DISABILITY IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

HIST 268
SPRING 2020

THURSDAYS 3:30-6:30
GORE HALL 317

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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 corrupts 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.

ANALYZE: 40%	Paper minimum: 3,000 words
• Research Paper • Research Poster • Object Analysis	• ADA Campus Survey Report • Create a 10 min documentary • Graphic Comics Narrative

PERFORM: 20%	
• Create a class activity (45min) • Deliver a class lecture (30min)	• Lead a class discussion (45 min) • Present an object analysis (30min)

REPORT: 20%	Paper minimum: 1,500 words
• Attend & write on a campus event • Book Review • Op-Ed Article	• Interview a disabled person • Other creative art response to readings and course theme(s)

PARTICIPATE: 20%	
• Engaged, active conversation in class • Write 4 reading responses (500 words each)	• Other creative art response to readings and course theme(s)

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

PART I: MEDIATORS OF DISABILITY

February 13: Object Lessons

Katherine Ott, "Material Culture, Technology, and the Body in Disability History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*, eds. Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 125-39.

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

February 20: Lifehackers

Liz Jackson, "We are the Original Lifehackers," *The New York Times* (30 May 2018).

Amy Merrick, "Designing for Disability," *The New Yorker* (16 April 2015).

Margaret Andersen, "Why Accessible Design Isn't a Niche Market," *Eye on Design* (13 February 2018).

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

Elizabeth Guffey and Bess Williamson, "Introduction: Rethinking Design History through Disability, Rethinking Disability through Design," in Elizabeth Guffey and Bess Williamson (eds.), *Making Disability Modern: Design Histories* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 1-13.

Bess Williamson, "From Accessible to Universal: Design in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 147-184.

Aimi Hamraie, "Flexible Users: From the Average Body to a Range of Users," in *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 41-63.

BONUS: Attend Bess Williamson's author talk at the Hagley Library and Museum, 7-9pm: https://www.hagley.org/research/author-talk-bess-williamson

PART II: DEVICES & DESIGNS

March 5: Polite Consumption

Nicole Belolan, "The Material Culture of Gout in Early America," in Elizabeth Guffey and Bess Williamson (eds.), *Making Disability Modern: Design Histories* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 19-42.

David M. Turner and Alun Withey, "Technologies of the Body: Polite Consumption and the Correction of Deformity in Eighteenth-Century England," *History* 99.5 (2014): 775-796.

Jennifer Van Horn, "George Washington's Dentures: Disability, Deception, and the Republican Body," *Early American Studies* 14.1 (2015): 2-47.

March 12: Mobility Aids

Cara Kiernan Fallon, "Walking Cane Style and Medicalized Mobility," in Elizabeth Guffey and Bess Williamson (eds.), *Making Disability Modern: Design Histories* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 43-59.

Mary Tremblay, Audrey Campbell, and Geoffrey L. Hudson, "When Elevators were for Pianos: An Oral History Account of the Civilian Experience of Using Wheelchairs in Canadian Society. The First Twenty-Five Years: 1945-1970," *Disability and Society* 20.2 (2005): 103-116.

Elizabeth Guffey, "Origins of a Misfit Design: The Advent of the Modern Wheelchair (-1945)," in *Designing Disability: Symbols, Space, and Society* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018)

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.

Holly L. Cooper, "A Brief History of Tactile Writing Systems for Readers with Blindness and Visual Impairments," *See/Hear Newsletter* (Spring 2006).

March 26: Artificial Parts

Caroline Lieffers, "'Happiness and Usefulness Increased': Consuming Ability in the Antebellum Artificial Limb Market," in Iain Hutchinson, Martin Atherton, and Jaipreet Virdi (eds.), *Disability and the Victorians: Attitudes, Legacies, Interventions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 126-142.

Katherine Ott, "Carnage Remembered: Prosthetics in the US Military since the 1860s," in *Materializing the Military,* eds. Bernard Finn and Barton Hacker (London: Science Museum, 2005), 47-64.

Laurel Daen, "'A Hand for the One-Handed': Prosthesis User-Inventors and the Market for Assistive Technologies in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain," in Claire L. Jones (ed.), *Rethinking Modern Prostheses in Anglo-American Commodity Cultures, 1820-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 93-113.

April 9: Acoustic Devices

Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer, "Purchase, Use and Adaptation: Interpreting 'Patented' Aids to the Deaf in Victorian Britain," in Claire L. Jones (ed.), *Rethinking Modern Prostheses in Anglo-American Commodity Cultures, 1820-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 27-47.

Jaipreet Virdi, "Brett and Toby: A 'Long and Beautiful Journey' of Prostheses and Personhood," in William Ennis, Brian Greenwald, and Joseph Murray (eds.), *New Perspectives on Deaf History* (Gallaudet University Press, in review).

Mara Mills, "Hearing Aids and the History of Electronics Miniaturization," *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 33.2 (2011): 24-44.

April 16: Communication

Meryl Alper, "Can Technology Really 'Give Voice' to Disabled People?" *Pacific Standard* (6 March 2016).

Meryl Alper, "Augmentative, Alternative, and Assistive: Reimagining the History of Mobile Computing and Disability," *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* (2015): 96; 93-95.

Nathan Hurst, "[Can Biomusic Offer Kids with Autism a New Way to Communicate](#)?" *Smithsonian Magazine* (2 April 2018).

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

Vic Finkelstein, "To Deny or Not to Deny Disability," *Physiotherapy* 74.12 (1988): 650-651.

Casandra Hartblay, "Good Ramps, Bad Ramps: Centralized Design Standards and Disability Access in Urban Russian Infrastructure," *American Ethnologist* 44.1 (2017): 9-22.

Wanda Katja Liebermann, "Humanizing Modernism? Jaap Bakema's Het Dorp, a Village for Disabled Citizens," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 75.2 (2016): 158-181.

May 7: Exhibition/ism

Elianna Gerut, Sarah Levin, Daniel Rabinovitz, Gabe Rosen, and Ben Schwartz, "[It's Time for a National Museum of Disability](#)," *The New York Times* (2 September 2018).

Katherine Ott, "Collective Bodies: What Museums do for Disability Studies," in *Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum*, eds. Richard Sandell, Jocelyn Dodd, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 269-79.

Mara Mills and Rebecca Sanchez, "[Design with Disability](#)," *Public Books* (2 October 2018).

Bess Williamson, "*Access+Ability,* Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution," *Design and Culture: The Journal of the Design Studies Forum*, 10.2 (2018): 223-26.

May 14: Class Wrap-Up