First Year Writing Seminar: Disability and the Arts
NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study | FIRST-UG419, Fall 2016
MW 11am-12:15pm | 1 Washington Place, Room 401

Instructor: Kevin Gotkin, kgotkin@nyu.edu
Office Location: 1 Washington Place, Room 429
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday, 12:30-1:30pm

The last few decades have seen the emergence of disability as a game-changing social analytic. By foregrounding the generative possibilities of non-normative forms, disability studies has offered profound insight into long-held conceptions of time, embodiment, environment, and difference. Activists and academics alike have drawn upon disability art and culture in order to expand the category and to realize material improvement in the lives of people with disabilities.

In this course, we will understand writing as a form of access and we will use many forms of disability art (visual, aural, performative, digital) to develop key modes of textual expression (personal, descriptive, analytical, critical). Over the course of the semester, students will develop rigorous, complicated ideas about disability through a series of essays that will serve as the training ground for critical writing skills. We will consider the work of Riva Lehrer, Sunaura Taylor, William Pope.L, Park McArthur, and Judith Scott as well as many theoretical and scholarly texts.

It is with and through art that students in this course will discover writing as an essential vector for the explorations that disability compels.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Gain a command of the key debates in the study of disability culture
and the possibilities for further exploration in disability studies at NYU

Learn to approach, describe, and interpret many forms of art:
visual, aural, performative, digital

Develop sophisticated ideas about disability
grounded in specific evidence culled from disability arts and culture

Understand writing as a form of access
compelled and inspired by difference

Render complicated thinking in the essay form
through rigorous examination of evidence that produces original insight
READING & WRITING

This is a writing-intensive course designed to introduce you to some fundamental aspects of critical inquiry. You will be writing every week, responding to prompts that allow you to practice a particular skill or habit. These exercises form a progression toward an essay that will require you to use these skills together to render a coherent, complicated idea. You will produce three essays over the course of the semester, each requiring a different kind of evidence and thus different expressive decisions.

Writing is a response to reading and thus it is crucial that we think of reading and writing as inextricably linked processes. This course will give you the tools to practice reading as a way to practice writing, and vice versa. *Procrastinate on either at your peril.*

Disability art and culture is the topic that we will use to stage our trials. We will be considering many kinds of art in this course and many written reflections on art objects. Accessibility is one of the most important concepts we will explore together and we will come to understand occasions for writing in terms of their potential to create access to ideas, for others, through difference.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All readings will be available on our NYU Classes/Web Publishing site and many will be available on reserve at Bobst Library. Texts assigned under a class meeting are to be read for that meeting. *Bring assigned readings to class.*

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Expectations for blogging, writing prompts, and essay requirements will be handed out and discussed in class, as will the rubric used to evaluate these assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material Blog</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progression #1:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progression #2:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Progression:</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Grades will be given on a letter scale.

TIME BANKING

You are expected to hand in your assignments on the days they are due. However, deadlines affect each of us in different ways. In this course, you will have three days of excused lateness on assignments, which you can choose to distribute among deadlines. For example: Since all of our essays are due on Fridays, you could hand in one essay on a
Sunday (two days late), one essay on a Saturday (one day late), and the other essay on time. The time bank is a tool designed to allow you to juggle the pressures of college life with more flexibility, but it is not an excuse to procrastinate without payoff. Late assignments beyond the time banked allowance will affect your grade. We will discuss this policy in detail together.

PARTICIPATION

Active participation in this course is essential for success. This is a seminar, which means most of our class time will be spent actively discussing our readings, art objects, and topics. However, raising your hand and speaking in front of others is not the only way we will measure participation. You are expected to demonstrate your engagement with the course material, which may happen by speaking up in class, showing unique preparation for class in blog posts, making use of office hours, or having a strong record of attendance. Please talk with me about ways we can expand your participation if you feel the options to do so are not conducive to your learning style.

In general, you will be discouraged from using your laptop during class time. We will negotiate a laptop policy together.

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected at every class and attendance is graded as part of the participation grade. However, life happens. Students are permitted to miss two class meetings for any reason before it affects the participation grade. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences: in this course, everyone gets two passes to juggle life’s complexities. Please do not provide documentation for absences unless your circumstance will seriously hinder your success in the course, at which point you should contact me.

OFFICE HOURS

I will hold office hours every week from 12:30-1:30pm on Monday & Wednesday. Please let me know ahead of time that you are coming so that I can accommodate as many students as possible. We can also talk on the NYU Classes chat room, on the phone, or over Skype. If you need to meet with me outside of these hours, email me.

ACCESS

You should feel comfortable accessing the classroom, the material, and the assignments. It is important that you allow yourself room to explore the kind of learner you are in order to develop individualized habits that will enhance your perceptual modes. There are many accommodations we can make together to increase your access to this course and I invite you to talk with me about them. If you would like to request accommodations through the
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to be familiar with Gallatin’s statement on academic integrity:

“As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website: http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html”

SCHEDULE

Week 1

Wednesday, Sept. 7th: Welcome

I. APPROACHING DISABILITY

Week 2

Monday, Sept. 12: Reading for Writing

Reading:

Wednesday, Sept. 14: Responding to Art

Readings:

Week 3
Monday, Sept. 19: How Do We Approach Disability?

Readings:


Two images from the music video for “Put the Spoon to My Mouth” by Sweetmeat, featuring Wobbly Dance (Yulia Arakelyan and Erik Ferguson). On the left, Yulia and Erik are sitting on a pile of feathers, facing each other, against a backdrop of a voile canopy. There is a ventilator tube they share, each with an end in their mouths. On the right, Erik is in a wheelchair on a black stage littered with feathers. He has impossibly long eyelashes, blond, that almost match his short tussled hair. He is dressed in a sharp white suit and hold in hands near his lap a bowl full of a red powder.

Wednesday, Sept. 21: Cultures of Disability

Watch:


Readings:


II. DESCRIPTION
Week 4

Monday, Sept. 26: Eye Witnessing Blind Culture
Readings:
   Georgina Kleege, “The Mind’s Eye” and “A Portrait of the Artist by His Blind Daughter,” from Sight Unseen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 93-121 & 139-165

Wednesday, Sept. 28: Deaf Gain
Reading:
   Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, “A Different Center,” from Deaf in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 39-55
Watch:
   “Uprising,” season 2, episode 9 of Switched at Birth, dir. Steve Miner, ABC Studios, first aired March 4, 2013
   Don’t Shoot the Messenger, YouTube web series, dir. Alexandria Wakes

Week 5

Monday, Oct. 3: Doing Description
Readings:
   Harriet McBryde Johnson, “Unspeakable Conversations” and “Art Object” from Too Late to Die Young: Nearly True Tales from a Life (New York: Picador, 2005), 201-249

Wednesday, Oct. 5: Draft Workshop

ESSAY #1 DUE FRIDAY OCT. 7 AT NOON

Week 6

Monday, Oct. 10: FALL BREAK – NO CLASS
Reading:
   Sonya Huber, “How Do I Write?” (photo essay online)
III.  

**DISABILITY SURROUNDS**

Wednesday, Oct. 12: **By Design**  
Reading:  
Graham Pullin, *Design Meets Disability*  
(Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009)  
Listen:  
"Icon for Access,” 99% Invisible podcast,  
Feb. 18, 2014

Week 7

Monday, Oct. 17: **Crip Ecologies, Part I**  
Readings:  
Stacy Alaimo, “Porous Bodies and Trans-Corporeality,” Larval Subjects blog by Levi Bryant, May 24, 2012  

Wednesday, Oct. 19: **Crip Ecologies, Part II**  
Readings:  

Week 8

Monday, Oct. 24: **Autisticulture**  
Reading:  
Erin Manning, “The Shape of Enthusiasm,” *Parallax* 17, no. 2 (March 2011): 84-109

Watch:  
A.M. Baggs, “In My Language,” YouTube

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The **Accessible Icon** is an orange figure overlaid on the iconic blue and white wheelchair user of a “Reserved Parking” sign. It shows a featureless person similar to the icon underneath, but is active: leaning forward with arms reaching behind to start a push of the wheels.

Sunaura Taylor’s **Arctic Wheelchair** (2013) depicts a motorized wheelchair covered in wind-blown wisps of snow and icicles. The chair has a shadow but it’s hard to locate in a particular place, against a background of cool greens and whites.
Wednesday, Oct. 26: Affective Environments
Readings:

Week 9

Monday, Oct. 31: Surrounding Disability (An Idea of Endurance)
Listen:
Readings:
   Drafts of “Notes on Aspiration”

Wednesday, Nov. 2: Draft Workshop

ESSAY #2 DUE FRIDAY NOV. 4 AT NOON

IV. REPRESENTATION

Week 10

Monday, Nov. 7: Enfreakment
Readings:

Wednesday, Nov. 9: What Do We Call Illness?
Readings:

Week 11
Monday, Nov. 14: Minding the Mind
Readings:

Wednesday, Nov. 16: Good Glitches
Readings:

Week 12

Monday, Nov. 21: Finding Objects, Intertexts, Ideas (Workshop)
Exercise:
  Come prepared to share your developments toward the final essay

Wednesday, Nov. 23: THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS

Week 13

Monday, Nov. 28: Performance: Film
Watch:
  Song of the Sea, dir. Tomm Moore (2014)
  Finding Dory, dirs.. Andrew Stanton & Angus MacLane (2016)
  OC87, dirs.. Bud Clayman & Glenn Holsten (2010)

Wednesday, Nov. 30: Performance: Stage
Watch:
  Neil Marcus and Access Theater, Storm Reading (1988)
  AXIS Dance Company, Divide (2014)
  Invitation to Dance, dirs. Simi Linton and Christian von Tippelskirch (2014)
Jennifer Cupri’s “Unguarded Gestures” series (2013) externalizes body language with metal armature that resembles early 20th century medical technology like braces or stirrups. Two images show “Unguarded Gestures 1” (aluminum, painted wood, acrylic, 28” x 18” x 10”) on the left and “Unguarded Gestures 2” (sterling silver, foam, 15” x 7” x 4”) on the right. “Unguarded Gestures 1” hangs around the neck of a model wearing a grey dress, laying down the center the chest, and continues to two places for a five-fingered hand to rest where a doctor, standing, might place her/his hands in the front pockets of a white coat. “Unguarded Gestures 2” also hangs around the neck and lays down the center of the chest, but continues to two horizontal rounded plates where the model, wearing a white t-shirt, rests crossed arms.

Week 14

Monday, Dec. 5: Disability and the Digital
Readings:
Special Issue of Canadian Journal of Disability Studies: “Crippling Cyberspace”
NYU Ability Lab’s Project Descriptions

Wednesday, Dec. 7: In-Class Writing

Week 15

Monday, Dec. 12: Draft Workshop

Tuesday, Dec. 13 (Legislative Day, Monday Schedule): Draft Workshop

Wednesday, Dec. 14: Farewell

FINAL ESSAY DUE FRIDAY DEC. 16 AT NOON