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A program proposal for a Companion Animal Emphasis within the existing Animal Science Major, in the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Science, University of Wisconsin – River Falls
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Proposal contains four sections: Justification, Industry Status and Job Availability, Outline of Curriculum, and Summary Information. One Appendix file is attached.

Animal Science – Companion Animal Emphasis, Management Option
Animal Science – Companion Animal Emphasis, Science Option
Animal Science – Companion Animal Emphasis, Minor Option

I. Justification
The University of Wisconsin – River Falls Animal and Food Science Department conducts one of the leading undergraduate comprehensive animal science programs in the nation. Our students are actively involved in scholastic and extracurricular activities at local, regional, national, and international levels. However, there is one aspect of Animal Science that has been underrepresented within the department and major: companion animals. There is a need for the department to encompass companion animals within our faculty expertise, courses, and major, in order to meet the growing demand for this branch of Animal Science.

The American Pet Products Association performs a National Pet Owners Survey each year. In 2009/2010, they found that 62% of all US households have a pet, which is a total of 71.4 million homes (approximately 2 million of these are horse owners); the number has increased since then to over 73 million. Further, in 2009, the reported expenditure on pets was $45.5 billion in the United States. Given that the GDP for the US is ~$14 trillion, approximately 3.2% of all income is spent on pets. This number is likewise growing every year, with the 2012 estimate at $52.9 billion spent. In 2009, of the $45.5 billion, only $12 billion was spent on veterinary care, indicating that an entire industry exists outside simply providing health care to canines, felines, lagomorphs (rabbits, etc.), and other small rodents. Food expenditures actually make up a larger amount of the total than veterinary care, and the remainder of this money is spent on everything from toys, clothes, bedding, leashes, and similar items, to services, such as grooming, boarding, and training. Also included are competitions, supplements, hunting gear, and myriad of other categories.

Furthermore, a number of other major Animal Science programs are offering companion animal courses and emphases. For example, both the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and the University of California, Davis, offer an option or area of specialization, respectively, in companion animals within their regular Animal Science majors. Other universities such as Penn State (3-4) and Texas A&M (1) also offer various companion animal courses (number of courses in parentheses). The University of Minnesota, as recently as Fall 2013 has begun to offer a Companion Animal sub-plan within their Animal Science major, consisting of four specific companion animal courses.
Locally, within the UW System, there is relatively less competition. Neither UW-Platteville nor UW-Madison currently offer a companion animal emphasis, although each school offers one companion animal course.

There is also significant demand for these types of courses among our present student population. To date, any students who desire an Animal Science major (whether Pre-Veterinary or not) have had to choose either the Meat Animal or Equine emphases, or switch to a Biology major (which also does not offer companion animal courses). Currently our “introductory” Companion Animal course (ANSC 121), which we have offered in our department since 2003, enrolls 60+ students each spring. A rough estimate of the number of students who would elect the Companion Animal emphasis is therefore around 40 students per year. Students choosing the Animal Science major represent a broad array of interests, including animal production and related industries. Pre-veterinary students represent a significant subset of those in the major with 10-15 of our graduates placing into veterinary schools each year. Graduation job placement data for DVM graduates consistently shows that at least 75% of them are exclusively practicing in small animal practices, while the remaining 25% often are in mixed animal practice, where they still see small animal patients. A head start in the companion animal sciences will definitely benefit these students, as the veterinary curricula grow in quantity and complexity every year due to the increasing standard of care demanded by many companion animal owners. Finally, for those students interested in companion animals that ultimately choose not to pursue veterinary school, many other career options are available.

II. Industry Status and Job Availability
As stated above, companion animals are a multi-billion dollar industry. Career opportunities in this field are numerous and varied. Whether students want to work for corporations, start their own business, or work for the government, a variety of options are available.
A sample listing includes:
- Pet foods (all aspects: R&D, sales, marketing, customer service, etc.)
- Animal transportation
- Animal control and animal welfare (officers, support staff, etc. Shelters alone often hire veterinarians, veterinary technicians, and all types of administrative personnel. Humane officers and animal control officers often work for cities or municipalities)
- Kennel and boarding facilities
- Grooming facilities
- Training facilities/competition facilities
- Veterinarians
- Veterinary clinic or practice managers
- Veterinary therapy and/or rehabilitation facilities
- Writing for magazines, blogs, etc.
- Animal photographers
- Development of environmental enrichments for companion animals
- Contract research organizations
• Staff for local, national, and international breed associations
• Research (various aspects – laboratory technicians in research laboratories, all types)
• Specialty dog training (e.g. guide dogs, conservation dogs, etc.)
• Pharmaceutical sales
• Public relations specialist

Early in the developmental process for this program, the Companion Animal Committee assembled a focus group of industry personnel which included owners and operators of such diverse businesses as retail pet supply stores, pet care & training centers, pet nutrition companies, contract research companies and the like. The focus group was enthusiastic about the prospect of a companion animal program. The committee was encouraged by the significant interest the focus group participants exhibited regarding the need for college educated people to fill a variety of positions within their respective sectors of the companion animal industry. In addition, just like an Animal Science student choosing an Equine emphasis or Meat Animal emphasis, Companion Animal students will ultimately obtain an Animal Science degree, and are therefore employable in many additional (non-companion animal) areas or branches of the animal industries. Being able to fall back on a broad-based Animal Science major will ensure that Companion Animal emphasis students can still find employment, even if their job prospects are limited by geography or other factors.

Many of the positions described above offer significant and early opportunities for advancement. The demand for personnel is consistently high and growing in most of the above areas. According to the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job outlook (from 2012 to 2022) for Animal Care and Service Workers is projected to increase 15% (faster than average), for Veterinarians it is projected to increase 12% (as fast as average), for Veterinary Assistants and Laboratory Animal Caretakers it is projected to increase 10% (as fast as average) and for Veterinary Technologists and Technicians it is projected to increase 30% (much faster than average). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics does not report data for self-employed workers, many of which may be working in the companion animal field, such as dog trainers, nor does it report data on adoption coordinators or managers at animal shelters, or earnings for pet-care business owners. However, based on the continually growing expenditures on companion animals, it is logical to conclude that these facets of the industry are also growing.

In addition, students with a Companion Animal emphasis and Science option will be prepared to enter veterinary school or graduate school. Attaining these advanced degrees offers additional opportunities for rewarding careers, such as university teaching, public or private veterinary practice, and federal or state veterinary positions. The companion animal industry is on a growth trajectory. It provides opportunities for corporate careers as well as entrepreneurial endeavors. Overall, the job prospects in the companion animal field are substantial.