

**BR 2315 ~ Justice & Peace Struggles: Faith Communities & People with Disabilities**  
**Iilff School of Theology**  
**Fall 2004**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course will introduce participants to disability studies as an avenue through which to examine issues of access, inclusion, justice, and community. It will explore definitions and models of disability, complicating we/they understandings of these issues. The class will look at historical and religious responses to disability, the impact of the disability rights movement on religious communities, and future directions for disability and religion. In addition to offering a theological framework for understandings of embodiment and difference, this class will examine barriers to accessibility in both architecture and attitudes, and will include discussions of practical worship ideas, disability etiquette, and implications of the ADA. We will also explore connections between disability and other identity and liberation concerns.

**PRIMARY GOALS & OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will develop and articulate their own definition(s) of “disability.”
- Students will gain a basic familiarity with the language, methodology, principal sources, and primary issues related to the field of disability studies.
- Students will become familiar with historical and contemporary interpretations, pronouncements, policies, and other responses to disability by faith traditions and religious communities.
- Students will be equipped to be proactive in relation to issues of disability and accessibility.

**COURSE TEXTS:**

- Nancy B. Miller and Catherine C. Sammons. Everybody’s Different: Understanding and Changing our Reactions to Disabilities. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 1999.
- Brett Webb-Mitchell. Unexpected Guests at God’s Banquet: Welcoming People with Disabilities Into the Church. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.
- That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities. Washington, DC: National Organization on Disability, 2000. *Not required for the class, but recommended for those looking for practical suggestions for making a site accessible to people with disabilities.*

These three texts are available for purchase from the Cokesbury bookstore at Iliff. All books mentioned on this syllabus are also on reserve in Taylor Library. Additional required readings will be posted on the class website and/or distributed in class.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

### 1. Issue Mini-Paper & Presentation (15% of grade, due October 12):

For your first mini-project, you will learn about and explain one text/idea/moment/issue relevant to disability studies (of your choosing). Helpful resources may include (but are not limited to):

- Handbook of Disability Studies / edited by Gary Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman, Michael Bury. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001 (on reserve).
- Disability Studies Reader / edited by Lennard J. Davis. New York: Routledge, 1997 (on reserve).

The final product should take the form of a **1-2 page summary paper** (this can be written as a formal paper, outline, bullet points, or other appropriate format) to be submitted to the instructor on the due date, and will also be **shared verbally** with the rest of the class (this will take the form of an informal discussion where all course members share their findings – no pressure!). You should also submit to the instructor a **brief bibliography** showing the sources you used for your paper.

The end result (and grading criteria) will be that if any of the class were to later hear the mention of your issue, they would understand the basic who/what/when/where/how and have some grasp of the complexity, importance, relevance, and/or aftermath of this issue.

### 2. Denomination/Organization Mini-Paper & Presentation (15% of grade, due October 26):

For your second mini-project, you will be given the opportunity to explore and share with the rest of the class what a particular group (of your choice) has to say about disability. This can be your denomination, your community of worship, state or federal government, educational institution, business, etc. You may wish to explore this group's policies, practices, resources, decisions, actions, history, and attend to both silence/absence of statements as well as their presence. You may also include some brief speculation as to where you think this group/organization is going next in relation to disability.

As with the first assignment, the final product should take the form of a **1-2 page summary paper** (this can be written as a formal paper, outline, bullet points, or other appropriate format) to be submitted to the instructor on the due date, and will also be **shared verbally** with the rest of the class. You should also submit to the instructor a **brief bibliography** showing the sources you used for your paper.

The end result (and grading criteria) will be your thoughtful answer to the question, "what do the \_\_\_\_\_ (United Methodists, Federal Government, etc.) have to say about disability?"

### 3. Application Project (50% of grade, due November 16):

Your final project will give you the opportunity to put the topics and discussions from this course into a specific application. Options will be discussed in greater detail in class, but can take the form of something relevant to your own context. For example, you may choose to create a:

- Children's sermon
- Worship service outline
- Community action plan for outreach to families with disabilities
- Formal presentation & plea for additional budget funds for a specific accessibility implement
- Analysis of the accessibility of your congregation/community and a proposal for improvement
- Research paper on a specific issue (including topics from mini-projects #1 or #2)
- Your idea goes here!

**(3 cont)** The final product will depend on your choice of project – it can be a formal paper (probably in the 5-7 page length) or can take another format. Students are encouraged to discuss their ideas with the instructor well in advance of the due date. Projects are due and will be shared in class (via informal discussion) on November 16. All projects should also include a brief bibliography and/or resource list.

Helpful starting points for this project may include (but are not limited to):

- Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice / ed. Nancy L. Eiesland and Don E. Saliers. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998 (on reserve)
- That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities. Washington, DC: National Organization on Disability, 2000 (on reserve)

The end result (and grading criteria) will be a product that shows awareness and clear application of course themes, as well as your own thoughtfulness and creativity, especially as these relate to the context you have chosen for this project.

\*\*\*SPECIAL NOTE ON PROJECTS 1-3: While each of these projects have been described as individual work, you are welcome to work on any or all of them together. The grading expectation will be that group work should show an increase in both quantity and quality – papers and presentations should be longer and include a higher level of information, interpretation, and reflection. More detail on this option will be discussed in class. \*\*\*

#### **4. Disability Definitions (10% of grade):**

As we will discover throughout this class, although people seem to know what they mean by “disability” (we know it when we see it?), disability definitions are controversial and widely contested. Twice during the course (on September 28 and November 23), you will be asked to turn in your own working definition of disability (no more than 1-2 paragraphs). The first definition will be ungraded; the second will be evaluated based on clarity, thoughtfulness, and usefulness for your personal and/or professional contexts.

#### **5. Classroom Participation & Daily Exercises (10% of grade):**

Disability is an issue for which we each have expertise and attachments; it is also a diverse and rapidly developing field that requires a room full of informed contributors for any genuinely productive discussion (hence the course projects). Consequently, this class is designed to be interactive, using small group discussion, in-class exercises, and take-home “thought questions” to encourage class involvement. Each member is strongly encouraged to participate fully in each week’s activities & assignments.

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**Due Dates:** Assignments need to be turned in on the dates specified on the syllabus unless arrangements have been made with the instructor in advance. Grades may be lowered for late assignments. Because this is an interactive class, *incompletes* are strongly discouraged. If a situation arises where you believe you will not be able to complete the course requirements, please see the instructor as soon as possible. Students interested in taking the class *pass/fail* should discuss this with the instructor by September 28.

**Accommodations:** Students with disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss options with the instructor during the first two weeks of class.

**Academic Integrity:** All students are expected to abide by Iliff’s statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook.

**TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF CLASSES**  
**(adjustments to this schedule may be announced in class)**

WEEK	TOPIC	ASSIGNMENTS
1 / September 21	Introduction to the Course - and - The Language of Disability	Read: Language Handout
2 / September 28	What is Disability? Models, Metaphors, & Meanings	Read: Everybody's Different 25-37 & Unexpected Guests 23-49  <b>Due: Disability Definition #1</b>
3 / October 5	Scriptures & Stories: Religious Responses to Disability	Read: Unexpected Guests 1-22 & 50-75
4 / October 12	Disability Rights (a.k.a. Pride & Prejudice)	Read: Everybody's Different 49-100 (skim)  <b>Due: Issue Mini-Paper</b>
5 / October 19	Different Disabilities (and are the d/Deaf disabled?)	Read: Everybody's Different 101-262 (skim)
6 / October 26	Access in Practice: The ADA and Beyond	Read: Unexpected Guests 100-129  <b>Due: Denomination Mini-Paper</b>
7 / November 2	Theologies of Disability	Read: Unexpected Guests 76-99 Optional: Look at Nancy Eiesland, <u>The Disabled God</u> (on reserve) (esp pp. 89-105)
8 / November 9	Future Directions in Disability Studies - and - Disability's Insights into Other Identity & Justice Concerns	Read: Unexpected Guests 170-184 & Everybody's Different 309-323
9 / November 16	Project Presentations	<b>Due: Final Project</b>
10 / November 23	Course Wrap-up	<b>Due: Disability Definition #2</b>