DISABILITY IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

HIST 268
SPRING 2020

THURSDAYS 3:30-6:30
GORE HALL 317

Dr. Jaipreet Virdi
122 Munroe Hall
jvirdi@udel.edu

Office hours:
Thursdays 12-2, or by appointment
Course Description
This course is designed to build a mature understanding of how the life circumstances and prospects of disabled people are shaped by the tenor and content of entrenched attitudes, barriers, and representations of bodies. Since technology is ubiquitous with disability, this course introduces a critical framework for understanding how technologies can reveal individual experiences with disability, notions of citizenship, gender, sexuality, and identity. Applying a hands-on material and visual cultural approach, we will examine different technologies of disability. We will analyze how medical and prosthetic technologies enrich, marginalize, or stigmatize disabled people. We will also historicize concepts such as “impairment vs. disability” and “ableism,” and examine how cultural reinforcements of “acceptable norms” for bodily behavior were challenged by disabled people. Highlighting the importance of lived experiences, we will closely examine the role of users as shapers, collaborators, and manipulators of their own dis/ability technologies and how such control reflected or contradicted social definitions of disability, invisibility, and normality.

Learning Outcomes
This course is designed for you to gain knowledge in material culture and historical research to become familiar with understanding and applying disability theory within a seminar-based setting. A primary goal is for students to develop critical and creative thinking skills and apply those skills in their projects.

Our Learning Environment
This class gathers on the ancestral territory of the Unami-speaking Lenape people. This class is an inclusive learning environment and I am committed to ensuring all students are respected and valued. My intention is to view student diversity in identity and background as a crucial source of strength. This course aims to provide materials and activities to present inclusive histories with respect to gender, sexuality, race, disability, class, culture, and ethnicity. This course is specifically designed to be inclusive with regards to assignments and grading. It is expected that for all class activities and discussions, we will together contribute to enriching our learning environment by being respectful of the diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences by listening to others’ views. This means all personal attacks or insults that degrade someone’s character will not be tolerated. I will gladly honor any requests to address an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me at the start of the semester.

Accessibility Accommodations
If you have any specific personal and/or academic accessibility requirements (learning disability, physical disability, language comprehension, etc.), I welcome you to speak with me or email me to let me know how to best accommodate your needs, especially if you don’t have an apparent disability, have ongoing health issues or are trying to pass. You are NOT obligated to disclose
any of these issues with me, only specify if there’s any accommodations required. Trust me when I say I’ll understand. If you need any adaptations for course materials (large font, pacing, image description, closed captioning), this is easy for me to do, so let me know. You are also encouraged to register with the Office of Disability Support Services, but it is not a requirement.

Professor Availability
Face-to-face contact is the most direct and effective means for communicating with me. I have regular office hours. Email is good too. Per university policy, use your udel.edu email only; I will not reply to any emails sent from other accounts. Use proper email etiquette; it’s good practice for post-university correspondence. Professors usually receive dozens of messages daily so do not be concerned if it takes me two days to reply to your email; and don’t shy from sending me reminder prompts!

Technology Etiquette
Respect the classroom time: leave the video-watching, social media browsing, and internet shopping for another time. Do not text or send emails during class. Even if it doesn’t distract you, it will certainly disrupt your peers’ focus and even mine. Use courtesy and common sense. Silence your cellphones. Laptops are for notetaking and accessing course readings only.

Academic Honesty
The University of Delaware Student Guide to Academic Honesty indicates: “All students must be honest and forthright in their academic studies. To falsify the results of one’s research, to steal the words or ideas of another, to cheat on an assignment, or to allow or assist another to commit these acts corruptions the educational process. Students are expected to do their own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance.”
(http://www1.udel.edu/stuguide/17-18/code.html#honesty)

Please do not, in any shape or form, commit the act of plagiarism. If you are having ANY difficulties with the course material, or with essay writing, or even with reading and understanding, please email me or make an appointment to see me. Any proven violations of Academic Honesty will result be reported to the Office of Student Conduct.

Class Structure
This is a 3-hour seminar with 5-10min breaks at the end of the first and second hours. We will begin with a 20minute lecture/overview to the unit topic. We will then proceed with a class conversation on the readings – some classes will include a hands-on activity, student presentation, or object study. Come to class having done the readings and ready to converse, ask questions, and participate. Where scheduled, some classes will be held elsewhere on campus.
ASSIGNMENTS

This is a course about disability technologies: how they are made, who uses them, how they are adapted, and what means we have for accessing them. This is also a course on diversity and inclusion that acknowledges everyone has different learning strengths.

Thus, you are going to create your own assignments evaluation by choosing amongst the following categories. Here are the guidelines:

1. ONE assignment must be from EACH category.
2. Select deadlines that make sense for you, but at least ONE assignment must be due by March 26 for midterm assessment. All assignments must be submitted by May 21.
3. Hand in your grading breakdown with deadlines to me by the second class.

Full assignment details will be distributed in class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANALYZE: 40%</th>
<th>Paper minimum: 3,000 words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Research Paper</td>
<td>• ADA Campus Survey Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Research Poster</td>
<td>• Create a 10 min documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Object Analysis</td>
<td>• Graphic Comics Narrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERFORM: 20%</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Create a class activity (45min)</td>
<td>• Lead a class discussion (45 min)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deliver a class lecture (30min)</td>
<td>• Present an object analysis (30min)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REPORT: 20%</th>
<th>Paper minimum: 1,500 words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Attend &amp; write on a campus event</td>
<td>• Interview a disabled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Book Review</td>
<td>• Other creative art response to readings and course theme(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Op-Ed Article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPATE: 20%</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Engaged, active conversation in class</td>
<td>• Other creative art response to readings and course theme(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Write 4 reading responses (500 words each)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are welcome to discuss alternative options with me at the start of the semester.
PART I: MEDIATORS OF DISABILITY

February 13: Object Lessons


February 20: Lifehackers


s.e. smith, “Disabled people don’t need so many fancy new gadgets. We just need more ramps,” *Vox* (30 April 2019).

February 27: Disability Design


BONUS: Attend Bess Williamson’s author talk at the Hagley Library and Museum, 7-9pm: [https://www.hagley.org/research/author-talk-bess-williamson](https://www.hagley.org/research/author-talk-bess-williamson)
March 5: Polite Consumption


March 12: Mobility Aids


March 19: Vision and Blindness

This class will be held at Morris Library, where we will be examining the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, with a special lecture by Mark Samuels Lasner, followed by a visit to Special Collections.

March 26: Artificial Parts


April 9: Acoustic Devices


April 16: Communication


Bronwyn Hemsley, “The technology that gave Stephen Hawking a voice should be accessible to all who need it,” *The Conversation* (16 March 2018).

**PART III: SPACES & DISPLAYS**

April 23: No Class – Professor at a Conference

April 30: The Upside Down


May 7: Exhibition/ism


May 14: Class Wrap-Up