

English 389
Composing Disability, Health and Wellness
Spring 2014

“Disability is indeed a fundamental human experience that is missing from our critical consciousness.”

—Sharon Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*

“Racialized assumptions and biases are historically embedded into the very DNA of health-care delivery systems, and shape interactions and outcomes.”

—Jonathan Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease*

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Catalogue Description

This course uses the lenses of disability studies and medical humanities to explore texts on the subject of disability, health, and wellness. Emphasis is on the way that these concepts are composed and represented through language and visual means.

Prerequisites and Satisfactions

Prerequisites: English 103/193 and junior standing, *or* permission of the instructor. Satisfies elective credit in the Writing Minor, or general elective credit.

Course Rationale

This course investigates the ways that disability, health, and wellness are composed in contemporary life. By “composed,” I mean constructed through language and image, through memoirs, films, and sign-language poetry—any and all the communicative practices used to make meaning. We’ll explore various models of disability/health/wellness, ranging from the medical to the social and poststructural, with attention to the ways that each model intersects with race, gender, class, and sexuality. Through our explorations, we’ll theorize concepts including *normal*, *passing*, *access*, and *built context*, and consider how these theories both emerge and are contested through individual authors’ and artists’ composing practices.

Our course is divided into two major units: *definition* and *representation*. In the first unit, we will ask how language (signed as well as spoken) may influence, or even construct, our understandings of disability, health, and wellness. In the second unit, we will engage in close study of one of the most prevalent metaphors governing human well-being—“visibility”—and ask how visual representations, like (but also unlike) words, shape our understandings.

Rhetorical elements studied will include purpose, genre, audience, context, form, and style. Student work will range from short response papers (“text preps”) to major projects. Major projects will be assigned in both in written (essay) form and in digital (multi-media storytelling or poster) form.

Course Objectives

- Explain and apply key concepts involved in the study of disability, health, and wellness, including each of those terms itself, as well as other key terms including *normal*, *accommodation*, *access*, *built context*, *in/visibility*, *supercrip*, and *universal design*.
- Critically analyze texts that represent a wide range of views on, or beliefs about, disability / health / wellness. Such critical analysis should include the ability to identify and discuss features including purpose, genre, audience, context, form, and style.
- Develop, express and revise a critical claim or stance on a question or issue.
- Identify and engage others’ critical claims or positions as a means to developing and further understanding your own.
- Identify and evaluate appropriate research sources, integrate sources clearly, and document accurately.
- Deliver your arguments in multiple media and modes (including visual, verbal and oral/aural), with appropriate copy-editing and polish of both verbal and visual elements.
- Substantively revise your work in response to peer and instructor feedback, thus demonstrating your ability to engage in writing as an ongoing practice of critical re-thinking and re-writing.

Accommodations, Disabilities, and Academic Support

Spelman College is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the College’s programs or services, contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as soon as possible. To receive any academic accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with

ODS. The ODS works with students confidentially and does not disclose any disability-related information without their permission. The ODS serves as a clearinghouse on disability issues and works in partnership with faculty and all other student service offices. For further information about services for students with disabilities, please contact the ODS at (404) 270-5289 (voice), located in MacVicar Hall, Room 106.

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including the Writing Center and the Learning Resources Center, are available to all students.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

At the heart of Spelman College's mission is academic excellence, along with the development of intellectual, ethical, and leadership qualities. These goals can flourish only in an institutional environment where every member of the College affirms honesty, trust, and mutual respect. All members of the academic community of Spelman College are expected to understand and follow the basic standards of honesty and integrity, upholding a commitment to high ethical standards. Students are expected to read and abide by the Spelman College Code of Conduct (see the current Spelman College Student Handbook) and are expected to behave as mature and responsible members of the Spelman College academic community. Students are expected to follow ethical standards in their personal conduct and in their behavior towards other members of the community. They are expected to observe basic honesty in their work, words, ideas, and actions. Failure to do so is a violation of the Spelman College Academic Integrity Policy. Violators will be subject to the sanctions outlined in the Spelman College Bulletin.

A rhetorical note about plagiarism: All academic writers use ideas, words, and short passages from others in their own writing. Reference and citation are required parts of academic writing. Material from outside sources, *whether quoted, paraphrased, summarized, or simply referred to*, must always be accompanied by acknowledgement of the source. Failure to acknowledge the contributions of others' words or ideas to your work is plagiarism. Understanding what plagiarism is and how attribution works can be complicated, so be sure to ask as many questions as you need to. I strongly encourage you to read the full Academic Integrity Policy (in the College *Bulletin*) and come to me with any questions you may have.

Work From Other Classes

Within the category of "academic honesty" comes the issue of submitting any work which has/will be submitted to fulfill another academic requirement. This practice, identified in the College's Academic Integrity Policy as "multiple submissions," is a violation of academic honesty. However, I realize that—like most authors—you may find yourself returning to sources you've read previously, or topics that you've found compelling in the past. For example, you may wish to include a reading from another class in your research for an essay, or you may wish

to re-visit a topic that you've already discussed in a current or previous class. If this is the case, *you must discuss the situation with me before work on the project begins*. Failure to do so will be considered a violation of academic honesty and subject to appropriate penalties.

Grievances

The form for filing student grievances may be found on the Spelman College website at <http://www.spelman.edu/academics/provost/academic-deans/forms-resources>.

Attendance

This class is interactive and discussion-based. Without each member's presence and active participation, the class doesn't work. Therefore, attendance, preparedness and participation are required. Please be aware of these specific requirements:

- You may miss two classes without penalty. These "free" absences are intended to accommodate for unpredictable circumstances, such as illness, so try not to use them early in the semester. Being sick does not entitle you to extra "free" absences. Whether or not any additional absences will be excused must be discussed with me individually.
- You will be considered absent if you are unprepared for class or miss a substantial portion (15 minutes or more) of any class meeting.
- Missing a scheduled conference, workshop, or meeting will count as an absence.
- Absences beyond the two "free" ones will pull down your final grade at the rate of one grade level for every additional absence. For example, a total of four absences (two "free" and two not) at the end of the semester would make a "B plus" into a "B minus."
- Tardiness affects your attendance record as well: every three tardies equals one absence. You are responsible for keeping track of your own attendance record, but you're welcome to check your records with me any time.
- If you will be absent from class for a full week or more, or need to discuss other issues regarding attendance, contact the office of Undergraduate Studies.

Punctuality

Being prepared includes having the work due that day *in hand*, both reading and writing, at the *beginning* of class. (Arriving to class on time and subsequently printing out readings / assignments is not acceptable.) I cannot accept late work unless you've arranged for an extension ahead of time, or in extraordinary circumstances (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). If you find yourself beginning to fall behind, see me right away. I'll work with you to help you get back on track. Note that the scoring guide for our class includes substantial attention to "preparedness" grades.

Required Texts and Materials

- Davis, Lennard J., ed. *The Disability Studies Reader*, 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Bell, Christopher M., ed. *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions*. Germany: LIT Verlag, 2011.
- Additional articles, readings, and viewings. Readings will be downloaded from the Woodruff Library's online databases, from the (publicly available) World Wide Web, or provided in PDF form on Moodle.
- Readings do not have to be printed out, but note that you must download them to your device if you plan to access them digitally. This is to avoid any potential problems that may arise if the Spelman servers are down during a given class period. Assignments must be printed out unless otherwise specified in class.
- A notebook in which to keep all paper materials from the course. Establish a system that allows you to pick out any piece of writing, or any handout, within a few seconds. You must have a paper copy of the course syllabus, all handouts, and all assignments. Readings (as noted above) may be accessed digitally.
- If you have a laptop or tablet, you are welcome to use it during class. Note that conducting any business on your device not related to *this* course during class time will result in being marked absent. Do not use your phone during class, even for academic purposes, unless you have personally discussed this approach with me ahead of time.

Discussion Leadership

- On designated days, members of our class will be assigned to lead that day's discussion. Available time slots are indicated on the course calendar; sign-up for time slots is first-come, first-served.
- Excellent discussion leadership entails careful preparation of the reading(s); producing a text prep for all class members (you must make the appropriate number of copies); and leading a productive, critical discussion during class. The text prep must do the following: 1) summarize the reading(s); 2) identify key terms and concepts; and 3) provide a list of critical questions / ideas for discussion. I will provide a model text prep of the first readings so you have a sense of what I'm looking for.
- A productive, critical discussion engages all class members; ensures that all class members adequately understand the reading(s); and spends at least half the time wrestling with difficult questions or controversial ideas raised by the reading(s). If you wish, you may design an activity (e.g., a game) as part of your discussion leadership. Just be aware that I am looking for *critical engagement* with readings by all members of the class. No word searches, no crossword puzzles.

Required Writing/Composing

- **Discussion leadership text prep.** See above.
- **Major projects.** You will complete two major projects (each a minimum of 1,250 words), one for each of our two course units. One project will be a conventional academic essay; the other will be a visual composition such as a poster or video. Both projects must be driven by a central argument, draw upon scholarly sources as evidence,

and be carefully revised through several stages from rough draft to copy-edited final draft. See the section “Grading” for specific criteria by which major projects will be graded.

- **Fourth-hour project.** See guidelines below. Specific guidelines for the reflective write-up will be distributed via Moodle.

Fourth-Hour Project

For your fourth-hour project, you will work in a small group to conduct and present an analysis of a built context in the AUC from a disability-studies perspective. As we will study in class, “built context” can mean something physical (such as a flight of stairs), linguistic (such as Spelman College’s required syllabus statement on disability), or cognitive (such as the ways of learning that are privileged or de-privileged in a particular class). When selecting your built context, think in terms of something that can be adequately explored in a 10-minute presentation. For example, Spelman’s Disability Statement is do-able; the entire Student Handbook is not. Or, as another example, one part of a building or *possibly* a whole building is do-able; a larger construct, such as “residence halls,” is not.

Your group will conduct an analysis of this built context, treating it as a primary text. In addition, you must draw upon critical sources (at least four, with no more than two coming from our course bibliography) to deepen and enrich your analysis. Other critical sources might include the Americans with Disabilities Act, critical texts we have not studied in class, and/or interviews conducted with users or designers of the context you choose.

Your presentation will be 10 minutes long, with an additional 5 minutes for questions and responses. Presentations must be accessible and multi-modal. In other words, you must design a presentation that takes into account the needs of an audience with varying dis/abilities, and make use of varying modes, such as visual, oral/aural, and kinetic. To put this another way, assume that if you show an image, you will also need to provide a means for non-seeing audience members to access the information it conveys; if your presentation includes oral speech, you should provide a means (such as a detailed outline or script) for non-hearing audience members to access the information. Your grade will be based on a combination of your group’s presentation and your individually composed reflective write-up, turned in at the same time as the presentation.

Grading

When responding to classmates’ writing, use the following criteria. I will do the same when responding and assigning grades. These guidelines hold for all assignments, including short writes, longer writes, reflections, and responses. Note that when I use the word *appropriate* in this list, I mean “appropriate to the rhetorical situation (purpose, audience, and context).”

An excellent piece of writing / multimedia project must:

- Communicate a clear purpose appropriate to the assignment and audience. If driven by a central argument (as your two major projects must be), the argument should be clear, precise, and complex.
- Provide thorough evidence to support the project's purpose, including not only concrete data such as facts or quotations, but also careful explanations of *why* that evidence is significant.
- Correctly cite all sources, including any given out in class. Note that if citation is seriously flawed, the entire assignment may receive a failing grade. Note also that all assignments, including text preps and other short preparedness assignments, must be correctly cited. You may use either MLA or APA style citation.
- Integrate sources smoothly and clearly.
- Acknowledge and discuss the complexity of the topic at hand, and provide clear explanations appropriate to the audience's needs. Where appropriate, take potential counter-arguments into account, and respond thoughtfully to those counter-arguments.
- Use precise language to deepen descriptions and sharpen analyses. Avoid clichés, word packages and inappropriate registers (i.e., too formal or too informal).
- Establish and adhere to a purposeful structure.
- Deliver in a professional style, with appropriate design, usability, and copy-editing.

All course requirements must be met in order to receive credit for this course. In addition, remember that overarching criteria such as attendance and punctuality will affect your final grade. The maximum number of points you can earn is 100.

Point Allotments

Project 1	32
Project 2	32
Discussion leadership and text prep.....	15
Fourth-hour project (group presentation + individual reflective write-up)	20
A completely free point. Because math	1

Letter Grade Equivalencies

A.....	96-100
A—.....	92-95
B+.....	88-91
B.....	84-87
B—.....	80-83
C+.....	76-79
C.....	72-75
C—.....	68-71
D+	64-67
D.....	60-63
F	0-59