

**CONCEPTIONS OF DISABILITY (SOCI 313:10) – 3 CREDITS**  
**Department of Sociology, St. Francis Xavier University**  
**Fall 2020 (Sept. 14-Nov. 30)**

*This course acknowledges that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People.*

**COURSE INFORMATION:**

Instructor: Dr. Katie Aubrecht; E: [caubrech@stfx.ca](mailto:caubrech@stfx.ca); T: 902-867-4845

Office Hours (Remote via Teams): Mon. 10am-11am & Wed. 12:30pm-1:30pm AST\*

Course Meeting Day and Time: Mondays, 5:15pm-8pm

Course Meeting Location: Remote via Moodle Collaborate

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

**Course Description**

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This course will provide students with an introduction to the field of disability studies through an examination of the ways in which disabled people and disability issues have been defined and treated within contemporary society. Students will employ a sociological perspective and interpretive sociological methods to understand and unpack the meaning of disability, as made to appear in research, policy, practice and everyday life. Community-based contributions and responses to disability knowledge are emphasized and common ideas and assumptions about disability are situated historically to illustrate changing relations to disability over time, and to the role of disability knowledge in social change.

This course outlines dominant ways of knowing disability and questions whether established ways of knowing disability align with the realities, needs, desires and lived experiences of disabled persons. It is guided by the following questions:

- What is disability?
- How has disability been conceived in sociology?
- How do conceptions of disability shape how disability is perceived and experienced?
- How is disability being redefined by disability communities?

Within the course students will analyze the role that social institutions such as the family, education, work, government and the media, play in organizing how disability is known.

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\* There may be times when office hours are rescheduled. During those times, a notification will be shared in class where possible, via email, and on the course Moodle page. Students are encouraged to make appointments for all meetings, and each student must meet with the professor in person at least once over the course of the term.

Social and political conceptions of disability are contrasted to medical and individualistic definitions of disability with the aim of developing a critique of taken-for-granted conceptions of normal bodies, minds and senses.

## **Course Objectives**

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By the end of this course, the student will be able to:

- Analyze conceptions of disability;
- Identify and explain approaches to conceptualizing disability, with a focus on the social model of disability;
- Describe how conceptions of disability have changed across time and place;
- Conduct sociological research and analysis using a disability studies perspective.

## **Course Materials**

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**Required Course Textbook:** Adams, R., Reiss, B., & Serlin, D. (Eds.). (2015). *Keywords for disability studies*. New York: New York University Press.

Other required readings and supplementary readings will be available on the Course Moodle Site.

## **Teaching Methods**

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This seminar style course is delivered online and supported electronically by a Moodle online classroom. The online classroom is a resource, and students must attend all seminars delivered via Collaborate and participate in the course discussions to advance in the course.

## **Accessibility**

To enhance the accessibility of the course, I will use a variety of teaching methods in each class, including:

1. Archived lecture materials, such as PowerPoint presentation slides.
2. Required and supplementary readings and course materials such as academic publications, reports, websites, blogs, documentary film, news media, YouTube videos, as well as artistic and creative works and guest speakers. Lectures will refer to both required and supplementary readings.
3. Online submissions of a reflective response to the readings, including questions developed from the readings.
4. In-class discussions and collaborative work. Through dialogue we will create a safe and stimulating space where you can creatively engage with the course content, and one another.
5. Short written assignments that provide students with an opportunity to monitor their progress in the course and receive feedback.
6. Individualized in-person meetings with students.

## **Expectations of Students**

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Weekly **participation** in the course discussions is expected of all students. The discussions are our space to share our reactions, thoughts and questions related to the readings. Each lesson will include guiding questions to support the conversation, but students are also encouraged to pose their own questions, think critically and take the conversations in new directions.

Attendance will be taken at each class. **Students who miss a total of 3 classes will have their names forwarded to the Dean's Office.** This is not done to be punitive but as a check-in to ensure you are supported in realizing your potential for success in the class.

Students are expected to complete assignments before or by due dates listed on the **syllabus**, unless previous arrangements have been made. If circumstances arise which make meeting a due date difficult, please inform me in advance, as soon as possible. **Clear and continuous communication** throughout the course is critical. I care about your progress. Contact me if you have questions or require clarification around instructions or expectations for assignments using my email [caubrech@stfx.ca](mailto:caubrech@stfx.ca).

**Our criteria for success is engaged, critical and creative dialogue that is informed by the readings.** For this to happen, it is expected that students will have read all of the required readings (as they are listed in the schedule), and will engage one another by listening to and responding to one another in respectful ways. A collective sense of trust, and respect for one another, will be essential to supporting meaningful engagement.

**Supplementary resources** are listed for each lesson for students who are interested in understanding more about the issues, theories and methods discussed in the required readings. The supplementary readings will also be used in the lectures. These additional resources are not required readings and viewings.

**Students may share related materials from outside of the course** as part of their responses to the readings; for example, digital audio and/or visual excerpts with the class (with a description and where possible, captions), links to media stories, current events, popular culture, social policies and programs, references to poetry or literature, etc. However, it is critical that the main focus of any response is on the required readings.

It is expected that all submitted writing assignments will include **direct references to course material** cited in **ASA or APA formatting**, in addition to the student's own reflections and creative contributions. When describing material from outside of the class, indicate where this information is from, using quotations for direct citations, and/or a reference that shows where you retrieved the information from. **Do not overuse direct quotations, since this will negatively impact your grade. When you do use a quotation be sure to introduce it, and explain the meaning of the passage in your own words.**

## Course Assignments

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Please include your name and student ID number on each document submission. Pay attention to assignment due dates and please consult assignment rubrics posted on Moodle before beginning and before submitting assignments.

Assignments must be uploaded via Moodle on or before the due date. **Marks may be deducted at a rate of 5% per calendar day for late assignments. Assignments without a negotiated extension and which are not received within 10 days of the submission date will not be accepted and will receive an automatic grade of zero.** Extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances, upon negotiation directly with the course professor.

Assignment	Due Date	Value
'Making Connections' Reading Reflections	Weekly Discussion Posts (10 @ 2%)	20%
Participation	Weekly Participation on Collaborate	10%
Major Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography	Oct. 5	10%
In-Class Debates	Oct. 26	10%
Midterm Grades Posted by Nov. 4/Course Drop Date Nov. 13 (via Banner)		
Presentations on the Readings	Students may present on one of the following dates: Oct. 5, 19; Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23	20%
Conceptualizing Disability Major Research Paper	Dec. 7	30%

### GRADING RUBRIC FOR EVALUATED WORK

**20% = Shows meaningful engagement (with course readings, lectures, other students)**

**20% = Demonstrates understanding of course material**

**20% = Displays critical and creative thinking (takes course material in new directions)**

**20% = Privileges disabled, M/mad, and D/deaf perspectives**

**20% = Technical aspects (proofread for spelling, grammar, organization and flow)**

## Detailed Assignment Instructions

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### 'Making Connections' Reading Reflections (20% - 10 @ 2% each)

- **Due: Ongoing weekly** (submit by 11:55pm on the Sunday before the class in which it is due):
  - **Sept. 21, 28; Oct. 5, 19, 26; Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30**
- Post a brief reflection and critical thinking question based on the required readings online on the discussion forum and be prepared to discuss in-class.
- Your reflection for each lesson should be approximately **150-200 words**.
- Each reflection will be graded individually. Your grade will be based on your *critical analysis and creative thinking*. The grade includes an assessment of your writing (e.g., spelling, sentence and paragraph structure, transitions between thoughts, adherence to proper formatting style).
- Your post should not be the same or too similar to anyone else's. Please read the other students' posts to ensure you are contributing something new to the discussions.

### Participation (10%)

- **Due: Ongoing weekly**
- Attendance and participation are mandatory.
- All students are expected to come to class having completed the readings and prepared to engage with the material, the professor, fellow classmates and guest speakers. Classes will include time for students to discuss the material with the full class and in small break-out groups.
- Students who miss classes for approved reasons may contact the professor to explore other ways of achieving participation grades (i.e., short assignments).

### Major Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (10%)

- **Due: Oct. 5**
- Students will submit a proposal for their major papers via Moodle.
- In the papers students will use what they have learned from the course readings and class discussions about conceptions of disability to **research, analyze and interpret a conception of disability from a sociological disability studies perspective**.
- The proposal should be formatted as follows:
  - **Title Page:** The proposal must include a title page with the student's name and ID, professor's name, the date of submission, the title of the course, title of the assignment (proposal), and original title based on the expected focus of the paper.
  - **Proposal (1 page):** In 1-2 paragraphs, identify the concept related to disability and describe the plan for analyzing this concept from a sociological perspective. Plans should be specific, listing the actual

materials that will be used from the course and outside of the course (for example, specific required readings, newspaper articles and other media sources, community activist blogs, publicly available organizational communications, newsletters, academic publications, etc. It is not sufficient to say you will include journal articles).

- **Annotated Bibliography (1-2 pages):** Students must list 1 course reading and 2 external references for published peer-reviewed academic research (University published book or academic journal article), presented in ASA or APA formatting. Each source should be followed by a 2-4 sentence description of what the reference is about, why the reference was chosen, and how it will support an analysis of the disability related controversy. Bibliographies must demonstrate that the student has read the article or book referenced.

- Additional details will be provided in-class.

### **Presentations (20%)**

- **Due:** One of the following dates: Oct. 5, 19; Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23
- Students will individually develop and share a presentation on one of the readings in the class.
- The presentation must be orally delivered, and 5 minutes long. It should provide a brief summary of the reading, critical reflection on the strengths and limitations make a connection to something outside of the class - popular culture or a current event, and pose a question for class discussion.
- A sign-up sheet for the presentation date and reading will be circulated in-class.
- Additional details will be provided in-class.

### **In-Class Debates (10%)**

- **Due: Oct. 26**
- Students will debate a controversial issue related to disability and society (e.g., Medical Assistance in Dying [MAiD], hospital and school triage protocols in COVID-19, deinstitutionalization, university admissions/accommodations, etc.).
- Students will be divided into small groups, and graded individually for their contributions.
- Additional details will be provided in-class.

### **Conceptualizing Disability Major Paper (30%)**

- **Due Dec. 7**
- Students must submit a research-informed major paper via Moodle that draws from the readings and discussions as well as an independent review of the sociology and disability studies literature on a disability related topic.

- The purpose of the major paper is to conduct an **in-depth examination of the social construction of *disability* using a sociological disability studies perspective.**
- Papers must include at least **8 references: 4 course readings and 4 external peer-reviewed academic research articles that represent a sociological/disability studies perspective**
- The paper must be no less than **8-10 pages double-spaced**, with a separate title page listing the course title, your name and student ID, and the date, and a separate reference page. The paper should have one-inch margins, be double spaced 12-point font Times New Roman, and all pages should be numbered. Papers may also be submitted in 16 or 18-point font to support accessibility, and in such cases the page length must be adjusted accordingly.

### **Submission of Assignments**

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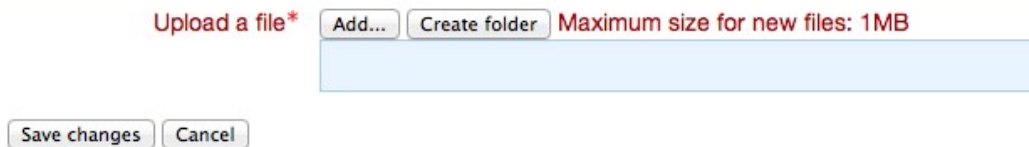
Assignments will be submitted and returned through Moodle. All the assignment drop boxes have the “Submit” icon in front of them. Click on the appropriate assignment link and click on the “upload file” button.

**Submission draft**

No files submitted yet

Upload files

Then click on “add” button and browse in your computer and attach the appropriate assignment. Finally click on “save changes”. Make sure your file is in MS Word format.



### **Statement on Equitable Learning**

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Everyone learns more effectively in a respectful, safe and equitable learning environment, free from discrimination and harassment. I invite you to work with me to create a classroom space – both real and virtual – that fosters and promotes values of human dignity, equity, non-discrimination and respect for diversity.

Please feel free to talk with me about your questions or concerns about equity in our classroom or in the STFX community in general. If I cannot answer your questions or help you address your concerns, I encourage you to talk to the Chair/Coordinator of the Department/Program or the Human Rights and Equity Advisor. The Human Rights and Equity Advisor is Megan Fogarty. Megan can be contacted by email at [mfogarty@stfx.ca](mailto:mfogarty@stfx.ca) or by telephone at 902-867-5306.

### Resources to Support Equitable Learning:

- **Student Success Centre**, Angus L. Macdonald Library, Main Floor; Website: <http://www2.mystfx.ca/student-success/>; Email: [sscentre@stfx.ca](mailto:sscentre@stfx.ca); Telephone: 902-867-5221
- **Health and Counseling Services**, Bloomfield Centre, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor (Room 305); Website: [https://sites.stfx.ca/health\\_and\\_counselling/](https://sites.stfx.ca/health_and_counselling/); Telephone: 902-867-2263
- **Student Advisory Services**, *Aboriginal, Black, International and LGBTQ Student Advising*; Website with links to advising and student societies: [https://sites.stfx.ca/equity/Student\\_Campus\\_Resources.html](https://sites.stfx.ca/equity/Student_Campus_Resources.html)

### **Religious, Spiritual or Cultural Observance**

Everyone should feel welcome and encouraged to bring their full selves to the class. Please feel free to speak with me about any religious, spiritual or cultural commemorations or celebrations that you plan to observe during the term.

### **Accessibility & Accommodations<sup>†</sup>**

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This course is organized to expect and welcome disabled, Mad, and Deaf students. This classroom will be a **disability, Mad, and Deaf positive space**. I recognize that accessibility should not follow a ‘one-size-fits-one’ standard, and therefore we will create our own access commitments, building on the accessibility already built into this course, during the first week of class. We will revisit these access commitments throughout the course to make sure that we are still following them, and that they still work for us.

The course has been developed using the **principles of universal design** for learning, and ways of enacting accessibility that I find to be useful and productive. The material for each class includes theoretical texts and life writing, blog posts and/or film, to accommodate different learning styles and preferences. I will include visual descriptions for all visual work, including art, film, and video, before showing them in class. **If you are not able to access the course material, please let me know as soon as possible.** Although participation is graded in this course, you can participate in different ways. Please feel free to get in touch with me in advance of the course to discuss your accessibility requirements with me.

St. Francis Xavier University supports academic accommodation for students with disabilities so that they may meet the learning objectives of their courses and be given the opportunity to be fairly evaluated on their mastery of course material. The Tramble Centre for Accessible Learning welcomes students with documented disabilities and offers them a student-centered program of support. For more information about access and accommodation please see: [http://sites.stfx.ca/accessible\\_learning/](http://sites.stfx.ca/accessible_learning/) **If you have a registered accommodation, please let me know.**

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<sup>†</sup> This statement has been adapted from a statement created by Dr. Eliza Chandler for Ryerson University’s School of Disability Studies.



## **Self-Care**

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Due to the focus of sociological study (social relations/social order/power and inequality), students need to be aware that course related discussions may contain information that could be potentially disturbing, triggering, and unsettling. If this happens students can identify it in the class discussions and talk through it collectively as a class, and/or contact the professor after class and work with the professor to develop appropriate strategies of address. In cases of more intensely felt disquiet students can also obtain peer support (talk to a friend), seek guidance from Student Services Coordinator, or seek assistance from resources listed in the STFX academic calendar.

## **Child and Elder Care**

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Many students have care responsibilities. If care responsibilities ever come into conflict with the course schedule, please do not feel as though you need to miss a class. I understand that sometimes plans fall through and can discuss how to support your progress with you.

## **Academic Integrity**

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Academic integrity must be upheld throughout the course. The following offences will result in an automatic zero:

- 1) Plagiarism** - the misrepresentation of another's ideas, words, or other work as one's own, plagiarism is a form of theft. Types of plagiarism may include: a) paraphrasing or re-arranging another's words without proper acknowledgement; b) using material from the Internet, a database, a book, a journal, or any other source without attribution.
- 2) Cheating** - A more direct form of academic theft, cheating may include: a) buying, selling, or sharing papers or other assignments, or submitting them as one's own work; b) collaborating on assignments designated as individual; c) submitting to one instructor work completed for another; d) copying or using unauthorized aids during examinations; e) impersonating another or allowing oneself to be impersonated; f) illicitly obtaining, viewing, or sharing information about an assignment or an examination before it is administered.
- 3) Falsification** - requesting extensions dishonestly.
- 4) Tampering** - interfering with others' work, including their use of computer or other resources.

## **Copyright and Intellectual Property**

These course materials are designed for use in “Conceptions of Disability” (SOCI 313) at St.F.X. University and are the property of the instructor, unless otherwise stated by the instructor. Copying this material for distribution, online posting, or selling of this material to third parties without permission is subject to Canadian Copyright Law and is strictly prohibited.

## SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1 (SEPT. 14): WELCOME & INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Introductions and orientation to the course.

***Online Discussion Response (post the first week of class, as part of participation grade):***

**A) Personal Narrative:** As part of the first lesson you are asked to provide a **personal narrative** to introduce yourselves and describe your background experiences, your relation to the course subject, and your interest in the course. As part of your narrative introduction, reflect on personal understandings of disability.

⇒ Please identify the first word or image that comes to mind when you think of ‘disability’. Unpack the meaning of this word. What do we need to know, believe and value for it to make sense? What social institutions shape the meaning of this work and how? What can this word teach us about society?

**B) Commitment to Accessibility:** Describe your understanding of accessibility. What is involved in imagining accessibility from a sociological perspective? How can we work together to create and sustain accessibility within our class? Why is this important?

### WEEK 2 (SEPT. 21): WHAT IS DISABILITY?

#### Required Readings

Course Textbook: “Disability” (pp. 5-11) & “Ability” (pp. 12-17)

Excerpt from: Oliver, M. & Barnes, C. (2012). *The new politics of disablement* (pp. 11-51). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

#### Supplementary Reading

Course Textbook: “Rehabilitation” (pp. 148-151)

### WEEK 3 (SEPT. 28): SOCIOLOGY OF DISABILITY

#### Required Readings

Course Textbook: “Citizenship” (pp. 37-39), “Impairment” (pp. 107-108)

Shuttleworth, R. & Meekosha, H. (2012). The sociological imaginary and disability enquiry in late modernity. *Critical Sociology*, 39(3), 349-367.

Simmel, G. (1950). The Stranger. In K. Wolff (Ed.), *The sociology of Georg Simmel* (pp. 402-408). New York: Free Press. Retrieved <http://www.wattis.org/MEDIA/00413.pdf>

### Supplementary Reading

Barnes, M. & Oliver, M. (1993). Disability: A sociological problem ignored by sociologists (23pp). Retrieved from <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Barnes-soc-phenomenon.pdf>

## WEEK 4 (OCT. 5): (DE)CONSTRUCTING DISABILITY PROPOSALS DUE

### Required Reading

Course Textbook: “Human” (pp. 98-102), “Madness” (pp. 114-120)  
Dolmage, J. (2014). An archive and anatomy of disability myths. In *Disability rhetoric* (pp. 31-62). New York, Syracuse University Press.

*Please read either of the following texts:*

Smith, D. (1978). ‘K is mentally ill’: An anatomy of a factual account. *Sociology*, 12(1), 25-53.  
Szasz, T. (1960). The myth of mental illness. *American Psychologist*, 15, Retrieved from <https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Szasz/myth.htm>

## WEEK 5 (OCT. 12): NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

## WEEK 6 (OCT. 19): (INTERACTIONAL) WORK

### Required Reading

Course Textbook: “Diversity” (pp. 61-64), “Invisibility” (pp.115-116), “Passing” (pp. 135-136), “Stigma” (pp. 173-176)  
*Excerpts from:* Goffman, E. (1986 [1963]). Information control and personal identity. In *Stigma: Notes on the management of a spoiled identity* (pp. 41-104). New York: Touchstone.  
Scully, J.L. (2010). Hidden labour: Disabled/nondisabled encounters, agency, and autonomy. *International Journal of Feminist approaches to Bioethics*, 3(2), 25-42.

### Supplementary Reading

Bailey, M. & Mobley, I.A. (2019). Work in the intersections: A Black feminist disability framework. *Gender & Society*, 3(1), 19-40.

Low, J. (2020). Stigma management as celebration: Disability, difference and the marketing of diversity. *Visual Studies*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2020.1763194>

### Video

Rosemarie Garland Thomson: Staring and Its Implications in Society. 2010.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jALsDVW63wo>

## WEEK 7 (OCT. 26): FAMILY

### IN-CLASS DEBATES

#### Required Reading

Course Textbook: “Dependency” (pp. 54-58), “Eugenics” (pp. 74-79), “Family” (pp. 81-84), “Normal” (pp.130-132), “Reproduction” (pp. 155-158)

Lalvani, P. (2017). Gatekeepers of normalcy: The disablement of families in the master narratives of psychology (pp. 287-308). In M. Rembis (Ed.). *Disabling domesticity*. Buffalo, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

## WEEK 8 (NOV. 2): EDUCATION

#### Required Reading

Course Textbook: “Education” (pp. 64-67), “Accommodation” (pp. 19-21), “Minority” (pp.122-124)

*Please read either of the following texts:*

Dolmage, J. (2017). Universal design (pp. 115-151). In *Academic ableism: Disability and higher education*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Hamrai, A. (2017). All Americans: Disability, race, and segregated citizenship. In *Building access: Universal design and the politics of disability* (pp. 65-93). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

#### Supplementary Readings

Course Textbook: “Design” (pp. 59-60), “Race” (pp. 145-148)

Aubrecht, K. (2012). The ‘new vocabulary’ of resilience and the governance of university ‘student life’. Special Issue of *Studies in Social Justice*, 6(1), 67-83.

Bruce, C. (2016). Divergent encounters with normal: Are they really so different after all? *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 5(1).

## **WEEK 9 (NOV. 9): MEDICINE**

### **Required Reading**

Course Textbook: “Illness” (pp. 105-107), “Medicalization” (pp. 120-121)

Zola, I. (1996). Culture and symptoms – an analysis of patients presenting complaints. *American Sociological Review*, 31(5), 615-630.

## **WEEK 10 (NOV. 16 ): CULTURE**

### **Required Reading**

Course Textbook: “Narrative” (pp. 126-130), “Representation” (pp. 151-154)

Longmore, P. (2009). Conspicuous contribution and American cultural dilemmas: Telethon rituals of cleansing and renewal. In T. Titchkosky & R. Michalko (Eds.), *Rethinking normalcy: A disability studies reader* (pp. 137-157). Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.

### **Supplementary Reading**

Veblen, T. (1899). Conspicuous consumption (pp. 33-47). In *The theory of the leisure class: An economic study of institutions*. New York: Penguin Books. Retrieved from <http://moglen.law.columbia.edu/LCS/theoryleisureclass.pdf>

## **WEEK 11 (NOV. 23): TOTAL INSTITUTIONS**

### **Required Reading**

Course Textbook: “Institutions” (pp. 109-112)

Ben-Moshe, L. (2011). Disability incarceration: Connecting disability to divergent confinements in the USA. *Critical Sociology*, 1-19.

Malacrida, C. (2005). Discipline and dehumanization in a total institution: Institutional survivors’ descriptions of time-out rooms. *Disability & Society*, 20(5), 523-537.

### **Supplementary Reading**

Goffman, I. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Anchor Books.

## WEEK 12 (NOV. 30): DISABILITY JUSTICE

### Required Reading

Course Textbook: “Activism” (pp. 21-25), “Crip” (pp. 46-48)

### In-Class Documentary Viewing

Crip Camp Screening: <https://cripcamp.com/>

### Supplementary Resources

Mingus, M. (2013). Beyond access: Mia Mingus on disability justice. *Equitable Education.ca*. Retrieved <http://equitableeducation.ca/2013/mia-mingus-disability-justice>

Mingus, M. (2011). Changing the framework: Disability justice. How our communities can move beyond access to wholeness. *Leaving Evidence*. Retrieved from <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/>