Rackham 580: **Topics in Disability Studies: Disability/Culture**  
Winter 2012

Cross-listings:  
UM-Ann Arbor  
Architecture 609 PM & R 580  
Education 580 **Social Work 572**  
English 528 Sociology 580  
Kinesiology 503 Women’s Studies 590

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**Office hours:**  
Wednesdays 2-4 and by appointment (always email me before you come to office hours: I am gladly available to you, but I’d like to know if someone is coming)

The class meets Tuesdays 6-8, G463 MH

Disability studies as a field addresses the lived experience of disability in relation to the cultural and social ways in which we make meaning of the category of disability. In this course, we will focus on the slash between disability and culture: we will investigate how we can understand the emergence of minority cultures surrounding disability, and we will look at how cross-cultural, transnational and global perspectives pressure and re-shape disability studies and disability culture. In a three-day symposium associated with the class, we will look at art practices and poetics as ways of sharing life experiences respectfully, and with an awareness of the ethical issues involved in encounters. Artists, writers and researchers from the US and beyond will be visiting our classroom, and we will develop an overview of disability culture(s) and cultures of disability today, their practices, their aesthetics, and their ways of engaging in political labor.

**Disability and Language: Guidelines for writing about disability**

Currently, there are two main ways of referring to disability endorsed by different segments of the disability community: social model/civil rights language (‘disabled people’) and people first language (‘people with disabilities’). Both of these usages are widely acceptable to many disabled people/people with disabilities. If in doubt about what kind of language is appropriate, ask.
ADA Statement

It is our intention to support the full participation of all students in the learning process of this class. We have incorporated a variety of instruction techniques and evaluation methods in the course process. In spite of these efforts, situations may occur in which the learning style of individual students is not met by the instructional climate. It is our expectation that students who require specific or additional support to acquire the course content or demonstrate their achievement of the objectives will inform us of their needs immediately. For UM-Ann Arbor, please contact the Office of Students with Disabilities, G664 Haven Hall, at 763-3000.

Syllabus

January 10: Welcome

Readings:

January 17: Disability, Language, Experiencing Cross-Cultural Difference

Readings:

**General background:**

**Specific case-study:**
Everybody read the ‘Introduction’ by Philip Armstrong, Nina Berman, Kimani Njogu, Mbugua wa-Mungai and ‘Reflections on the Disability, Culture, and Human Rights Workshop’ by Willy Mutunga. Beyond that, read two of the multiple contributions to the DSQ section, to get a sense of the different perspectives offered here.


Melanie Yergeau is an assistant professor of English at the University of Michigan. Her academic interests include digital media studies and disability studies, and, more specifically, what the neurodiversity movement has to teach us about learning, teaching, writing, difference, and being. She serves on the board of directors of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), a nonprofit organization run for and by individuals on the autism spectrum, and blogs semi-regularly on matters of rhetoric, autistic culture, and technology at aspierhetor.com.
Readings:

January 31st, 2pm to Feb 2nd 5pm: Disability/Culture Symposium and UMInDS Spring Conference (beyond our actual class time, please attend at least one more session during these three days, and follow along in the symposium reader, which will be made available in January)
Guests, some of whom will be running workshops: Yulia Arakelyan, Erik Ferguson, Aimee Meredith Cox, Ariel Osterweiss, Melanie Yergeau, Sadashi Inuzuka, Neil Marcus, Jennifer Eisenhauer, Cheryl Kaplan Zachariah, Margaret Ames, Sue Cheesman, Pam Block, Jim Ferris.

February 7
Disability and Postcoloniality: a mini-colloquium

Readings: Selection from
Wagadu: Journal of Transnational Women and Gender Studies special issues on postcoloniality and disability, Volume 4: Summer 2007 (http://wagadu.org/Volume%204/articles4.html)
and
With a partner, prepare one of these articles and present argument and method to the class.

February 14
The Anarcha Project: Questions of Intersectionality and difficult community

Readings:

(February 16-18 Queer Dance Conference: disability culture dance workshop optional but open to all seminar participants)

February 21 Guest: Therí Alyce Pickens.
Therí Alyce Pickens is an Assistant Professor at Bates College, having received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from UCLA. Her current book project explores the possibilities and pitfalls of using phenomenology and disability studies as a methodological approach to Arab American and African American literature.

Readings:
Therí Alyce Pickens: Get Me Bodied: Understanding the Embodied Experience in Rabih Alameddine’s Fiction (unpublished manuscript)

March 6 Film, from selection offered to seminar participants

Readings: tbc

March 13 **Guest: Jina Kim. Animal’s People.**

Jina Kim is in the Joint PhD Program in Women’s Studies and English at the University of Michigan. Her interests include disability and theories of embodiment in contemporary African-American women’s writing and Southern Gothic literature.

Readings:
Indra Sinha: Animal’s People (Simon and Schuster: 2007) It’s a novel, folks: make sure to get going with it over the break.

March 20**th** **“disability culturalism”? Complex Poeties. Guest: Denise Leto.**
Denise Leto is a poet, writer, and Senior Editor at the University of California, Berkeley.

Readings:
Sections from Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability, Eds. Sheila Black, Jennifer Bartlett and Michael Northen. El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2011. (We’ll decide on the sections in class together, to meet your interests)

March 27**th** **Guest: Nancy Higgins. Education, Research and Difference.**
Nancy Higgins is a Senior Researcher at the Donald Beasley Institute, Otago, New Zealand, and specialises in disability studies, inclusion, intellectual disability and vision impairment research. She is a member of the Maori Research Development Community.

Readings:

April 3rd **Sovereign Erotics: Bodies and Languages**

Readings:
Selected poems by Qwo-Li Driskill

April 10th Student Projects
April 17th Student Projects

**Requirements and Grading:**

Attendance and participation in class is expected, but there are ways and means of achieving this in innovative ways. Let’s work out what it might mean for you.

Each week, please post a page-long response to your readings on CTools, by Tuesday noon, before class.

Develop a substantial piece of work appropriate to your discipline: a research paper, a syllabus, an art work, a grant proposal, an engineering blue-print, whatever is most useful to your academic career.