**Panel:**

**Wolves to Wolfdogs: Creating and Condemning Charismatic Megafauna (Panel)**

Of all the charismatic megafauna, perhaps no species has captured humankind’s fascination as closely as the wolf. From ancient to modern times, these animals transcend the products of our disciplines: folktales, sculptures, field studies, novels, soundtracks, movies, gaming avatars, etc. Yet, while our interaction with these non-human animals has escalated widely between condemnation and preservation, we have also endeavored to modify the species through genetic manipulations. While the most well-known alterations are dogs, there is another subset population that mainly escapes public attention: wolfdogs. This panel brings together three academics, from three different fields, who reside in one of the top-producing wolfdog states: Florida. Borrowing from both their respective fields of training and their interactions with wolves and wolfdogs, each speaker presents important insights into humankind’s connections with these animals.

**Presentation:**

**Florida’s Canid Curiosities: Conceptualizing Wolfdogs as a Practice of Alterity in Literature and Pedagogy**

Mitchem, Sarah Lewis (University of Florida, English; smitchem@ufl.edu)

In *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Derrida traces the paradoxical position of wolves in literature and the popular imagination. Prompted by the phrase “pas de loup,” he illustrates how wolves embody the position of an absent referent while being directly referred to: “the syntagm *pas de loup*, is precisely that the absence of the wolf is also expressed in it in the silent operation of *pas*, the word pas which implies, but without any noise, the savage intrusion of the adverb of negation.” The phrase roughly translates to “the wolf is not here,” yet actually implies that a subject is acting “stealthily.” The animals are simultaneously erased (negated), referenced (named), and used to indicate intention (to act stealthily). Yet modern culture has escalated an animal variety that better embodies this precarious position of existence/erasure: wolfdogs. In just the US, over 300,000 straddle being classified as either a wild or domesticated species. This presentation examines various media to trace how wolfdogs became polarizing icons whose numbers increase due to the public’s demand, yet are condemned by most state and county animal control regulations. While being an English teacher at the University of Florida allows me to discuss these animals in a scholastic framework, my personal affiliation with
wolfdogs makes me acutely aware that the materials I provide only offer *pas de loup*, the animal as it is not there. Lastly, I discuss my attempt to rectify this situation by introducing wolfdog breed ambassadors to my students.