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ASU Social Work Professor Earns National Accolades for Innovative Animal-Human Connections Course

(Tempe, December 22, 2005) – Dr. Christina Risley-Curtiss, associate professor at Arizona State University’s School of Social Work, has developed a unique new social work course focused on the link between domestic violence, child and elder abuse and the abuse of non-human animals; and on the healing and resiliency humans can gain through positive connections with animals. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has selected this course as one of the three national winners of its Sixth Annual Animals and Society Course Awards, which recognize academic excellence in courses that teach about the relationships between people and animals.

Wayne Pacelle, President and CEO of the HSUS presented the award, which includes a stipend of $1.5K, to Dr. Risley-Curtiss at a gathering of the organization’s supporters earlier this month in Scottsdale, AZ. Dr. Martin Stephens, vice president for animal research issues for the HSUS noted, “The winning courses show thoughtful and clear originality both in the content and delivery of their subjects and a true dedication to their fields of academia.”

Risley-Curtiss’ innovative course is designed to improve the ability of social workers to acutely assess and enhance their client’s environment and relationships, as well as to increase their ability to recognize inhumane behaviors that may be indicators of or precursors to domestic violence. The course is one of only a handful of such courses offered nationally by schools of social work. The majority of the other courses are focused on animal-assisted therapy.

Designed for master’s level students and open to other non-majors, the course has been well-received by a few Arizona State University students working full-time in the area of child protective services, who are now advocating for animal cruelty to be added to risk assessment
tools used in investigations. Other students who have completed the course have gone on to do comparative research in the area of ethnicity and the treatment of companion animals. Through the course, social work students also examine issues of prevention and treatment and build practice skills in both of those areas.

Dr. Leslie Leighninger, Director of the ASU School of Social Work noted, “We are very pleased that Dr. Risley-Curtiss and her pioneering efforts in this emerging and important area of social work have been recognized by The Humane Society of the United States.”

Risley-Curtiss, whose Ph.D. is from the University of Maryland, specializes in policy and practice issues in child welfare and public health, especially foster care and sexually transmitted diseases. She is the co-principal investigator on the School’s Department of Economic Security Child Welfare Education and Support Project grant and research consultant on the Families First Evaluations Project grant. She has also just started working on a grant from the William and Charlotte Parks Foundation to study the animal-human bond, the awareness level among social workers of related issues, and the applicability of these topics to the direct practice of social work.

Other winners of the HSUS 2004 Animals and Society Course Awards include Dr. Antonia J.Z. Henderson, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia and Belinda Recio, Worcester State College, Worcester, MA.

For further information: [http://ssw.asu.edu/faculty/curtiss.html](http://ssw.asu.edu/faculty/curtiss.html)
[http://www.hsus.org/animals_in_research/animals_in_education/animals_society_course_awards.html](http://www.hsus.org/animals_in_research/animals_in_education/animals_society_course_awards.html)