GSWS 321-4: Special Topics in GSWS: Critical Disability Studies

Professor: Dr. Coleman Nye
Email: TBA
Lecture: Wednesdays 9:30 – 13:20; AQ 5039

“Laugh and cry and tell stories. Sad stories about bodies stolen, bodies no longer here. Enraging stories about the false images, devastating lies, untold violence. Bold, brash stories about reclaiming our bodies and changing the world.”
- Eli Clare, Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation

Course Description:
This course will introduce students to key questions and debates in the interdisciplinary field of disability studies. Drawing from a range of texts and media, we will explore the social, political, and representational dimensions of disability. Throughout, we will attend closely to the ways that the category and experience of disability differently intersects with formations of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and class.

Some questions that we will explore include: How and why do minds and bodies get categorized as “normal” or “abnormal,” and what is at stake in these definitions? What is the relation between our bodies and their environments – from the buildings we live in to the air we breathe? How do technologies—prosthetics, pharmaceuticals, and amniocentesis—force us to reconsider what it means to be human? How do people with disabilities negotiate sexual desires and identities? In what ways has mental and physical difference been disciplined through institutions such as asylums, prisons, and schools? And, how do performances of disability in art, activism, or biomedicine reinforce or reimagine cultural categories of ability?

Educational Goals:
- Greater understanding of the major theoretical, historical, and lived dimensions of disability in North America and worldwide
- Ability to trace the affinities and tensions that emerge between disability studies and feminist, queer, trans, postcolonial, and critical race perspectives
- Awareness of the ways that seemingly neutral biomedical technologies, demographic methods, and political policies are deeply tied up in the production of cultural values and bodily in/capacities
- Grasp of methods and means to engage actively and imaginatively with disability issues in your own life and in the wider community
- Enhanced skills in critical and creative thinking; media, cultural, and literary analysis; communication of ideas through speech and writing; and original research design

Course Texts and Courseware:
Required:
- Clem Martini and Olivier Martini, Bitter Medicine: A Graphic Memoir of Mental Illness (Freehand Books, 2010).
- Eli Clare, Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation (South End Press, 2009).
- All other readings and media will be made available on canvas.

Recommended:

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
- Attendance – 10%
- Accessibility Assignment – 5%
- Short Paper 1 – 15%
- Final Project Proposal – 5%
- Active participation – 10%
- Presentation – 10%
- Short Paper 2 – 15%
- Final Project (Research Paper or Creative/Community Piece) – 30%

Prerequisite: 15 units