





Master of Arts Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) 658

Doing Disability Differently (Revision 2)

Status:

Replaced with new revision, see the [course listing](#)  for the current revision 

Delivery mode:

Grouped study 

Credits:

3

Area of study:

Arts

Prerequisites:

None

Precluded:

None

Faculty:

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences 

Notes:

Students in Group Study courses are advised that this syllabus may vary in key details in each instance of the course. Always refer to the Moodle site for the most up-to-date details on texts, assignment structure, and grading.

Overview

MAIS 658: *Doing Disability Differently* examines disability as a social, cultural, political, and experiential phenomenon from which issues of social equality and justice emerge. The course invites a critical examination of disability while exploring how disability can teach us about the culture within which we live.

First we will consider definitions of disability and ask who defines disability—and for what purposes—and who defines themselves as disabled. We will also consider the terms to use when communicating about disability.

The first section of the course explores how clinical, medical, and therapeutic approaches are authorized to create categories of disability for subsequent treatment, alteration, and prognosis, often without taking into account the lived experiences of those who have been categorized. This approach locates the “problem” of disability within the individual and understands the cause of disability within functional limitations or psychological losses of the individual (Oliver 1996). This section also considers how the medical or individual model of disability regards disability as a personal tragedy and also examines societal responses to “solve the problem” of disability, such as pity and charity, genetic testing, “wrongful birth,” euthanasia, abortion, and sterilization.

The second section explores the implications of making a distinction between impairment and disability. The social model of disability acknowledges the often profound physical and psychical effects of impairment on individuals, but it regards disability as a social problem rather than an individual problem. According to the social model, disability is the disadvantage caused by social organization, and disabled people are an oppressed group.

We then turn to the question of what is demanded of society when disabled people are recognized as an oppressed group and to a consideration of how disability is complicated by other axes of difference such as gender and ethnicity. This section also examines how disability and caregiving might be understood, experienced, and looked after differently if interdependence is recognized as central to all human relationships.

The third section of the course considers the cultural model of disability, which foregrounds disability as a way that a culture can learn about taken-for-granted norms and procedures. In the cultural model, disability functions not as abnormality but as a diagnosis of culture.

The last section of the course takes up the cultural model of disability in order to explore possibilities for doing disability differently. This can include various types


of performance art, including disability humour, but also involves different ways of portraying disability in newspapers and other mainstream communications

Objectives

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- understand various historical and contemporary approaches to disability
- appreciate debates about who is counted among the disabled and why
- recognize how far reaching the impulse to normalize is, including the use of such eugenic practices as institutionalization, genetic testing, and euthanasia
- understand how social and physical environments disable people with impairments
- recognize the political importance of understanding disabled people as an oppressed group
- realize that disabled people are not a homogeneous group and that disability is confounded by other axes of difference
- appreciate how disability can expose taken-for-granted norms of a culture and, in doing so, be a perspective for learning
- recognize opportunities to take up disability as a diagnosis of culture in your engagement with media and other representations and, in doing, so, “do disability differently”

Evaluation

To receive credit for this course, students must participate in the online activities, successfully complete the assignments, and achieve a final mark of at least 60 per cent. Students should be familiar with the Master of Arts—Interdisciplinary Studies [grading system](#) . Please note that it is students' responsibility to maintain their program status. Any student who receives a grade of "F" in one course, or a grade of "C" in more than one course, may be required to withdraw from the program.


The following table summarizes the evaluation activities and the credit weights associated with them.

Activity	Weight
Online Participation	20%
Assignment 1	20%
Assignment 2	20%
Term Paper	40%
Total	100%

Materials

Davis, L. 2013. *The Disability Studies Reader*, 4th. ed. New York and London: Routledge.  (Print)

Snyder, S. and Mitchell, D. 2006. *Cultural Locations of Disability*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.  (Print)


Titchkosky, T. 2003. *Disability, Self, and Society*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.  (Print)

The course materials for MAIS 658 include the items listed below. If you find that any of these items are missing from your course materials package, please contact Course Materials Production of Athabasca University. You can contact us toll-free from anywhere in Canada or the United States at 1-800-788-9041. Choose option 3 from the main menu, then enter extension 6366 to be connected with the Materials Management department. You may also write in care of Athabasca University, 1 University Drive, Athabasca AB T9S 3A3; or direct your e-mail to cmat@athabascau.ca





Athabasca University Online Materials

Course Home Page: You will find Course Information (including the Assignment File and other pertinent information) at the top of the course home page. You will also find your Study Guide presented unit by unit online. You will

find your assignments and links to submit your work to your professor on the course home page.

Athabasca University Library: Students are encouraged to browse the Library's Web site to review the Library collection of journal databases, electronic journals, and digital reference tools: <http://library.athabascau.ca> .

Important links

- › [Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies](#) 
- › [Focus Areas](#) 
- › [Courses](#) 
- › [Fees and Funding](#) 

Athabasca University reserves the right to amend course outlines occasionally and without notice. Courses offered by other delivery methods may vary from their individualized study counterparts.

Opened in Revision 2, January 1, 2013

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View [previous revision](#) 
