DISABILITY IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

HIST 268 Spring 2019
Tuesdays 3:30-6:30
Memorial Hall 107

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

Office Hours:
Wednesdays 10-2
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. A primary goal is for students to develop critical and creative thinking skills and apply those skills in their projects.

Statement of Diversity and Inclusion
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. I acknowledge that students have different learning styles and thus, 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
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
couraged to register with the Office of Disability Support Services, but it is not a requirement.

My goal is to ensure that all students are able to engage fully in this course – this also
means students are expected to attend, participate, and contribute to the seminar.

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
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 corrupts the educational
process. Students are expected to do their own work and neither give nor receive
unauthorized assistance.”

Read the Statement and outline of violations in plagiarism and cheating:
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.
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 styles.

Thus, you are going to create your own grading system by choosing amongst the three categories listed below to add up to a total grade of 90%, with the remaining 10% a mandatory assignment. Here are the guidelines:

1. ONE assignment must be from EACH category.
2. You are welcome to do the same assignment option twice, if it is different, to add up to a total grade of 90%.
3. Select deadlines that make sense for you, but at least ONE assignment must be due by March 25 for midterm assessment. All assignments must be submitted by May 22.
4. 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>ANALYSIS (35%)</th>
<th>PRÉCIS (15%)</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION (10%)</th>
<th>MANDATORY ASSIGNMENT (10%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Research Paper</td>
<td>• Book Review</td>
<td>• Post on class Instagram</td>
<td>• Develop an infographic on a topic related to one of the course themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Research Poster</td>
<td>• Op-Ed Article</td>
<td>• Engaged, active participation in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Object Analysis</td>
<td>• Lead 1-hour class discussion</td>
<td>• Manage class Twitter feed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ADA Campus Survey Report</td>
<td>• Create a 10 min documentary</td>
<td>• Create a comic strip</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create a 10 min documentary</td>
<td>• Graphic Comics Narrative</td>
<td>• Other creative art response to readings and course theme(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are welcome to discuss alternative options with me at the start of the semester.
COURSE READINGS

There is one required textbook for this course which can be purchased from the University of Delaware library or online. All other readings will be posted on Canvas or are online.


PART I: MEDIATORS OF DISABILITY

February 12: Why Users Matter


February 19: Exhibition/ism


February 26: Representations

Krista A. Murchison, “Guide Dogs in Medieval Art and Writing.”

Kim E. Nielsen, A Disability History of the United States, Chapters 1-3.

**PART II: DEVICES & DESIGNS**

**March 5: Crafting the Body**


Kim E. Nielsen, A Disability History of the United States, Chapters 4-5.


**March 12: Wheelchairs and 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.”

Kate Torgovnick May, “How technology is changing blindness: 6 talks on how those who can’t see can drive cars, take photographs and more,” TEDBlog (11 September 2013).

Kim E. Nielsen, A Disability History of the United States, Chapter 6.

March 26: Accessible America

The first half of this class will be guest lectured by Dr. Bess Williamson


April 9: Hearing Devices


April 16: Communication Technologies


**April 23: Medical Insertions**


**PART III: ADAPTATION**

**April 30: Cultural Representations**

Sara Hendren, “*All Technology is Assistive,*” *Wired Magazine* (16 October 2014).

Amanda Hess, “*The Social Media Cure,*” *Slate* (4 March 2016).


Browse comics by *Jessica and Lianna of The Disabled Life*

May 7: Work Adjustments


May 14: Lifehackers

