

WRT 205, Section M144: Critical Research and Inquiry— “Everyday Representations of Dis/Ability”

“How has a society been created and perpetuated which has excluded so many of its members?” — Irving Zola

“The social, political, and cultural analyses undertaken by disability studies form a prism through which one can gain a broader understanding of society and human experience, and the significance of human variation.” — Simi Linton

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Course Description

Welcome to WRT 205, a course that focuses on rhetorical strategies, practices, and methods of analysis and research. This course relies heavily on research, and we will work to develop your skills as rhetorical researchers. Being a good researcher involves developing critical reading and thinking skills, making choices about useful and

relevant information, and applying your research to different mediums for different audiences. A rhetorical researcher and writer is critically aware, thorough, persuasive, and ethical—qualities we will discuss this semester.

Researching and writing rhetorically also acknowledges that there are multiple ways to learn, research, and compose, and that different methods are appropriate within different contexts. We research in order to discover and understand what we don’t know, to ask critical questions, to collect and represent the voices and perspectives of others, and to evaluate evidence and claims. Often, this requires an element of *unseeing*, a process of defamiliarization that helps us to see “normal” things differently. This unseeing allows us to reimagine what is “abnormal.”

Inquiry: Everyday Representations of Dis/Ability

What is “normal”? How does disability mark particular people as “abnormal”? And as Irving Zola asks, how have we, as a society, so consistently excluded the *world’s largest minority group*?

Our inquiry for the semester is **Everyday Representations of Dis/Ability**. Specifically, we will look beyond popular representations of disability seen in films like *Forrest Gump* and TV shows like *Glee* that circulate stereotypes and too-simple understandings of disability. Instead, we will explore representations of disability that account for complex material realities in order to question how we understand and perpetuate ideas about ability itself. We will examine different themes that commonly surface around disability—such as pity, the search for a “cure,” and overcoming narratives. We will also consider how disability is constructed through language and discourse, by news and popular media, and within schools and policies.

How are particular bodies normalized and stigmatized?

How do constructions and representations of bodies affect us all?

What does it mean personally, politically, and economically to be able-bodied vs. disabled?



Disability is often conceived as an **individual problem**. We will approach texts this semester that challenge the idea that disability is negative. We will also read texts that challenge the notion that disability is located within the *individual*—often, disability is disregarded as something that only affects the disabled. In this course, we will explore how disability both affects individuals and is socially constructed through our cultural values and systems. To frame this discussion, we will draw from Disability Studies and a range of texts to analyze how we construct particular bodies as ab/normal, granting and denying them access to particular spaces and positions of power. This semester, I would like us to suspend judgments, to ask critical questions, and to refuse easy answers as we reflect critically on the messages we receive everyday about dis/ability.

“Day in Court for Americans with Disabilities Protests Planned Over Supreme Court’s ADA Rulings” (NPR)

Course Goals for WRT 205

1. Students will investigate a shared topic of inquiry and develop research questions that engage the complexities (social, political, ideological, economic, historical) of and current debates about that topic.
2. Students will learn multiple research strategies, including primary research, and develop more extensive knowledge of library databases in order to identify sources appropriate to their research questions.
3. Students will evaluate the validity of their sources in the context of their research questions.
4. Students will read sources rhetorically, which involves considering authors' positions in relation to audiences, recognizing points of congruence and difference among texts, and establishing a genuine dialogue with others' ideas.
5. Students will understand the role of genres, sources, styles, and media in communicating with particular audiences and for specific purposes.
6. Students will understand the ways in which digital media shape all stages of the research and writing process—*invention, composing, revision, delivery*—and will understand how the effects of digital media vary according to audience, genre, context, and purpose.

7. Students will write a series of informal assignments as part of their composing process, and at least three sustained, finished texts that respond to specific rhetorical situations.
8. Students will practice and produce analysis, argument, synthesis, and summary as central components of researched writing.
9. Students will practice the strategies of incorporating the research of others into their own texts in a variety of ways (including summary, paraphrase, quotation) and will provide textual evidence of where, how, and why sources are being used.
10. Students will produce texts that demonstrate a nuanced understanding of and an ethical relationship with source texts and research participant.
11. Students will demonstrate how their dialogue with sources has broadened and enhanced their own thinking about the issue.
12. Students will develop revision and editing strategies for organization, prose style, and technical control.

Course Texts & Materials

- Harris, Joseph. *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*.
- Wysocki, Anne Frances, and Dennis A. Lynch. *The DK Handbook*, 2nd ed.

Our course is loaded on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>). You will need to find, download, and link to a range of course materials regularly throughout the semester. I will also contact you via the course listserv, so please check your .syr account at least once daily.

Work of the Course

During the course you may be asked to annotate readings, jot down observations, take notes on class discussions, and engage in a variety of drafting and revision activities. All these activities are important and will have an impact on your development and success as academic writers (and your final grade). As you will see in the grade breakdown below, 10% of your final grade comes from homework, which I will collect on a regular basis and grade on a check, check +, check - scale. You will get a zero for work you do not complete or don't submit on time.

Grading

- Unit 1: Flashpoints Portfolio.** **20%**
Using the critical reading guidelines outlined by Harris in "Coming to Terms," you will compose critical summaries of three assigned readings and one text that you locate through database research. You will also generate a researchable question specific to the course inquiry.
- Unit 2: Source Analysis Essay.** **20%**
Next, you will analyze the secondary sources you locate specific to your research question and account for how your perspective on your research topic has changed as a result of your encounters with other ideas and perspectives. 6 pages.

Unit 3: Research Synthesis Essay. **30%**

Then, you will write a research essay directed toward a specific audience that draws on no more than three secondary sources and primary research. 8 pages.

Unit 4: Translation Project & Reflection. **20%**

Finally, you will translate your research essay into a visual presentation or new media “trailer” that draws on a range of new sources. You will also compose a final reflection that analyzes and accounts for your rhetorical choices in the presentation.

Homework & Participation. **10%**

You are responsible for completing and submitting all assigned homework.

NOTE: Some feedback will come from peers, some will come from me, and both are important. Feedback from multiple sources lets you know how readers with different perspectives and values respond to your writing. This feedback will also help you assess your own work.

Attendance & Participation

Writing studios are courses in language learning, and language is learned in communities. Absences and lack of preparation for class will affect your classmates' work as well as your own. The work you do in class and prepare for each class is as important as the assignments you turn in for a grade. In addition, each unit calendar is only a projection and is subject to changes—another reason why attendance is vital.

Absences *do* happen. If you miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned. Class time cannot be reconstructed and your performance, work, and final course grade will be affected by absences. If you miss three weeks of classes or more, it is unlikely that you will pass the course.

Course & SU Policies

Accessibility. This is a course about disability, welcoming different learning and composing styles, and questioning the “normal.” If we can do something to make the classroom more accessible, please let me know immediately. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs.

Accommodations. If you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Ave, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

These are not *all* of the policies for our class. Together, we will write additional guidelines to clarify our expectations for each other and for the course.

Computer Use & Email. Most of the work you hand in for this class will be typed and should follow MLA formatting (Times New Roman, size 12 point, one-inch margins). You are welcome to bring a laptop to class with you for taking notes and in-class writing exercises.

We will also use email for contact outside class. Contact me (ahhitt@syr.edu) about your coursework, to set up appointments to meet with me outside class, or to ask a question.

Academic Integrity. All writing submitted for this course is understood to be your original work. In cases where academic dishonesty is detected (the fraudulent submission of another's work, in whole or part, as your own), you may be subject to a failing grade for the project or the course, and in the worst case, to academic probation or expulsion. For a more detailed description of the guidelines for adhering to academic integrity in the College of Arts and Sciences, visit <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

Religious Observance. SU's religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any exam, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. An online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class. (http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm)

Student Writing. All texts written in this course are generally public. You may be asked to share them with a peer, the class, or with me during classroom activities or for homework. You will also be asked to sign a consent form requesting the use of your writing for professional development, teacher training, and classroom instruction within the Syracuse University Writing Program.

The Writing Center. Experienced writing consultants at the Writing Center (101 HB Crouse Hall) can teach you how to succeed on individual assignments and ultimately become a better writer. They're prepared to work one-on-one with you at *any* stage of your process with *any* kind of writing. Whether you need help understanding an assignment, brainstorming ideas, revising subsequent drafts, or developing editing strategies, face-to-face and online appointments are available for 25- or 50-minute sessions throughout the semester and can be reserved up to seven days in advance via their online scheduling program, WOnline. In addition, drop-in appointments are welcome Monday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and brief concerns or questions can be emailed to consultants via the eWC.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, go to <http://wc.syr.edu>. This is a *free* resource, and I highly recommend it for every assignment you work on in this class.