

# ENG 240: Introduction to Disability Studies



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Class: 2:15-3:45 pm Tuesday/Thursday  
Office Hrs: TBA

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

ENG 240 introduces students to central concepts and essential texts in Disability Studies and applies them to literary and cultural texts, with a focus on racial diversity and learning directly from writers and scholars who experience a wide spectrum of body/mind variabilities. The texts in this course cover a spectrum of physical, sensory, psychological, and intellectual disabilities, neurodiversity, and chronic illnesses, fostering an understanding of the lived experience of disabled people. We will study key moments in disability history through the asylum, the freak show, and the telethon, exploring how artists remake oppressive histories and interrogate notions of normality and disability, health and disease, the grotesque and sentimentality. We'll also delve into how artists use comedy to subvert stereotypes and explore the anxiety and confusion of how to feel about disability. In addition, the course takes an intersectional approach, analyzing new dimensions that come into focus when we consider more than one form of difference at a time, examining, for example, how disability interacts with both race and ethnicity to shape identity. We'll also explore literary works that dramatize neurodiversity, and ask how a disability can also be considered an ability. Finally, because disability always involves interdependence, we will learn about the complications of caregiving and caretaking, speaking for and speaking with, and what it means to be inextricably linked as vulnerable humans. Through the Disability Studies lens, the course will introduce you to a significant and vibrant canon of contemporary literature.

This is a remote class due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Though ideally I'd love to have you all discussing these ideas and texts in person, the pandemic is a terrifying yet fruitful backdrop to discuss many of the issues we'll bring up in Disability Studies: vulnerability and interdependency, caregiving and caretaking, ableism and intersectionality, and discrimination and healthcare injustice.

I hope you are safe and healthy for the remainder of the pandemic. If your life or health is disrupted to the point where you cannot turn in assignments, please let me know and we'll figure out a way for you to make up the work.

**Primary Texts** (order from UO Bookstore with free shipping)  
<https://www.uoduckstore.com/book-search>

1. Molly McCully Brown, *The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded* (Poetry – Order from Bookstore)
2. Stanley Elkin, *The Magic Kingdom* (Novel – Order from Bookstore)
3. Roxane Gay, *Hunger* (Memoir – Order from Bookstore)
4. American Horror Story, *The Freak Show* (TV Episode – Streaming on Amazon Prime)
5. Robert Arnold, *The Key of G* (Documentary – on Canvas)

### **Supplementary Texts (on Canvas)**

#### **Critical**

- Steven Noll, “Institutions for People with Disabilities in North America” (16)  
Paul Longmore, “The Cultural Framing of Disability: Telethons as a Case Study” (7)  
Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. “The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows, 1835-1940.”  
Alice Hall, “Introduction to Disability Studies” (9)  
Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows, 1835-1940.” (25)  
Tobin Siebers, “A Sexual Culture for Disabled People” (16)  
Josh Lukin, “Disability and Blackness” (7)  
Anna Mollow, “Disability Studies Gets Fat” (10)  
Eva Kittay, excerpt from *Love’s Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (20)  
Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness” (10)  
Murray and Bauman, “Deaf Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Deaf Gain and the Future of Human Diversity” (10)

#### **Audio and Video**

- Hidden Brain Podcast featuring interview w/ Molly McCully Brown  
Stella Young, “I’m Not your Inspiration” (TED Talk)  
YouTube, “ASL Poetry-Deaf Gain”

### **III. Expected Learning Outcomes**

#### **English Department Learning Outcomes**

1. To develop the ability to read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions.
2. To begin learning to draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.

3. To begin learning to analyze literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts formally and critically.
4. To begin learning how to write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose.

### **Learning Outcomes Specific to This Course**

1. To acquire familiarity with key concepts and essential texts in disability studies and to apply these concepts to literary and cultural texts and the world around us.
2. To begin to analyze how race and disability are overlapping identity categories that influence each other.
3. To acquire familiarity with key moments in disability history and consider their impact on the present day.
4. To learn about a wide variety of disabilities from the testimony and scholarship of the people who experience them.
5. To develop understanding of the ways oppressed communities respond creatively to barriers through art.
6. To begin cultivating the ability to channel discomfort at learning about painful histories into creative, critical, and synthetic thinking.

### **Grading Policy**

#### **Paper Criteria**

An “A” paper offers a persuasive, eloquent, stylistically sophisticated argument. It presents a compelling thesis, which is then developed into a well-structured, coherent essay. An “A” paper uses evidence effectively. Such a paper thoughtfully considers and analyzes other viewpoints, including the views of the paper’s intended audience. An “A” paper’s style is distinctive, and this style helps further the writer’s argument.

A “B” paper also offers a convincing argument. It has an interesting thesis and is, on the whole, well-structured. Like an A paper, it too considers alternative positions and does so in a thoughtful manner. A “B” paper’s style is clear and relatively free of errors that could hinder its readability and/or persuasiveness. A “B” paper grasps the significance of style in making an effective argument.

A “C” paper makes an argument but does not do so effectively. It may fail to present evidence in support of its thesis or it may present evidence in a haphazard and hence unconvincing manner. In addition, a paper will receive a “C” if it is stylistically unsophisticated, replete with digressions, lacks a sense of audience, or ignores opposing opinions.

A “D” paper fails to present an argument. The paper lacks a thesis and is merely a string of ideas, some of which may be very interesting but none of which are developed into a clear, rational,

coherent essay. Additionally, a plethora of typos, stylistic problems, or grammatical flaws may turn any paper into a “D” paper if such lapses significantly affect the essay’s readability.

An “F” paper results when the writer neglects to hand in the assignment; refuses to address the paper topic; or violates common standards of decency. Additionally, plagiarism also will result in a paper grade of “F.”

### **Course Breakdown**

| <b>Assignment Type</b>   | <b>Avg.</b> | <b>Percent of Total Grade</b> | <b>Points</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Midterm Essay  |             | 20%                           |               |
| Final Essay  |             | 30%                           |               |
| Participation: Discussion Posts, Reading Responses, In-Class Discussion, and Peer Review |             | 50%                           |               |

### **Midterm Essay (3-4 pages)**

Write a literary analysis. Develop an analytical essay that explores disability and representation for one or more of the literary works we’ve read and viewed in Weeks 1-5. You should have an original thesis, engaging style, and well-developed argument, using evidence and explication to support your opinions. You might, for example, answer one of the following questions: How does one of the writers subvert the rhetoric of sentimentality or the medical model? How do authors reframe the oppressive histories of the asylum or the telethon?

### **Final Essay (6 pages)**

**Option A:** Write a literary analysis. Develop an analytical essay that explores disability and representation for one or more of the works we’ve read and viewed this term. You should have an original thesis, engaging style, and well-developed argument, using evidence and explication to support your opinions.

**Option B:** Write a creative nonfiction essay on some aspect of disability in your own life. This is more of a critical/creative hybrid option that integrates criticism/literary analysis with personal experience and dramatic scenes/meditation. You must draw substantially from at least one creative work and one critical work we’ve read in class, including citation and development (for at half of the total page count). Think about your personal experience with disability through the texts we’ve read in class.

### **Participation**

#### **Discussion Board Posts**

On Tuesdays, the Canvas’ Discussion Board serves as our stand-in for class discussion. For the critical essay readings, you will write a Primary Discussion Board Post and then a Response to one of your classmates’ posts or questions. You will write a Discussion Board post of at least 100 words, post a discussion question, and a 50-word respond to someone else’s discussion question. The

Discussion Board is your space to interact with and engage with the texts and each other's ideas. I will lightly moderate this space and at the end of each deadline, I will give my two cents, highlighting important things you should know, which I will send out via Announcements. See Discussion Board Guidelines (in Canvas) for more information.

### **Reading Responses**

These are due most Thursdays, in preparation for our live Zoom class. You will usually write 100 words in response to a focus question I have posted for that day. These questions will be discussed in class, so they will help you know what to read for as well as practice your thinking before our discussion. Reading Responses are an Assignment rather than a Discussion Board; Only I will read them. The back-and-forth with your peers will occur in class over Zoom. But the Reading Responses give you an opportunity to think about the creative work while also showing that you thoughtfully read or watched the text.

### **In-Class Discussion**

On Thursdays, we will have a live discussion-based class. I expect every student to contribute to class discussion each day, asking questions, attempting to understand the texts and ideas, and offering opinions backed by sound reasoning. This includes small group discussions as well as whole class discussions. You will be graded on both the quality and frequency of your contributions.

### **Peer Review**

You will be expected to engage in stimulating, committed, and productive peer review of one others' papers. I have scheduled time in Weeks 6 and 10 for you to work on your essays-in-progress and help one another brainstorm and revise. You will help each other in Workshops Groups of two or three on the peer review day.

## **Course Policies**

### **Disability**

I am happy to support your success by providing the accommodations you need, even if it's late in the term. Please let me know by email if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation.

Handy contacts: Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu) .Counseling Center: 541-346-3230; <http://testing.uoregon.edu>.

### **Late Work**

Late work is penalized. If an assignment is late, it receives a reduced grade. If you are undergoing a life situation that will impact the timeliness of your assignments, please let me know.

### **Attendance Policy**

During the term, you are allowed to miss 2 Discussion Board Posts or 2 Zoom Classes (or a combination of the two) without negatively impacting your grade. As we are in the midst of a pandemic, if something is happening in your life that impacts your participation, let me know and we'll come up with a plan for you to catch up on work.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

Don't be a jerk. Antagonistic comments will not be tolerated and might adversely affect your participation grade. In this class, we will treat one another with respect, and show respect for differences in race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexual orientation as per university policy. The online platform of the course also brings certain challenges. See the Discussion Board Guidelines for more guidance on proper netiquette.

### **Office Hours**

I will host "live" office hours through Canvas Chat each week. From there, we can move to the Zoom platform to chat face-to-face. I will also have a running discussion forum on our Canvas called "Class Questions and Answers" for the entire group to ask and answer. I welcome meeting outside my regular office hours, too. Just email me to set up a time.

### **Technical Requirements**

We will be using Canvas as a platform for our class. Log into [canvas.uoregon.edu](https://canvas.uoregon.edu) using your DuckID. If you have questions about accessing and using Canvas, visit the [Canvas support page](#). Canvas and Technology Support also is available by phone or live chat:

Monday–Sunday | 6 a.m.–12 a.m.  
[541-346-4357](tel:541-346-4357) | [livehelp.uoregon.edu](https://livehelp.uoregon.edu)

If you face Internet access challenges, some companies are offering free access during the pandemic. To learn more about options visit Information Services' [web page on going remote](#).

# Course Schedule and Assignments

## Week 1: Introductions

- T 5 Jan      Introductions: Welcome, Syllabus and Community  
**Attend:** Zoom Class at 2:15  
**Readings:** Syllabus  
                  Discussion Board Protocol
- TR 7 Jan     Introduction: What is Disability Studies? Theoretical Foundations  
**Attend:** Zoom Class at 2:15  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Readings:** Alice Hall, “Introduction to Disability Studies”  
                  Molly McCully Brown, *The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded* (1-17)

## Week 2: The Asylum and the Medical Model

- T 12 Jan     Medical Model; History of Institutions; Eugenics;  
**Post:** Discussion Board  
**Reading:** Steven Noll, “Institutions for People with Disabilities in North America”  
**Listen:** *Hidden Brain* Podcast – “Emma, Carrie, Vivian”
- TH 14 Jan    *The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded*  
**Attend:** Zoom Class at 2:15  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Reading:** Molly McCully Brown, *The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded* (17-70)

## Week 3: Freak Show, Satire and Sentimentality

- T 19 Jan     Freak Show; American Horror Story  
**Post:** Discussion Board  
**Reading:** Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. “The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows, 1835-1940.” (25)  
**Watch:** American Horror Story – The Freak Show
- TH 21 Jan    Introduction to *The Magic Kingdom*  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Read:** Stanley Elkin, *The Magic Kingdom* 3-60

## Week 4: Politics of Laughter

- T 26 Jan     Disability and the Politics of Comedy  
**Post:** Discussion Board  
**Read:** Paul Longmore, “The Cultural Framing of Disability: Telethons...” (7)  
**Watch:** Stella Young, “I’m Not your Inspiration” (TED Talk)

TH 28 Jan     The Cultural Work of Comedy  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Read:** *The Magic Kingdom* 61-159

**Week 5: Sexuality and the Cultural Work of Comedy**

T 2 Feb       Disabled Sexuality and the Problem of Privacy  
**Post:** Discussion Board  
**Read:** Tobin Seibers, “A Sexual Culture for Disabled People” (16)

TH 4 Feb     The *Magic Kingdom*  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Read:** *The Magic Kingdom* 163-257

**Week 6: End Magic Kingdom and Midterm**

T 9 Feb       End *Magic Kingdom*  
**Post:** Discussion Board  
**Read:** *The Magic Kingdom* 258-317

TH 11 Feb    Workshop Rough Draft of Essay 1  
Post: 2-3 pages of Essay 1

**Week 7: Submit Midterm and Intro to Hunger**

T 16 Feb      **Submit:** Midterm Essay

TH 18 Feb    Life Writing; Trauma and Disability  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Read:** Roxane Gay, *Hunger* 1-98

**Week 8: Hunger and Fat Studies**

T 23 Feb      Disability and Fat Studies  
**Post:** Discussion Board  
**Read:** Anna Mollow, “Disability Studies Gets Fat” (10)

TH 25 Feb    *Hunger*  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Read:** *Hunger* 99-200 (Chapters 27-57)

**Week 9: Hunger and Intersectionality**

T 2 Mar       Intersectionality; Blackness, Queerness and Disability  
**Post:** Discussion Board



**Read:** Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness”  
Josh Lukin, “Disability and Blackness” (7)

TH 4 Mar     *Hunger*  
**Post:** Reading Response  
**Read:** Hunger 201-304 (Chapters 58-End)

**Week 10: Interdependence and Caregiving; Conclusion**

T 9 Mar     Neurodiversity, Interdependence and Caregiving  
**Post:** Discussion Board  
**Watch:** *The Key of G* (1 hour)  
**Read:** Eva Kittay, excerpt from *Love’s Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*  
**Submit:** Final Brainstorm

TH 11 Mar     Peer Review for Final Essay/Wrap Up  
**Submit:** 2-3 pages of Final Essay for Peer Review

**Final Essay Due during Finals Week Wednesday**