

# The Social Construction of Disability

SW 360 SW 387  
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Denise De La Garza, Ph.D., LPC  
J.J. Pickle Campus  
10100 Burnet Rd. Bldg. CMS #137,  
Rm. 1.154, MC/L4000  
Austin TX 78758-4445  
512-232-0743  
denisede@mail.utexas.edu  
Office Hours: by appt

**Text:** You will have readings for the course that will be made available to you by the Texas Center for Disability Studies. They will be online in .pdf format. If you need accommodations to read .pdf files, please let me know. You may need to purchase a book for one of the projects in the class, or you can find a book that you need in the library.

**Format:** This course will be conducted entirely on the web, using software called Blackboard. This software is fully accessible, but if you have difficulty in using a screen reader to access any information on the website, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. As is University policy, if you need any accommodations to successfully complete this course, you must notify the instructor in advance of your needs.

**Course Objectives:**

**Course Objectives:** The purpose of this course is to introduce psychosocial topics from an empowerment model as they relate to disability studies. To that end:

- The student will learn and critically evaluate current definitions and theories of disability.
- The student will understand disability as a socially-conferred status, not a fixed attribute of the individual.
- The student will identify how attitudes and beliefs about individuals with disabilities may impact the personal and social view of disability.
- The student will identify and discuss some of the issues that influence individuals with specific disabilities.
- The student will examine the complex interplay of social, political, and economic forces as they relate to disability.
- The student will examine the impact of cultural values in conceptualizing individual difference.
- The student will understand the longstanding social oppression of the disability community and consider ways to initiate social change.

**Schedule:**

**Syllabus lesson:** This lesson will orient you to the structure of the course, the software we'll use for the course, as well as

elements of learning online.

**Lesson 1:** In lesson 1, we try to understand exactly what we mean when we say “disability.” We start with the variety of definitions that can apply to the word “disability,” then move to an examination of different frames of reference for understanding disability. In addition, we work to understand the meaning and scope of Disability Studies coursework.

**Lesson 2:** In this lesson, we come to understand the importance of deliberate and precise language use when it comes to disability and appreciate some of the guidelines that are important to know when discussing disability. This helps us understand the variety of perspectives about the "naming" of disability.

**Lesson 3:** We explore some of the issues related to attitudes toward disability in more depth. We begin to understand the importance and impact of attitudes and values about disability as we explore issues of paternalism and power as they relate to the oppression of people with disabilities. In addition, we begin to conceptualize the meaning of a disability identity.

**Lesson 4:** We continue our exploration of attitudes by understanding the importance and impact of cultural attitudes and values about disability, and their effect on individuals with disabilities. We also work to identify personal values and attitudes toward disability.

**Lesson 5:** We continue our focus on attitudes related to disability by using what we know about attitudes toward disability and to understand the attitudes of people with disabilities towards people without them. We also explore

attitudes people with disabilities have toward their disability.

**Lesson 6:** We consider how culture and gender impacts disability, how we come to understand our own culture and what it means to have a multicultural understanding of disability.

**Requirements:** Since this course is offered for both graduated (SW 387R) and undergraduate (SW 360K) credit, there are different requirements for you, depending on what class you signed up to take. If you are not sure what class you are in, please ask the instructor. Essentially, the graduate students have more reading and writing to do, although the same content will be covered.

This course is designed in a web-based environment that allows a certain kind of flexibility in creating learning opportunities for you. The course will give you some flexibility in choosing how you best learn, and what topics are of primary interest to you, within a structure. There are 5 lessons in this course (not counting what you will do this week). Most of the lessons will last two weeks. We will also have “projects” that may be shorter. All of the due dates for lessons are on the calendar, located on Blackboard. At the beginning of each lesson, there is a **map**, a kind of lesson plan, which will tell you all of the learning activities for that lesson. Some of the activities will be required, and some will be optional. The map will clearly state what you need to do to complete that lesson, but if you have any doubts or questions, be sure and ask the

instructor. You will need to complete all of the required activities as well as the optional activities you choose, in order to make a point total that creates the grade you wish to receive.

One of the biggest hazards in a distance learning environment is getting behind, and although I do have some flexibility within this course, you must complete your lessons on time! The lessons will be open for a certain time period only, and you **must** complete the activities within that time period to get credit. If you find yourself getting behind, due to unexpected circumstance or poor planning, **let me know** as soon as possible. This is not a course where you can ignore everything until mid term and cram and catch up! The content will be measured out and paced, and we all complete each lesson together, within the 2 week time frame. Before you start, ask yourself whether you are willing to devote time each week to this course, just like you would if you were going to a classroom and sitting down there. You have to make yourself sit in front of the computer; even though you get to choose the time, you still have to put in the time. If the answer is no, you can't make yourself do it, save us both the grief, and drop now.

## **Learning Activities**

Each lesson is broken down into learning activities. These are the parts:

### **The Map**

To make sure everyone knows what to expect for any given lesson, there is a map of the tasks and assignments. The map will list the tasks, and give you the number of points you can earn for doing it. You should review the map of every lesson at the beginning, with your day planner, so you can **plan when**

you will work on the class that week. The map will also specify which assignments are **REQUIRED** and which are optional. Within each lesson you will have options about the activities you engage in to get information. This allows you the opportunity to construct some of your learning based on your interests or preferred learning styles. Some activities will be required, and the optional activities will be your choice. You will need to do at least some of the optional activities to make a passing grade in each lesson.

### **The Lesson**

This would be the lecture I would deliver if I were standing in front of you in a class. Read it, and imagine me talking to you (it's better if you imagine that I am younger, thinner, and much better looking than I actually am!). You will notice that I pose a lot of questions when I teach; that's just how I teach, and I do that because I want you to **think**, to stay engaged in the material. The lessons are always required, along with the document (your "think" journal) that you produce with each lesson. You will see a sample in just a minute so that you know what I'm talking about.

### **Activities**

These will be things I'll ask you to do to support your learning in the class. Most will be required, some will be optional, but you will know each time by looking at the map. These tasks will involve you "doing" something, like filling out a questionnaire or interviewing someone. The purpose behind most activities is to give you a cultural context for what we are studying; they also help you understand multiple perspectives about any given issue.

## Readings

You will have a reading packet for this class, consisting of articles, book chapters, etc. This will be on the website usually under a link called "Readings". They will all be in .pdf format. Usually, you will write a reaction paper for the items you read; sometimes you will simply answer questions. There will be specific instructions for each reading. In general, for each reading I expect a summary of what you read, as well as a personal reaction.

## Readings on the Web

I'll also ask you to read documents that are on-line, summarize, and react to them. Again, you will have specific instructions for each of those readings, and a link within Blackboard to get there.

## Listen on the Web

Sometimes you'll have an option to listen to something on the web. Usually these are NPR radio programs, and some of them are great. To listen, you need Real Player installed on your computer. If you don't know how to do that, the [help desk \(512\) 475-9400](#) will be a great resource to you, and this and any other technical problem.

## Web Hunt

This activity allows you review websites. Sometimes you'll review ones I've found; sometimes you'll look for your own. Again, you will write a review, or a reaction paper, or answer specific questions for these assignments.

## Discussion Questions

Each week we'll have some questions to discuss on the bulletin

board. Your participation there will be required, just like class participation. For some of the lessons, in addition we will have a variation of this activity called: **Ask the Expert!** For these weeks, a person with a disability and a particular interest in whatever we are discussing that week, will log on to answer your questions. Your assignment will be to pose questions, then write a reaction paper for the discussion. You will do this in addition to the discussion questions.

## Quiz

We'll end each lesson with a quiz. The point of the quiz is to integrate the information you've gathered from the whole of the lesson. The quiz will be short answer questions that hopefully will help you pull together the info from the lesson. I ask that you do the quiz last, so that it reflects what you've done throughout the lesson.

## Share Your Work

It is also an option to post one of your reaction papers for each lesson, for points. Because you may all pick different tasks, this is an opportunity for other class members to learn about something they didn't read or explore. To do this, go to the **GROUPS** button and click on the file sharing for that lesson. To get the points you should **post** one of your own documents, as well as briefly **review** a document written by one of your fellow students. This is an option for every lesson, even if it is not listed on the map.

## Portfolios

At the **end** of each lesson you will submit all your work for that lesson. The best way to do this is to upload your lesson in the grade book using the assignment link. If you have some



kind of problem with that, you can send in your assignment as an email attachment, but it is much better to go ahead and put it in the gradebook. You should always include a **cover page** that lists your **NAME**, **the work you are submitting** and the **total points** that you are submitting. It helps you to be clear about what grade you are intending to make with your work, and you don't have to trust my addition! I will review your work and give you feedback and comments, along with your grade for the lesson, as soon as possible. You may get your work returned if you don't include a cover page with this info on it.

## **Project Weeks**

There will be some weeks when we forgo new information in order to apply the information you already have learned. During those weeks, you will have an assignment to help you apply your learning. These will vary, but at least one will require you to watch a movie, and apply some of the concepts we have discussed. You will write a paper or answer questions about the assignment in that week.

## **GRADES**

You will acquire points by doing the tasks associated with each lesson. Each lesson has basic requirements and everyone has to do those required tasks within the time specified for that lesson. Then you have the option to add tasks (and therefore points) to increase your grade. Each lesson clearly states how many points you can earn, and what grade you get for that number of points. There are different total point requirements for the graduate and undergraduate students. There are no mid terms or finals in this class; as a result all work is due **NO**

**LATER THAN** the last day of class. In general you get points for both quality and quantity of work. In most reaction papers I only want one page; if a reading or task is more complex, sometimes I ask for two. Big fonts and large spacing do not a full page make: a page of work is usually 3-5 paragraphs, and there is no such thing as a one sentence paragraph.

Note: **THERE WILL BE GRADE PENALTIES FOR LATE WORK**, and I will **NOT** grant incompletes. If you are having trouble keeping up with the class due to unforeseen circumstances, let me know **ASAP**. If you are behind at midterm, assume you need to drop the class.

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

The course will be evaluated according to university guidelines. I'll also ask for feedback that you will be able to provide anonymously on the website.

I am a firm believer in learning by experience, so the lesson that supports your learning about the syllabus follows. Just like on the first day of class, you have some tasks to complete to make sure you understand what is expected, and to make sure everything “works” before we get into the content of the course. So go get started on your Syllabus Lesson!