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Office Hrs: M 11:00a -1pm in O’Neill 200, Connors Family Learning Center; and by appointment.

“The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst.”  C.W. Mills  The Sociological Imagination, 1959

“The tragic aspect of blindness does not inhere in the condition nor can it do so. In nature it is absent. It is an entirely civilized idea. The world in which a man [sic] finds himself creates the tragedy for him and in him.”  Chevigny, My Eyes Have a Cold Nose. Preface, xi.

Course objectives
This course will provide an introduction to the major themes of sociology of disability and chronic illness. Until the advent of the disability rights movement, disability was predominantly seen as a matter of individual medical diagnosis. People with disability were seen as in need of repair; those who could not be repaired often became objects of pity and fear.

The cumulative effect of the disability rights movement activities has shifted the understanding of the concept of disability from the personal/medical to the social – it introduced disability as a social construction. In other words, the physical or intellectual impairment -- of hearing, sight, movement, intellectual ability, etc. -- is real, but the meaning that society assigns to the impairment is flexible, changes over time and from culture to culture.

Thus, throughout this course we will explore the contrast between the traditional view of disabled people as medically “broken” with the emerging view of what has become known as ‘disability theory’. This view has argued that people with accredited or perceived impairments are disabled by society’s blatant failure to accommodate their needs. We will not ignore or deny the significance of any particular impairment in people’s lives. We will simply concentrate on noticing and analyzing those social barriers which are constructed ‘on top of’ impairments. We will also examine the ways in which: a) the definitions meanings and experiences of having a disability and/or chronic illness are shaped by cultural, political, economic and historical factors; b) the institutions shape the definitions, meanings and treatments of disability; c) people resist or accept dominant definitions and treatments of disability. Representative readings and films will provide the basis for in-class discussions, exercises, assignments, and exams.
Course requirements

1) **Class attendance** – students are expected to attend all classes.

2) **Class participation** – students are expected to actively participate in class by asking questions, offering comments and exchanging their ideas regarding the material with classmates and the instructor.

3) **Assigned readings and exercises** – students are expected to complete all readings and take-home exercises before the class of the date for which they are assigned. **This class is reading intensive. Without knowledge of the readings you will not be able to fully participate.**

4) **Response paper** (5-8 pages) – respond to a specific problem or issue we will be grappling with during the course. During this reflective paper, I encourage you to first summarize what the central issues are, then elaborate on how your own experiences and critical readings respond to these issues. You are expected to demonstrate your understanding of the issues discussed and use the conceptual tools offered in class to critically analyze the social realities that frame the lives of persons with disabilities. More detailed guidelines will be discussed in class and posted on WebCT.

5) **Class presentations** – Pairs of students will be expected to make a presentation on any one’s class assigned readings (concentrating on one or more articles, or chapters) and to generate discussion for part of the class. This assignment gives you some autonomy to lead discussion on issues you deem important to the course. On the day of your presentation you are expected to provide an outline and/or handout of your presentation. Presentations are expected to be well organized and students should be ready to address comments from class members and the instructor. You can always see me for assistance. Additional materials or notes contributing to the discussion are welcome.

6) **Interview/Review**

   You will be asked to provide a written report of an interview with a person with disability (or a parent of a child with a disability) and relate the issues discussed in the interview to the theoretical framework and conceptual tools we will learn in this class.

   OR

   You can choose to review one of the additional books regarding disability, the list of which will be posted on WebCT and handed out in class. Review paper (2 pages-4) should include a summary, your reflection on what you find most interesting in the reading as well as an analysis of how this book relates to the topics and issues discussed in our class.

7) **The Final Paper**

   A final paper is due on May 1st on a topic of your choice. This should be a formal, sociological research paper. Detailed guidelines and notes on this assignment will be discussed in class and posted on WebCT.
Grading
Final grades will be determined as follows:
• Class Participation and Presentation 20%
• Response Paper 20%
• Interview/Book Review 20%
• Final Paper 40%

Academic Honesty
You are responsible for adhering to the statement of academic honesty in your Student Handbook.

Disability Statement
If you have a disability you would like me to know about so that I can make appropriate accommodations for you, please, let me know at the beginning of the semester.

Required Readings

• Electronic Readings on WebCT.
• Class handouts.

Documentaries and films.

NOTES
14<sup>th</sup> January  INTRODUCTIONS AND DEFINING DISABILITY

- Course overview, objectives, assignments.
- Introduction to the main themes and topics in the sociology of disability and chronic illness.
- In class activity.

21<sup>st</sup> January  Martin Luther King day – NO CLASS

28<sup>th</sup> January  UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- Setting the context for the study of disability and chronic illness: Disability and the “sociological imagination”. What is the interplay between the individual’s everyday life and the wider society?
- Historical context of disability in the West: evolution of ideas regarding disability across time, theories of normalcy and deviance/difference, stigma, poverty, mechanisms of social control, emergence of institutions.

Readings:
- WebCT:

4<sup>th</sup> February  SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE AND ACCEPTANCE
CONSTRUCTION OF “NORMALITY”
STIGMA AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

- Social theories about disability and human difference. Social and cultural construction of normalcy and deviance: What is the sociology of deviance? How is deviance socially constructed? What is normal and abnormal? How do these ideas affect our social identity?

Readings:
WebCT:


**11th February**  
**SOCIOCOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO DISABILITY AND CHRONIC ILLNESS**  
**THEORIZING DISABILITY**

- Different models of disability: traditional models, biomedical model, disability Rights Movement -- reframing disability - the social model of disability.

**Readings:**

**WebCT:**

**18th February**  
**DISABLING SOCIAL BARRIERS: FAMILY, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

- From theoretical debates to empirical examples of the diverse structural barriers to disabled people’s meaningful participation in mainstream society.

**Readings:**

**25th February**  
**WHAT IT MEANS TO BE DISABLED NARRATIVES OF DISABILITY/LIVED EXPERIENCE MOBILITY IMPAIRMENT/ PHYSICAL DISABILITY**

- Narratives of disability and chronic illness have greatly contributed to the sociological study of disability. In the second half of this semester we are going to look at a number of personal narratives of people with various disabilities and examine them in the context of their wider social contexts. We will start by discussing and learning about mobility impairment.

**Reading:**
3rd March  SPRING BREAK -- NO CLASS

10th March  LOSS OF HEARING/DEAFNESS/ ***RESPONSE PAPER DUE***
• What is the experience of auditory impairment? What is its social context?

WebCT:

17th March  LOSS OF SIGHT/BLINDNESS
• What is the experience of visual impairment? What is its social context?

WebCT:
➢ To be assigned

24th March  Easter Monday – NO CLASS

31st March  INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES INTRODUCTION
LEARNING DISABILITIES, AUTISM
***INTERVIEW/REVIEW DUE***
• What are intellectual and developmental disabilities? How do lives of people with intellectual disabilities fundamentally differ from other disabilities? What is the social context informing intellectual disabilities?

WebCT:
➢ Reading on learning disabilities to be assigned.
7th April  DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
- Sibling’s account of developmental disability  

Readings:  

WebCT:  

14th April  DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES/ MOTHERHOOD  
FRAGILE X SYNDROME, DOWN SYNDROME  
BROADER ETHICAL DILEMMAS/EUGENICS  
- Another look at a developmental disability. What are the ethical dilemmas that arise in the context of disabilities and most of all in the context of prenatal testing? *To be or not to be?*

Readings:  

WebCT:  

21st April  Patriot's Day – NO CLASSES

28th of April  RESISTING DISABLING REPRESENTATIONS  
REFLECTING ON THE COURSE AND SEMESTER  
***Final Paper Due***

- Who has the right to speak for whom? What is the place of the non-disabled narrator in disability studies? What different positions did we take during the semester? Did we miss something? What was our lens, our position informing our analysis and our point of view? What can we learn from it?

Reading:  
- To be assigned