

## **Cultures of Dis/ability (WST 392)**

Professor Lisa Diedrich

Fall 2018; Tu-Th 11:30-12:50

Office hours: Tu 4-5:30 and W 2:30-4:00 (or by appointment)

Office: 2117 Humanities Building

Email: [Lisa.Diedrich@stonybrook.edu](mailto:Lisa.Diedrich@stonybrook.edu)

*By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances.*

—Erving Goffman, *Stigma*

*I situate disability not as the condition of being but of becoming, and this becoming is a historical event, and further, it is its material context that is critical in the theorizing of disabled bodies/subjectivities.*

—Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts*

*Disability, situated alongside other key lines of stratification such as race, class, nationality, and gender, is central to understanding the complex, varied, and interlocking ways in which incarceration occurs and is made out to be normal, natural, politically necessary, and beneficial.*

—Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman and Allison C. Carey  
*Disability Incarcerated*

In this course we will consider disability historically and cross-culturally, and investigate the shifting ways disability has been understood and misunderstood, celebrated and stigmatized, made invisible and spectacular, medicalized and politicized. We will look at various models for understanding disability, including the biomedical, social, and justice models, and we will analyze the emergence of the disability rights movement and disability studies in the university. We will approach dis/ability and dis/ableism as categories of analysis, operating intersectionally with other categories, including race, gender, sexuality, and class. Because the “experiences” of disability are so varied (the concept covers physical and mental disabilities; visible and invisible disabilities; congenital, sudden, or progressive disabilities; permanent or temporary disabilities), and because most of us will, at some point in our lives, become disabled, investigating the “experiences” of disability give us insight into the complicated and changing relationship between selves, bodies, and worlds. Investigating disability allows us to ask many questions, including: What makes humans human? What is the relationship between thought and language? How do we articulate experiences of the body? How are certain situations, including poverty, war, and incarceration, disabling? How can we foster accessibility, inclusion, and justice as practices of everyday life?



### **Learning Outcomes:**

This course fulfills the Stony Brook Curriculum (SBC) requirement to “understand relationships between science or technology and the arts, humanities or social sciences (STAS).” Upon completion of this course, students should be able to demonstrate proficiency in the following skills:

1. Identify dis/ability as a central organizing principle of human experience.
2. Give examples of the social construction of disability through scientific, medical, legal, moral, political, economic, and cultural discourses.
3. Explain the category of disability as mutually constitutive with other socially constructed categories, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, and nationality.
4. Demonstrate analytical skills in textual interpretation and visual analysis through course readings, films, and class discussions.
5. Explain and apply theoretical and methodological tools (including discourse and visual cultural analysis and qualitative interviewing) to analyze different cultures of disability.

### **Required Texts:**

- Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey, eds., *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
- Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
- Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices* (New York: Vintage, 2000).
- Alice Wong, Disability Visibility Project Podcast, online at: <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com>

### **Recommended further reading:**

- Alice Wong, *Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People* (published October 15 in a kindle edition)

**Films:**

- *Lives Worth Living* (Eric Neudel, 2011; 60 minutes) (US)
- *The Sea Inside* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2004; 125 minutes) (Spain)

**Students are required to have copies of the readings for every class.**

We will be doing close readings of these texts in class, and it is not possible to do this if students haven't done the readings prior to the discussion and if they do not have the texts to consult as we discuss them. If you cannot afford to buy all of the texts, you may want to utilize the copies of the books that I have placed on reserve at the main library.

**Classroom etiquette:** A good classroom atmosphere depends upon the behavior of both the instructor and the students. So, we need to respect each other and be courteous to each other. This means all of us should come to class on time, not leave early, answer cell phones, write emails or texts on phones or laptops, or talk when others are talking. Concentration and participation are necessary for good thinking!

I permit the use of laptops for note-taking and to consult electronic versions of reading materials. Using your laptop for other things during class time is not allowed—searching the web, checking social media, etc. is distracting to you and others!

**Blackboard:** This class is on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu>), and students are expected to consult Blackboard regularly for updates on readings and assignments. I will post questions on the readings on Blackboard, and will also email students through Blackboard with reminders and follow up from class discussions. Make sure that the email listed for you on Blackboard is the one you actually use, and if you need assistance with Blackboard, contact [helpme@stonybrook.edu](mailto:helpme@stonybrook.edu) or call 631-632-9602.

**Email:** It is your responsibility to make sure that you read your email in your official University email account. For most students that is Google Apps for Education (<http://www.stonybrook.edu/mycloud>), but you may verify your official Electronic Post Office (EPO) address at <http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/checking-or-changing-your-mail-forwarding-address-in-the-epo>. If you choose to forward your official University email to another off-campus account, faculty are not responsible for any undeliverable messages to your alternative personal accounts. You can set up Google Mail forwarding using these DoIT-provided instructions found at <http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/setting-up-mail-forwarding-in-google-mail>. If you need technical assistance, please contact Client Support at (631) 632-9800 or [supportteam@stonybrook.edu](mailto:supportteam@stonybrook.edu).

**Students with disabilities:** If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Student Accessibility Support Center. The SASC office is located in 128 [Educational Communications Center](#) (ECC), directly behind the Psychology A building and diagonally across from the rear parking lot of the Student Activities Center (SAC). For more information about available supports, students can visit the SASC website [stonybrook.edu/SASC](http://stonybrook.edu/SASC), email [SASC@stonybrook.edu](mailto:SASC@stonybrook.edu), call 631-632-6748, or walk in the SASC office. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students requiring emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and SASC. For procedures and information, go to the following web site: <http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu/fire/disabilities/asp>

**Critical Incident Management:** Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures.

**Academic Integrity:** Do not plagiarize, which is defined as “to take and use as one’s own the thoughts, writings, or inventions of another” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). This means you have plagiarized if, for example: you copy part or all of another student's paper, or use another student's paper from another class or semester, or if you download part or all of your paper from the internet and claim it as your own, or if you copy from a book and do not quote or cite the author. I take plagiarism very seriously. If you plagiarize, you will be turned in to Academic Judiciary. If you are confused about what constitutes plagiarism, come talk to me about it.

**University statement on Academic Integrity:** Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at <http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/>

**Course Evaluation:** Each semester Stony Brook University asks students to provide feedback on their courses and instructors through

an online course evaluation system. Feedback from course evaluations helps me determine what texts, assignments, pedagogical practices work well or not. Course evaluations also help our department continue to deliver a rigorous, exciting, and comprehensive curriculum in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies that prepares students for a diverse range of career, graduate and professional school options.

**Academic Success and Tutoring Center (ASTC):** The ASTC provides free academic support services for all undergraduate students, including one-on-one tutoring, small group tutoring, academic success coaching, and public speaking seminars. Learn more about these services and additional campus resources at [www.stonybrook.edu/tutoring](http://www.stonybrook.edu/tutoring).

**Writing Center:** Writers of all skill levels and at any stage of the writing process are invited to make appointments at the Writing Center. Writers can bring in anything they're working on, be it a creative piece, a personal statement, or a paper for class. Tutors will help writers brainstorm, organize, focus, and develop their written works.

We aim to meet all writers' needs, but in the interest of helping writers rather than helping papers, we do not function as an editing service. Tutors may choose to address some grammar and punctuation issues, but only at advanced stages of the writing process. When we do address sentence-level concerns, we discuss fundamental concepts as opposed to making editorial corrections. Make an appointment at: <https://sunysb.mywconline.com>

**Questions?** Feel free to contact me to discuss the course at any point during the semester. Come to my office hours, make an appointment with me, send me an email, or see me after class.

**Keep the conversation going, use our course hashtag: #CultDis18.** I will use this hashtag on Twitter to post articles and commentary related to course themes. Students are encouraged to do the same on Twitter and other social media. Some other hashtags to explore to get you started: #CripTheVote, #disabilitysolidarity, #ShitCripsHear, #AbleismExists, #DisabledAndCute, #DisabledandSTEM, #ChronicIllness, #Spoonie, #HealthcareVoter, etc.



### Course schedule

Aug 28: Introduction to key concepts and themes for the course and discussion of course requirements

#### Historicizing Disability

Aug 30: In class film screening: *Lives Worth Living* (Eric Neudel, 2011; 60 minutes) (US)

Sep 4: Discussion of *Lives Worth Living*

#### Theoretical key term: stigma

Sep 6: Goffman, *Stigma* (BB)

#### Theorizing the dis/abled body

Sep 11: Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts* (Introduction: Bodies That Do Not Matter, pp. 1-23)

#### Theoretical key term: Intersectionality

Sep 13: Nirmala Erevelles with Andrea Minear, *Disability in Global Contexts* (“Unspeakable’ Offenses: Disability Studies at the Intersection of Multiple Differences,” pp. 95-120)

#### Queering disability/Crippling sexuality/Grappling with Cure

Sep 18: Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection* (Introduction and pp. 1-36)

Sep 20: Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection* cont. (pp. 37-100)

Sep 25: Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection* cont. (pp. 101-148)

Sep 27: Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection* cont. (pp. 149-190)

#### Enacting dis/ability in public space: field notes and paper due

Oct 2: In class film screening: *The Sea Inside*

Oct 4: *The Sea Inside* continued

Oct 9: **Fall break—No class**

Oct 11: **Midterm exam**

### **Language and thought**

Oct 16: Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices* (“A Deaf World,” pp. 3-30)

Oct 18: Sacks, *Seeing Voices* cont. (“Thinking in Sign,” pp. 31-98)

Oct 23: Sacks, *Seeing Voices* cont. (“The Revolution of the Deaf,” pp. 99-130)

### **Interviewing as method**

Oct 25: Everyone should listen to Episodes 1 and 2 of Alice Wong’s Disability Visibility Project Podcast

Episode 1: “Activism and the Disability Community” with Andrew Pulrang and Gregg Beratan

<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2017/09/13/disability-visibility-podcast-ep-1-activism-and-the-disability-community/>

Episode 2: “Immigration and Disability” with Michelle Garcia and Alicia Contreras

<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2017/09/24/ep-2-immigration-and-disability/>

Oct 30: Choose 2 more podcasts to listen to—whatever most interests you!

Be prepared to share with the class what you learned from

### **Ways of seeing**

Nov 1: Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen* (Part I: “Blindness and Culture”)

**Interview proposal due**

### **Theoretical key term: blind phenomenology**

Nov 6: Kleege cont. (Part II: “Blind Phenomenology”)

Nov 8: No class: finish Kleege and work on interview!

Nov 13: Kleege cont. (Part III: “Blind Reading: Voice, Texture, Identity”)

### **Logics of confinement**

Nov 15: *Disability Incarcerated*

(Chapman, Carey, and Ben-Moshe, “Reconsidering Confinement: Interlocking Locations and Logics of Incarceration,” pp. 3-24)

Nov 20: *Disability Incarcerated*

(Ware, Ruzsa, and Dias, "It Can't Be Fixed Because It's Not Broken: Racism and Disability," pp. 163-184)

Nov 22: **Thanksgiving—No class**

Nov 27: *Disability Incarcerated*

(Ben-Moshe, "Alternatives to (Disability) Incarceration," pp. 255-272)

### **Ethics of care**

Nov 29: Nirmala Erevelles, "The 'Other' Side of the Dialectic: Toward a Materialist Ethic of Care," pp. 173-197

Dec 4: Erevelles, "The 'Other' Side of the Dialectic" cont.

Dec 6: **Wrap-up = Interviews due + take-home final handed out**



### **Course Requirements**

**1. Class participation (10%):** You are required to bring the current readings to each session and be ready to discuss those readings with questions, comments, and criticisms. Some of the readings will be difficult: spend time reading carefully and thinking critically about what you have read! One way to engage in discussion is to bring up specific passages in the text that are interesting, confusing, provocative, etc. Take notes during class. I also recommend that you use the questions posted on Blackboard to help you engage with the material and join in discussion. **Attendance:** You are permitted up to three absences without penalty. **Each absence in excess of three will lower your attendance point total.** If you miss a class, contact another student for the notes.

**2. Midterm exam (20%):** There will be a midterm exam on October 11. The midterm is designed to test the student's knowledge of the material we have read and discussed in class. It is not a test on general knowledge. There will be four sections graded on a 100-point scale. **All answers must be written in a blue book. Don't forget your student ID and blue books!**

**First section: Short Answer Questions**

You will be required to give one word or short sentence answers to these questions. You do not need to rewrite the question in your blue book. Simply number from 1 to 10 and write the answer. Questions will primarily concern factual information from the readings: people or characters, places, and dates. A few will ask you about ideas or arguments. The dates and people will be ones discussed in class and in the reading. You will be asked about authors—so you need to know who wrote what (this also applies to the other parts of the exam).

**Second section: Key Terms and Definitions**

You will have a choice in this section. This section will ask you to define, **in a full paragraph**, a term or concept or identify a person. Be specific and provide detail. In each answer you will need to include the reading in which the term appears, the context for the term, the meaning of the term, and why it is important in relation to the themes of the class. Be sure to write the term in your blue book before defining it.

**Third section: Explication of a quotation from one of the readings**

You will be provided with a quotation from one of the readings, which you must explicate. This means you will interpret the quote in relation to the work in which it is contained, as well as in relation to themes discussed in class. Your answer should be **two full paragraphs**.

**Fourth section: Essay**

You will answer **one question** from a choice of two. Your answer must be at least **three-to-four full paragraphs** long. Again, the more detail you give, the more points you will earn. This section is designed to test your ability to interpret material (arguments and ideas) and to analyze. (Definition of “analyze”: “To take to pieces; to separate, distinguish, to examine minutely,” *Oxford English Dictionary*).

**Extra Credit Question**

An opportunity for extra points!

**3. Enacting Dis/ability in Public Space Paper (20%):** For this paper, students will observe and write about how dis/ability is enacted in public spaces. Students are required to spend at least one hour observing human activity in a public space (streets, shops and shopping malls, subways, airports, train stations, bars, restaurants, and cafes, sports fields and arenas, performance halls, etc.). While observing, they will take field notes—detailed descriptions of what they observe. Students will also take at least 3 photographs of the space. Their observations, field notes, and photographs will become the material for a short paper (2-3 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) on the enactment of dis/ability in public spaces. Some questions to consider as you are observing: What sorts of people are in a particular space (for example, are they alone, in pairs, in peer groups, in families, etc.)? How do people move through and

occupy space? How do people participate in activities and events? Pay attention to the built environment. You will want to observe general aspects of the space as well as specific accommodations for people with disabilities (for example, parking, automatic doors, ramps, curb cuts, disabled toilets, Braille, closed captioning). Some questions to think about regarding accommodations, include: Where are these accommodations? How are they labeled or indicated? How do they function? Are they currently working properly? Who uses them? Although the paper is primarily concerned with the enactment of dis/ability in public spaces, you will also want to think intersectionally, considering gender, race, class, and sexuality in your observations and analysis. Is a space inviting and welcoming for all? Why or why not? Course materials will help you with your analysis (for example, think about images and descriptions of disabling environments from the film *Lives Worth Living* and Erevelles's practice of "carnal sociology").

Students will turn in their field notes and photographs along with their paper. Papers are due at the beginning of class on September 27. Late papers will be penalized.

**Grade rubric:**

**Field notes** (3 points)—how detailed are your observations of the enactment of dis/ability in a particular space?

**Analysis** (6 points)—how well do you use course materials to help analyze how dis/ability is enacted in a particular public space?

**Organization** (3 points)—how organized is your argument? (strong thesis, good transition between paragraphs)

**Writing** (3 points)—is your writing clear and concise? Have you read and re-read to catch typos and grammatical mistakes?

**4. Interview (30%):** Students will conduct a 30-minute interview with a person with a disability, a health care practitioner or educator who works with disabled people, or a person involved with the disability rights movement. Students will transcribe the interview and also write a 2-page reaction to the interview process. Students must submit a proposal on November 1, which will include a 1-page description of the person to be interviewed, an explanation of why this person will be a good interviewee on the topic of disability, and ten questions for the interview. Interviews are due at the beginning of the last day of class (December 6). Late interviews will be penalized. I will provide a handout and discuss the

project in more detail in class when we explore interviewing as method on October 25.

**5. Take-home final exam (20%):**

Students will be given a hard copy of the take-home final on the last day of class. Students will answer 2 of 3 questions. Each answer must be approximately **2 pages** (so 4 pages total for the exam), typed, double-spaced, and in 12 pt. font. Each question requires that you write about at least two texts in order to answer the question fully. The purpose of this exam is for you to show an understanding of the material we have read and discussed this semester. **You should not use other sources to answer the questions (as usual, I do not want you to consult the internet), nor should you discuss the exam with your classmates. I expect you to do close and careful readings of the material we have looked at in class. You will be graded on your depth of understanding of the material, your ability to make a cogent argument, and to write clearly.** REREAD and edit your exams carefully to catch spelling and grammatical errors and to make sure that your answer is clearly written and argued. You may quote, but only very sparingly. If you quote, you must properly cite the author and page number in the text (e.g. Kleege, 79).

The final must be turned in on Blackboard before midnight on Thursday, December 13. Late finals will be penalized.

