

Three Macalester faculty to participate in ACM-Mellon SAIL Seminar

St. Paul, Minn. – Andrew Billing, French and Francophone Studies, Scott Legge, Anthropology, and Eric Wiertelak, Psychology and Director of Neuroscience Studies, will participate as a team representing the humanities, social and natural sciences at an ACM-Mellon Seminar in Advanced Interdisciplinary Learning (SAIL) in July titled “Considering Animals.”



Fifteen faculty from six ACM (Associated Colleges of the Midwest) schools will explore, through a cross-disciplinary manner, how humans and animals interconnect and how understanding animals helps us better understand human nature. Faculty will utilize many of the significant places and resources related to animals in and around Washington, DC. In addition to Macalester, the other ACM participating colleges are Beloit, Carleton, Grinnell, Lake Forest and Luther.

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“What excites me most about participating in the seminar is the opportunity it provides participants to widen their focus on the roles that human and non-human animals play in each others lives, as well as how lessons learned from the experiences of one species bear on what we can come to know about another,” said Wiertelak. “This expanded focus will transform my courses in fundamental ways, beginning with the basic examples I use to illustrate key points in introductory courses, to the readings and projects designed for students in advanced course work.”

Billing’s research project explores the animal/human distinction in French literature and philosophical thought during the 17th and 18th centuries. “The interdisciplinary nature of the seminar will allow me to compare perspectives with scholars working in the natural and social sciences and familiar with contemporary research on the animal/human distinction in fields including neuroscience, biology, zoology and anthropology.”

The SAIL seminars are new, intensive off-campus study experiences for ACM faculty that will allow them to explore salient topics in cross-disciplinary contexts while challenging them to leave their physical and intellectual comfort zones and explore big questions through new methodologies and perspectives. Faculty will be immersed in a setting that encourages multiple perspectives and collaboration across disciplines to lay the foundation for the development of innovative, integrative advanced-level coursework.

“This seminar will provide the perfect foundation for engaging Macalester faculty and students in discussions which could lead to a team-taught seminar coinciding with faculty expertise,” said Legge. “A course of this nature is really what liberal arts education is all about. It is not specific to any one disciplinary division, and it will challenge students to be intellectually broad in their consideration of a topic rather than focusing solely within their major, thus breaking them out of their own ‘intellectual bubble.’”

The SAIL seminars are funded by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. "Considering Animals" will be the first of five annual SAIL seminars, which will alternate between domestic and international sites.

Macalester College, founded in 1874, is a national liberal arts college with a full-time enrollment of 1,958 students. Macalester is nationally recognized for its long-standing commitment to academic excellence, internationalism, multiculturalism and civic engagement. Learn more at [macalester.edu](http://www.macalester.edu) (<http://www.macalester.edu/>).

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