

**Disability Theory and Politics**  
**Fall 2023**  
**TR, 1:00-2:15pm**  
**Fretwell 406**

*Professor:* Dr. Amber Knight  
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*Office hours:* TR, 9:00-10:00am

**Course Description**

This course applies insights from the field of disability studies to the canon of Western political thought in order to examine the political nature of disability and the disabling nature of politics. In this course, students are exposed to varying definitions, cultural representations, social justice and human rights issues, and current bioethical debates related to disability.

The course is divided into five units. Unit 1 examines core concepts in disability politics, including competing definitions of disability, the “medical model” and the “social model,” universal design, and inclusion. Unit 2 provides a brief history of the disability rights movement by emphasizing key figures and leaders, cleavages and coalitions within the movement, and critical moments and swells of activism (i.e. deinstitutionalization and the Independent Living Movement, the Deaf President Now protest, the Section 504 sit-ins, the ADA Capital Crawl). Unit 3 explores issues pertaining to disability-related policies, including the ADA and ADAA, SSI, SSDI, IDEA, and the ACA and Medicaid. Unit 4 tackles current issues and pressing political problems facing people with disabilities today, most notably the care crisis, prenatal testing and the selective abortion of disabled fetuses, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and media portrayals of people with disabilities. Finally, Unit 5 envisions future directions for disability theory and activism.

**Course Goals**

- To learn about the political nature of disability and the often disabling nature of politics
- To consider disability as a dimension of human diversity, not a personal tragedy
- To critically examine and reconceptualize dominant concepts in political theory from a disability perspective
- To develop verbal dexterity in the classroom through engaged participation with classmates
- To develop the writing skills necessary to articulate one's ideas in a clear, comprehensive, and concise manner

**General Expectations**

Because this course is about ideas— which are to be analyzed and applied critically rather than memorized— the format emphasizes opportunities for students to process ideas through

discussion and writing. The format is organized around short lectures followed by structured discussions.

The format of this course places a great deal of responsibility on students. Your participation is VITAL. All students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Your work for this class will involve both autonomous and collaborative learning. The idea of *autonomy* stresses your personal responsibility for your own learning. This requires you to “do the reading”— read the text carefully, think through the underlying assumptions and implications of the arguments made, and apply a note-taking system which will allow you to quickly consult the readings during class discussions. The idea of *collaboration* stresses your responsibility for teaching and learning from one another. It is my responsibility as the teacher to secure the necessary conditions in which both types of learning can occur, and to engage in analytic thinking with you.

*A few general guidelines for class discussions:*

- 1) Critical engagement with the readings through active participation requires that we treat one another respectfully. Listening is as important as talking.
- 2) We can only have a successful discussion if all voices and perspectives are heard. Thus, it is my goal to ensure that all students feel comfortable to participate.
- 3) Do not be afraid to ask questions for clarification. Before we critique the arguments within the text, we need to first obtain a comprehensive understanding of them.

### **Disability Accommodations**

Students in this course seeking accommodations for disabilities must first consult with the Office of Disability Services and follow the instructions of that office for obtaining accommodations. I will do everything I can to meet requested accommodations.

### **Preferred Gender Pronoun**

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you prefer to be called a different name than what is indicated on the class roster, please let me know. Feel free to correct me on your preferred gender pronoun. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

### **Academic Integrity**

All students are required to read and abide by the Code of Student Academic Integrity. Violations of the Code of Student Academic Integrity, including plagiarism, will result in disciplinary action as provided in the Code. Definitions and examples of plagiarism are set forth in the Code. The Code is available from the Dean of Students Office or online here <http://legal.uncc.edu/policies/up-407>.

Faculty may ask students to produce identification at examinations and may require students to demonstrate that graded assignments completed outside of class are their own work.

## **The Office of Civil Rights and Title IX**

UNC Charlotte is committed to maintaining an environment conducive to learning for all students and a professional workplace for all employees. The University takes active measures to create or restore a respectful, safe, and inclusive environment for community members that is free from discrimination, discriminatory harassment, and interpersonal violence. If you (or someone you know) has experienced any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. UNC Charlotte has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with civil protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UNC Charlotte employees, including faculty members, are expected to relay any information or reports of discrimination, discriminatory harassment, or sexual and interpersonal misconduct they receive to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving these matters, I am expected to report the information. Although I am expected to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can contact the following on-campus resources, who are not required to report the incident to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX: (1) Center for Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) ([caps.charlotte.edu](http://caps.charlotte.edu), 7-0311); or (2) Student Health Center ([studenthealth.charlotte.edu](http://studenthealth.charlotte.edu), 7-7400). Additional information about your options is also available at [civilrights.charlotte.edu](http://civilrights.charlotte.edu) under the “Students” tab.

## **University Policy on Withdrawals**

Students are expected to complete all courses for which they are registered at the close of the add/drop period. If you are concerned about your ability to succeed in this course, it is important to make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible. The University policy on withdrawal allows students only a limited number of opportunities available to withdraw from courses. It is important for you to understand the financial and academic consequences that may result from course withdrawal.

## **Assignments and Grade Breakdown**

1. Participation— 20%
2. Quizzes— 15%
3. Midterm paper— 30%
4. Final paper— 35%

### *(1) Participation*

Please do not hide behind your computer screens and let me do all the talking. Students learn best when they actively participate in the educational experience.

I will not take attendance this semester since COVID-19 has disrupted so many people's lives. That said, you cannot receive an excellent participation grade if you are habitually absent. You are all grown-ups who have the privilege of receiving a college education, and I expect you all to show up to every class period unless extenuating circumstances make your attendance impossible.

### (2) *Quizzes*

You will have pop quizzes in class to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings. Quizzes typically consist of roughly 4-6 multiple choice questions.

### (3 and 4) *Papers*

As you can see, you will write two 5-6 pg. essay assignments, one at the midterm and the other during finals. I will distribute the prompt and instructions for each essay at least a week in advance. **I do not accept late papers**, unless you have contacted me ahead of time or it is an emergency.

All in all, your final grade will be based on your performance on the assignments listed above. There is no extra credit available for the completion of additional work. I give final letter grades corresponding to the following assessment criteria:

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	59 and below

### **Books**

The following required texts have been ordered through the UNCC Bookstore:

1. Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (New York: Routledge)
2. Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Three Rivers Press)

All other readings are available on Canvas (C)

## Reading and Assignment Schedule, Fall 2023

### UNIT 1: CORE CONCEPTS

#### WEEK 1

- Tuesday, August 22** Go over syllabus, introductions, and discuss class expectations
- Thursday, August 24** Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, Chapter 1, “Who Is Disabled? Defining Disability,” pp. 11- 33

#### WEEK 2

- Tuesday, August 29** Tom Shakespeare, “The Social Model of Disability” (C)
- Thursday, August 31** **NO CLASS— Dr. Knight is attending APSA**

#### WEEK 3

- Tuesday, September 5** Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, Chapter 2, “The Social Construction of Disability,” pp. 35-56
- Thursday, September 7** Molly Follete Story, “Maximizing Usability: The Principles of Universal Design” (C)

#### WEEK 4

- Tuesday, September 12** Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, Chapter 3, “Disability as Difference,” pp. 57-84
- Thursday, September 14** James Charlton, “The Dimensions of Disability Oppression” (C); *The Garrett History Brief* (C)

### UNIT 2: HISTORY OF THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

#### WEEK 5

- Tuesday, September 19** Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity*, Chapter 1, “Tiny Tims, Supercips, and the End of Pity,” pp. 12-40
- Thursday, September 21** Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity*, Chapter 2, “From Charity to Independent Living,” pp. 41-73

## WEEK 6

**Tuesday, September 26** Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity*, Chapter 3, “The Deaf Celebration of Separate Culture,” pp. 74-104

**Thursday, September 28** Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity*, Chapter 4, “A Hidden Army for Civil Rights,” pp. 105-141

## WEEK 7

**Tuesday, October 3** Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity*, Chapter 6, “People First,” pp. 184-210

**Thursday, October 5** In-class film screening of *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*  
**Midterm Paper Due**

## UNIT 3: DISABILITY POLICY

### WEEK 8

**Tuesday, October 10** Joice Chang, “The Americans with Disabilities Act and Its Case Law” (C)

**Thursday, October 12** JoyAnna Hopper, “The Social Safety Net for Disabled Persons” (C)

### WEEK 9

**Tuesday, October 17** Aaron Whelchel, “The History of Special Education in the United States” (C)

**Thursday, October 19** Irina Kobzar et. al., “Navigating with Disabilities in the U.S. Health Care System” (C)

## UNIT 4: CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ISSUES

### WEEK 10

#### A) The “Care Crisis” and Community Living

**Tuesday, October 24** NO CLASS— Student Recess

**Thursday, October 26** Lorraine Krall McCrary, “The Politics of Community: Care and Agency in People with Intellectual Disabilities at L’Arche” (C)

## WEEK 11

### B) Prenatal Testing and Selective Abortion

- Tuesday, October 31** Marsha Saxton, “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion” (C)
- Thursday, November 2** Amber Knight and Joshua Miller, Introduction to *Prenatal Genetic Testing, Abortion, and Disability Justice*, pp. 1-26 (C)

## WEEK 12

### C) Covid-19 Pandemic

- Tuesday, November 7** Amber Knight and Joshua Miller, Conclusion to *Prenatal Genetic Testing, Abortion, and Disability Justice*, pp. 183-189 (C)
- Thursday, November 9** Anna Hamilton, “Two Years into the Pandemic, I’m not Sure if I Can Trust Nondisabled People Anymore”:  
<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2022/04/10/two-years-into-the-pandemic-im-not-sure-if-i-can-trust-nondisabled-people-anymore/>
- Sandy Ho, “Moving From Survival”:  
<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2021/07/25/moving-from-survival/>
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, “How Disabled Mutual Aid is Different than Abled Mutual Aid”:  
<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2021/10/03/how-disabled-mutual-aid-is-different-than-abled-mutual-aid/>

## WEEK 13

### D) Media Representation

- Tuesday, November 14** In-class film screening of *Cinemability: The Art of Inclusion*
- Thursday, November 16** Jeanne Holcomb and Kenzie Latham-Mintus, “Disney and Disability: Media Representations of Disability in Disney and Pixar Animated Films”:  
<https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/7054/7599>
- Global Alliance for Disability in Media and Entertainment:  
<https://gadim.org/>

**UNIT 5: NEW FRONTIERS**

**WEEK 14**

**Tuesday, November 21** In-class film screening of *Human Nature: The Story of CRISPR*

**Thursday, November 23** **NO CLASS— Thanksgiving**

**WEEK 15**

**Tuesday, November 28** Amber Knight, “Gene Editing Technologies, Utopianism, and Disability Politics” (C)

**Thursday, November 30** Guest Speaker, Kristin Bumiller

**WEEK 16**

**Tuesday, December 5** Final Class Discussion