedures (for youth and adults); the populations and settings where animal abuse is most prevalent; and the evaluation, sentencing, and treatment of individuals who engage in violence toward animals.

Students will also learn from guest speakers, such as judges, prosecutors, forensic clinical specialists, veterinarians, human law enforcement and probation officers, with expertise in responding effectively to animal cruelty cases. One of these experts is the GSSW's Clinical Professor Philip Tedeschi, Executive Director of IHAC, who recently authored a chapter in the Oxford Press's publication, "[Animal Maltreatment: Forensic Mental Health Issues and Evaluations.](#)"

Come away with a deeper understanding of the connection between animal cruelty and acts of violence against humans, as well as the skills to evaluate individuals who engage in cruelty or harmful behavior to animals. At the conclusion of the course, non-licensed students may request a list of supervisors if they wish to conduct an animal abuse evaluation. (Continuing Education credits available.)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who complete the course will meet the following learning objectives:

1. Perform a Forensic Animal Maltreatment Evaluation (FAME);
2. Knowledge of the contexts and settings in which animal abuse occurs, the link between interpersonal violence and animal abuse, and risk factors and treatment considerations of individuals who abuse animals;
3. Become LINK-informed: Understand the human-animal bond at various levels of society, the bond's relevance to evaluating the values and ethics that inform animal abuse legislation, learn how to work from a human-animal bond-centered approach to public safety, and learn the skills needed to assess and intervene in the identification and treatment of animal abuse in a variety of settings.

## INSTRUCTOR

**Laura Meyer**, a Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology (GSPP), earned her Ph.D. in Quantitative Research Methods in 2008 and has taught introductory and advanced courses in statistics and research methods since 2007. Dr. Meyer also teaches courses in geropsychology and doctoral paper development, and co-teaches, with Professor Philip Tedeschi of the Graduate School of Social Work, a course on animal-assisted interventions (AAI). She has conducted research on the effects of equine therapy on the PTSD symptoms of Vietnam veterans and on the outcomes of a Denver metro pet food pantry on its clients' lives. Currently, she is conducting a psychometric analysis of the Animal Abuse Risk Assessment Tool as a means of increasing its scope, validity, and use. Given the tremendous interest of GSPP students and fellow researchers in AAI, Dr. Meyer is working to increase opportunities for student training and research in this area via grant funding and other training options.