Sociology of Disability  
(3 Credit Hours)

Instructor:  Dr. Jeff Houser

Course Information:  
Online course:  
No scheduled meeting place or times

Instructor Information:  
Office Hours: whenever I’m online  
Campus Office: 2064 Candelaria Hall  
Phone: 351-2479

Course Goals:  Students are introduced to the social, sociological and social psychological dimensions of physical and mental disability. The course will encourage a critical analysis of previously-held assumptions about persons with disabilities. More specifically the course will examine: different models of disability; how disability is a “socially constructed” phenomenon; the reality of living with a disability; the demographics of disability; and the impact of recent legislation (the Americans with Disabilities Act) for persons with disabilities. Additional emphasis will be placed on increasing sensitivity to issues facing persons with disabilities and what steps are necessary to insure equal access for persons with disabilities in all aspects of society.

Required Readings:

Title: Exploring Disability.  
AUTHOR: Barnes & Mercer  
EDITION: 2nd  
COPYRIGHT YEAR: 2010  
PUBLISHER: Polity Press  
ISBN: 9780745634869  
NEW: $28.95  
USED: $21.75

Text is available through UNC Bookstore or any online book seller (i.e. amazon.com).

Additional readings will be assigned throughout the semester. Most are journal articles that will be made available on Blackboard.
**Course Requirements** - The course requirements are constructed to achieve the following three things:

1. ensure that each student acquires a base of knowledge concerning the sociological aspects of disability,
2. ensure an ongoing two-way communication process between student and instructor concerning course material,
3. provide a variety of opportunities for students to demonstrate their progress.

Each requirement yields a maximum number of points contributing to the total number of points possible, which are translated into a final grade as noted on the scale below. This is known as a mastery system of evaluation whose purpose is to allow each student to determine his/her own level of performance based on your own expectations. In other words - the grade you receive in the class is based on your ability to demonstrate what you have learned, rather than on how you compare to other students in the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blackboard Discussions &amp; Media Watch</td>
<td>On going</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview &amp; Paper</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grade Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>400—360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>359—320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>319—280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>279—240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt; 240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Requirement Descriptions**

**Blackboard Discussions** 180

Learning is an interactive process. A large portion of the material for this course will emerge from the online discussions. The success or failure of any class depends on the efforts of both the instructor and class participants. Therefore, I strongly encourage thoughtful preparation (on my part as well as yours), regular reading, and active participation throughout the semester. You will not be able to wait until the last minute and dump a bunch of comments on Blackboard to meet this part of the course. Regular contribution (at least twice a week if not daily) is necessary for successful completion of the course. Discussion Board grades will be given out every two weeks.

**Media Watch** 20

On the Media Watch discussion thread, students will collect relevant articles, news reports, radio commentaries, etc. which deal with the issues discussed in the course. Students are expected to provide a critical response to those items they collect.
**Interview & Paper**

Students will conduct a private interview with a person with a disability and at least one other person familiar with the interviewee (e.g., spouse, family member, close friend). The student will produce a reflection paper on the interview as described by the instructor. Papers will be due in Dr. Houser’s Blackboard drop box by noon June 13th.

**Final Examination**

A final examination will be passed out on June 20th and will be due in Dr. Houser’s Blackboard inbox by noon on June 27th. The exam will be over all material covered during the course of the semester and consist a selection of essay questions.

The purpose of constructing the course and its requirements in this fashion is to encourage a "hands-on" approach to the study of disability that allows you to actively deal with the ideas, issues, and problems of disability. Additionally, the course structure compels you to have a stake in the class since it depends on cooperative learning among students, as well as the expertise, dedication, and interest of the instructor.

**Things for your consideration**

**Nonsexist, Nonracist, and Nonableist Language**

An increasing number of academic and non-academic organizations, as well as many mainstream newspapers and magazines, require that authors use nonsexist nonracist and nonableist language. This means referring to persons in terms that are not ambiguous, stereotypical, or evaluative. For example, it is ambiguous to say "man is selfish by nature" when we mean to include all people regardless of sex. Thus, "humans are selfish by nature" is the less ambiguous phrase. To refer, for example, to a "wheelchair bound" person rather than a person who uses a wheelchair when speaking generically perpetuates the stereotype that persons with disabilities are seen only as their impairments and not as people first.

This is not a trivial issue. It is no longer considered appropriate to ignore segments of the human population (i.e., persons with disabilities, persons of color, all women) by using only “preferred” terms or pronouns simply because it is considered more convenient and less unwieldy. I strongly encourage you to make the manner in which you express ideas as conscious as the manner in which you learn to ask and answer sociological questions in this course, by using non-sexist, non-racist and non-ableist language in your written and spoken remarks.

**Plagiarism**

When you use the ideas of someone else, whether you quote a source directly or indirectly incorporate general points made by another person, **you must cite the source.**
Proper citation practices not only help you to avoid the unethical act of plagiarism, but are a mark of good scholarship. When you cite the work of others you demonstrate your ability to apply and synthesize information and to form your own ideas regarding the opinions of someone else. Here are three examples of general citation format - please refer to the instructor or reference guide with any questions:

1. **For a direct quote --**
   "Proper citation practices ... are a mark of good scholarship" (Houser 1997, p. 3).

2. **For an indirect reference --**
   Houser (1997) has suggested that plagiarism is an unethical act and unscholarly.
   OR
   According to some (e.g., Houser 1997), presentation of information requires proper citation.

More specifically, the required writing assignments should follow the citation guidelines found either in the *American Journal of Sociology* or the *American Sociological Review*.

*Persons with Additional Needs*

Any student who may require additional time, help or an alternative format on the graded requirements of this course please contact me as soon as possible to make the necessary arrangements. Students who participate in Student Disability Services (SDS) please contact me as soon as you have discussed your needs with one of SDS’s counselors.
Course Outline:

WEEKS ONE: Introduction to the Sociology of Disability.
- Definitions of Terms
- What is a disability? What is it not?

History of Disability
- From demons to freaks to outsiders to “Jerry’s Kids”
- The “statistical” creation of disability in 18th century Europe

Readings: Barnes & Mercer—Chapters 1 & 2
Conrad and Schneider—“Medicalization of Deviance”
Davis—“Constructing Normalcy”

WEEK TWO: Theories of Disability
- Labeling Theory and Symbolic Interactionism
- Structural Functionalism and the “Sick Role”

Models of Disability
- Medical and Economic Models of Disability
- Socio-political Model of Disability
- Feminist Theory of Disability

Readings: Barnes & Mercer—Chapter 3 & 4
Wendell—“Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability”

WEEK THREE: The Effects of Disability on Social Interaction
- Stigma vs. Status
- Self-fulfilling Prophecies or Deviance Disavowed

Reactions Toward Disability
- The Creation of “Otherness”
- Attitudes, Emotions and Behaviors

Social Psychological Justification of Reactions Toward Disability
- Belief in a Just World
- The Importance of Physical Attractiveness

Readings: Barnes & Mercer—Chapter 5
WEEK FOUR: Societal Responses to Disability
- Inclusion or Exclusion
- “Total Institutions” vs. “Mainstreaming”

The Disability Business
- Medicine and Rehab
- Workshops and Group Homes

The Social Policy Paradox and Disability
- Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- The Americans with Disabilities Act

Life After the ADA
- Who is Being Included?
- What are the Costs?

Readings: Barnes & Mercer—Chapters 6 & 7

Interview Paper Due: In Dr. Houser’s inbox by noon July 24th

WEEK FIVE: Images of Disability in Popular Culture
- “Tiny Tim’s” and the Bionic Man
- Movie Review

Readings: Barnes & Mercer—Chapter 8

Final Examination: Posted on Blackboard June 20th

WEEK SIX: Toward a Sociology of Acceptance
- The Disability Rights Movement: A Socio-political Tomorrow
- Eliminating “Ableism”
- Delabeling Disability
- The Social Construction of Humanness
- Can Disability Be Beautiful?
- Over-estimating Negatives and Under-estimating Positives
- Review
- Course Evaluation

Readings: Barnes & Mercer—Chapter 9

Final Examination Due in Dr. Houser’s Blackboard Drop Box by noon August 7th