

## **Introduction to Disability Studies: Form, Text, and Practice**

Taught by Prof. Mae Howard Eskenazi

Wednesdays 1:45-4:45pm

Introduction to Disability Studies: Form, Text, and Practices is a class that fuses disability studies, queer theory, Black feminist theory, visibility studies, film theory, and disabled artistic practices. Centering the praxis of disability justice, this class asks students to think about practice and theory as an intertwined discipline. Students will study, write, and create works that looking towards models of production that center community based and interdependent relationality. Some areas that this course covers includes but is not limited to disability studies vs. crip theory, the history and legacy of AIDS epidemic, disability justice and mutual aid organizing, multi sensorial artistic practice, as well as tending to questions of labor, pain, excess, and debilitation.

Disability studies has a long and complicated history of centering whiteness, domesticity, and the West in its models of rights-based advocacy. This class turns away from the white independent disabled superstar and towards the teachings of crip of color critique and disability justice to think beyond the terms and conditions that have been rectified as productive models in uplifting the “good disabled person.” We will use texts and teachings from Sins Invalid, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha, Audre Lorde, Park McArthur, Constantina Zavitsanos, Jasbir Puar, Cara Page & Erica Woodland, C. Riley Snorton, LaMarr Jurelle Bruce, Mel Chen, Kai Cheng Thom, Sami Schalk, Kay Ulanday Barrett, and Beatrice Adler Bolton & Artie Verkant to guide us in our efforts. Students will also engage with transformative justice and anti-carceral models of thought through Mia Mingus’s Care Pods Activity. Finally, students will have the chance to meet with various artists through Zoom and in person visits throughout the semester.

Reading is both in depth and attends to a broad survey of the field. There are four required texts. All other texts have been uploaded in PDF form on Canvas.

### **Coursework**

This class is divided into 4 mini projects or assignments, giving students a broad range of production styles and a capacious approach to each assignment.

### **Reading Presentation (22%)**

Each student will select a week to dive deeper into the reading and give a 30-minute presentation on a reading of their choice from the syllabus alongside a disabled artist, organizer, writer, or performer. There is a list at the bottom of the syllabus as a starting off point. However, the list is not all encompassing. If there is an artist you would like to present on who is not on the list, please email me and we will assess their relevance for the assignment. The reading presentation is paired with a 2-page double-spaced paper, 500 words. This paper is meant to exemplify your understanding of the assigned text in relationship to the artist who

you are presenting on. In a way, this is the written-out version of your presentation. Your presentation should end with 3-5 discussion questions that allow the class to sit with the reading and work you have just presented to us.

### **Bedlife Project (22%)**

The Bedlife project proposes the bed as a site of investigative inquiry and creative response. Inspired by artists such as Bob Flanagan, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha, Tala Khanmalek and Heidi Rhodes, this project asks you to respond to your bed, someone else's bed, a past bed, or future bed. This project welcomes any medium including but not limited to sculpture, performance, video, photography, writing, drawing, painting, and installation. Some key questions for you to consider: what does the bed represent to you? How can you move beyond the physical object of the bed to create something that *does* instead of *represents*? What are the potentialities of the bed? What is the bed as a horizon, measurement of time, or gathering place?

### **Mutual Aid Project or Final Project (22%)**

Inspired by the practices of disability justice, this third project asks you to propose a mutual aid practice. This could be a workshop on Narcan use, a fundraiser to support a trans person paying for top surgery, or a herbs skill share. Or perhaps you are working with a collective in Philadelphia or wanting to support an already existing collective on a fundraiser or event that they are planning. The purpose of this project is for students to gather insight from the communities of which they are apart and design something that uplifts the mutual aid work either already happening around them or supporting someone or something that needs a boost of mutual aid work. The scale of your project does not have to be monumental. Thus, this is not a project that is meant to support white saviorism, but instead ask you to think supporting the communities and people you are in working conversation with. The project is in two parts: the proposal phase (5%) and then the execution of the proposal (15%). The proposal is due on or before Week 11. The execution of the proposal is due by the end of the semester. Remember, think feasible and localized.

### **Final Project (22%)**

The final project asks you to respond to one of the themes from the semester and create project in response. Perhaps you want to make an installation that responds to spectrality or hauntings. Maybe you want to write a research paper that outlines the history of Narcan use in queer underground events or track the accessibility protests in Seoul for accessible subway use. There will be a check in marker in the middle of the semester as a time for students to discuss with me what they are thinking. Final projects are due at the end of the semester.

### Classroom Policies

Participation in class is vital to creating an equitable environment for everyone. If speaking in class is not your go-to mode of participation, you are welcome to write slightly longer reading responses to exemplify your engagement with the work. Participation overall is worth (12% of your grade). We are still living in a pandemic with long term health effects that are undermined by public social life and university policies, oftentimes excluding those who are most vulnerable. Please be mindful of your peers who may be more immunocompromised and thus vulnerable than you are. Masked are highly encouraged in this space for the safety of our class as a collective learning environment.

Expectations of class behavior and what is marked as violent is pulled from disability justice principles, which are both the guiding principles of our class and of much of the broader artistic and organizing practices that we will discuss. As a result, anti-Black racism, Zionism, transphobia, sexism, homophobia, anti-Asian sentiments, anti-sex work sentiments, and xenophobia are all not permitted in this space. These harmful thought patterns replicate and extend the reaches of ableism and do not make for a conducive learning environment. While this is a place to grow, violent sentiments will not be tolerated. If you have any questions about this policy, please reach out to me and I would be happy to speak more in depth with you.

### Trigger Warnings

Diving into disability studies through the study of disability justice, feminist theory, Black studies, and queer theory has an inevitability of triggering content because colonialism, imperialism, racism, transphobia, and ableism are inherently harmful and thus upsetting. This course does not feature trigger warnings because different aspects will trigger different people. Students will not be penalized for leaving class to take a break nor will they be penalized if they have to skip a reading because the content is harmful to them personally. However, as a participant of this class, I urge you to carefully consider what triggers you and why. By analyzing what content is activating for us, we are better able to make the connection between systems of oppression and identify patterns of said oppression in our daily lives.

### Access

If you are sick or having a flare up, you are welcome to zoom in from home. Additionally, if you have any access needs around sound, sight, smell, touch, allergies, ASL, captions, etc. please do not hesitate to reach out. The rigor and intensity of higher education asks us to forgo these needs often. This is a space of making sure those needs are met so that you can engage with as much capacity and ease on any given day.

### Reading Weeks and Breaks

There will be a reading week on Week 5 to give students time to catch up and take a week off from class. There will still be assigned readings that week. In addition, each student is given one week off of their choosing as a mental health break, no questions asked. Please alert me within 24 hours of class if you are taking the week off so that the lesson plan can be adjusted accordingly.

### Chatgpt

The use of Chat GPT for papers is considered plagiarism. Students are expected to write and create their own projects. I am available for office hours if you need extra help or guidance on projects.

### Office Hours and Contact

Office Hours can be scheduled on Wednesdays in person before or after class. I am also available Monday or Friday on Zoom. These can be used to discuss accommodations, answer additional questions about a lesson, or check-in on a project. Please schedule at least 24 hours in advance otherwise I may not be able to accommodate for your preferred date.

To schedule office hours, please email [mae.eskenazi@gmail.com](mailto:mae.eskenazi@gmail.com).

If you are having an emergency in relation to class, please text 317-919-9102.

### Accessibility Resources on Campus

#### **Weingarten Center**

Students can request accommodations through the Weingarten Center portal. These accommodations include but are not limited to reading support, seat accommodations, and travel support. The Weingarten Center has a program called Penn Accessible Transit that gives free rides to disabled and chronically ill students.

#### **LGBT Center**

The LGBT Center fosters a variety of queer affinity and support groups on campus. The center is also a great place to study and they often have printers that students can print on for free.

Please feel free to reach out to me via email if you have any accessibility needs that are not met at any point in the semester.

### Required Texts in Order

*Skin Tooth and Bone: A Disability Justice Primer* by Sins Invalid (PDF Provided to Students)

*The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde (PDF Provided)

*I Hope We Choose Love* by Kai Cheng Thom

### Movies

*United in Anger: A History of Act Up* (2012)

*All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* dir. Laura Poitras (2022)

*Margarita with a Straw* dir. Shonali Bose (2015)

*Crimes of the Future* dir. David Cronenberg (2022)

Week 1 August 30<sup>th</sup>

**What is Disability Studies?/Disability Studies vs. Crip Theory**

In Class Read Excerpt “freaks and queers” from *Exile and Pride* by Eli Clare (1999)

Week 2 September 6<sup>th</sup>

**Disability Justice / Disability Justice vs. Disability Rights**

Read

- *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: A Disability Justice Primer* (2019) \*most important\*
- “Care Webs: Experiments in Creating Collective Access” (p. 32-68) within *Carework: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha (2018)

Week 3 September 13<sup>th</sup>

**Horizontality/Intro to Bedlife project**

Read

- “Preface: Writing (With) A Movement from Bed” (p. 15-29) from *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha (2018)
- “So Much Time Spent in Bed” (p.180-186) from *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha (2018)
- “A Decolonial Feminist Epistemology of the Bed” by Tala Khanmalek and Heidi Rhodes (2020) \*most important\*

Suggested Viewing

- *Sort Of*, Episode 2 Season 3: “Sort of Broke”

Week 4 September 20<sup>th</sup>

**Healing Justice/In Class Visit with Lukaza Branfman Verissimo**

Read

- “Uninterrupted Legacy of Resistance” (p.32-42) in *Healing Justice Lineages* by Cara Page and Erica Woodland (2023)
- “Roots of the Medical Industrial Complex” (p.56-65) in *Healing Justice Lineages* by Cara Page and Erica Woodland (2023)
- “Spiritual Conditions: Mapping the Origins of Healing Justice” (p. 111-118) in *Healing Justice Lineages* by Cara Page and Erica Woodland (2023) \*most important\*
- “Sick and Crazy Healer” (p.97-113) from *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha (2018)

Week 5 September 27<sup>th</sup> There will be no class. This week is meant for students to catch up if needed, work on their Bedlife projects, and engage with the AIDS epidemic readings and movie below.

### **AIDS Epidemic and Ongoing Legacies**

ACT Up, Mutual Aid, and Artistic Practices

Read

- "Picture a Coalition" (p.19-41) from *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings* by Gregg Bordowitz (1986-2003) \*most important\*
- "The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous" (p. 43-67) from *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings* by Gregg Bordowitz (1986-2003)
- "Eleven Interview" on *ArtForum* by Kia LaBeija (2015)  
<https://www.artforum.com/print/201801/kia-labeija-73184>

Watch

- *United in Anger: A History of Act Up*

Suggested Viewing

- *Pose* Season 2 Episode 1: "Acting Up"

Week 6 October 4<sup>th</sup>

### **The Question of Pain/ Meet on Zoom/ Artist Talk from Kamra Sadia Abdul-Hakim**

Read

- TBA: Assigned Reading from Kamra Sadia Abdul-Hakim \*most important\*
- "Growing P.A.I.N." on *ArtForum*  
<https://www.artforum.com/print/201802/growing-p-a-i-n-73656>

Watch

- *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* dir. Laura Poitras (2022)

Week 7 October 11<sup>th</sup>

### **Black Feminist Disability Politics/ BedLife Project due**

Read

- *Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde (1980)
- "Black Disability Politics Now" (p. 140-153) from *Black Disability Politics* by Sami Schalk (2022)

Optional Reading

- "Introduction: Black Health Matters" (p. 1-17) from *Black Disability Politics* by Sami Schalk (2022)

Week 8 October 18<sup>th</sup>

### **The Question of Care/Introduction to Mutual Aid Project**

Read

- *I Hope We Choose Love* by Kai Cheng Thom

Optional Reading

- "Introduction: The Cost of Getting Better" (p. 1-31) from *The Right to Maim* by Jasbir Puar (2017)  
[https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-0-8223-6918-9\\_601.pdf](https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-0-8223-6918-9_601.pdf)

Week 9 October 25<sup>th</sup>

### **Crip Hauntings**

Read

- "Mad Is A Place" (p. 1-28) (*focus on p. 1-21*) from *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind* by La Marr Jurelle Bruce (2021)
- "Songs in Madtime: Black Music, Madness, and Metaphysical Syncopation" (p. 201-230) from *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind* by La Marr Jurelle Bruce (2021)
- "Introduction" (p. 1-14) from *Black on Both Sides* by C. Riley Snorton (2017)

Watch

- "Sick Witch" by Johanna Hedva  
<https://johannahedva.com/sick-witch.php>

Week 10 November 1<sup>st</sup>

### **Spectral Disability**

Read

- "Death to Death/ Life by Cuts" by Mel Chen (2022)  
<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/130/492951/death-to-death-life-by-cuts/>
- "A Glossary on Haunting" by Eve Tuck and C Ree (2013)

Watch

- *Crimes of the Future* dir. David Cronenberg (2021)

Optional Reading

- "Bodies with New Organs" (p. 33-61) from *The Right to Maim* by Jasbir Puar (2017)

Week 11 November 8<sup>th</sup>

**Disabled Erotics/ Mutual Aid Project Proposal Due/ Visit from alx velozo**

Read

- “Sick Woman Theory” by Johanna Hedva  
<https://topicalcream.org/features/sick-woman-theory/>
- “Uses of the Erotic” by Audre Lorde (1978)
- “Crip Sex Moments and the Lust of Recognition” (p. 114-120) from *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha and ET Russain

Watch

- *Margarita with a Straw* dir. Shonali Bose (2015)

Week 12 November 15<sup>th</sup>

**Transnational Disability Theory/ Introduction to Final Project**

Read

- “‘Will Not Let Die’: Debilitation and Inhuman Biopolitics in Palestine” (p.127-154) from *The Right to Maim* by Jasbir Puar (2017) \*most important, focus here\*

Optional Reading

- “Crip Nationalism” (p.63-93) from *The Right to Maim* by Jasbir Puar (2017)

Week 13 November 21<sup>st</sup>

**No class: Thursday schedule for UPenn**

Week 14 November 29<sup>th</sup>

**Future Leanings**

Read

- “Other forms of Conviviality” by Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos (2013)  
<https://www.womenandperformance.org/ampersand/ampersand-articles/other-forms-of-conviviality.html>
- “Why It’s Taking So Long,” by Johanna Hedva (2022)  
<https://topicalcream.org/features/why-its-taking-so-long/>
- “Introduction” (p.xi-xviii) from *Health Communism* by Beatrice Adler Bolton and Artie Vierkant (2022)
- “Host” (p. 179-184) from *Health Communism* by Beatrice Adler Bolton and Artie Vierkant (2022)
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Week 15 December 6<sup>th</sup>

**Queer Crip**

Read

- *More Than Organs* excerpt (p. 15-25) by Kay Ulanday Barrett (2020)
- *Paring* excerpt by Travis Chi Wing Lau (2020)
- “The World is Unknown” by Carolyn Lazard (2019)

<https://tc3.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/24/contents/the-world-is-unknown>

Watch

- CRIP TIME (2018) by Carolyn Lazard

<https://www.artforum.com/video/carolyn-lazard-crip-time-2018-83024>

Week 16 December 13<sup>th</sup>

**Office Hours instead of Class**

Reading Week/Work on Final Papers

Week 17 December 20<sup>th</sup>

Final Project Presentations

List of Suggested Artists and Organizers\*

Ogemdi Ude  
Mari Katayama  
Joselia Rebekah Hughes  
Kayla Hamilton  
agustine zegers  
Lukaza Branfman-Verissimo  
Park McArthur  
Constantina Zavitsanos  
Carolyn Lazard  
Bob Flanagan  
Kamra Sadia Hakim (particularly Activation Residency)  
Alice Sheppard  
Johanna Hedva  
David Wojnarowicz  
Greer Lankton  
Christopher Nunez  
Audre Lorde  
Kia LaBeija  
Yayoi Kusama  
Panteja Abareshi  
Sandie Yi  
Neve  
JJJJJerome Ellis  
Felix Gonzalez Torres  
Octavia Butler  
Christine Sun Kim  
Mia Mingus  
Niv Acosta  
Patty Berne  
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha  
Cyree Jarelle Johnson

Tourmaline  
Puppies Puppies  
Beatrice Olmedo  
Brontez Purnell

\*This is not an extensive list by any means. If you are interested in presenting on a different artist, please email me or schedule a time to meet during my office hours.