

Dr. Susan Burch  
Hall Memorial Building 235 S  
202 651 5921 (v/tty)  
[susan.burch@gallaudet.edu](mailto:susan.burch@gallaudet.edu)

### **History of Disability in the U.S. (PST 260 /HIS 735)**

**Prerequisites:** BA/BS degree if taking the course for graduate credit. Permission of instructor is required.

#### **Description:**

This course will address the meaning of Disability in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is a cultural study of disability, and will confront the social construction of Disability, its representation and changing meaning in society. Students are challenged to study a newer field of history, and to apply diverse analytical methods in their study of American Disability history. Comparative studies and non-traditional historical sources play a central role in this course. Students will use their new understanding of disability to reassess general American history.

**Class Format:** Readings, assignments and activities are posted on the course website. Students will submit all assignments electronically to the instructor through Safe Assignment. Students must log on to the course web site and participate in online discussion (students are responsible for their own internet access).

Students will complete a short critique of each of their reading/viewing assignments. Final versions of these reviews will be posted to the class website to share with classmates for additional critique and use. Student will also participate in several on-line discussions and produce a final "thought paper" that addresses general course themes and materials, as well as selected additional sources.

**Course Materials:** Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds., *The New Disability History* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). The syllabus will refer to this text as *NDH*. Various materials will be assigned to groups of students and individuals, consistent with the specific topics that you choose to study. Some of these materials will be available on line, but some you may need to locate, so choose your topics accordingly.

#### Course Requirements:

Short critiques

60%

Participation in on-line discussion	15%
Thought paper	25%

### **Schedule**

The due date given on the syllabus for each assignment is the FINAL DATE that work will be accepted. You may submit the work anytime before the due date.

In order for us to have productive (and successful) on-line discussions and exchanges, it is essential that you submit your work on time.

Failure to submit the assignments by the due dates will result in a “0” for that assignment. However, you may not simply “skip” an assignment. All work—even if it’s late and receives a “0”—must be completed and submitted to the professor by a date agreed upon by you and the professor. If you have not completed all the assignments by the end of the course, you will automatically receive an “F” for the course.

In the case of late work, YOU will need to contact the professor to discuss appropriate dates for submitting the assignment.

[note: I will be lenient on the first assignment if you are unable to obtain your materials in time, but you will need to contact me about this before the assignment is due]

It will be your responsibility to contact the professor if you experience problems satisfying this requirement.

### **Assignment 1 Defining Disability, meanings of disability; medical versus cultural interpretations**

Due by 25 May at 12:00 pm (EST)

For this assignment read the following materials. In 1-2 pages, answer the following questions:

1. What is the difference between a Medical interpretation of disability and a Cultural interpretation of Disability? Give an example of each.
2. According to each of these authors, what does Disability mean? (explain how EACH author defines Disability.)

THEN answer ONE (1) of the following questions:

3. Compare the authors’ approaches to Disability. What’s similar or different? (For example, did they look at the same topics, use similar terms, definitions, and evidence?)
4. What is the main argument made by EACH author? (what’s their thesis?)

**Readings:** Everyone reads: Baynton, Chap. 1 in *The New Disability History (NDH)*; Elizabeth Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freak as/at the Limit," in *Freakery*, 69-81; Robert Bogdan, "The Social Construction of Freaks," in *Freakery*, 23-37.

**Assignment #2 Case studies**

**Due by 6 June at 12:00 pm (EST)**

For this assignment, read the materials specifically assigned to you. In 1-2 pages answer the following questions:

1. What is Nielsen's thesis (main argument)?
2. How do issues like gender or class effect the meaning of Disability in EACH of the essays you were assigned to read?
3. In your opinion, what was the most important thing that EACH essay offered? Explain why that thing was important.

**Readings:** Everyone read Nielsen, Chap. 10 in *NDH*  
 Groups A also read: Freeberg,, "Laura Bridgman"  
 Group B also read: Byrom, Chap. 5 in *NDH*  
 Group C also read Williams-Searle, Chap. 6 in *NDH*

**Assignment #3 Eugenics and disability:**

**Due by 15 June at 12:00 pm (EST)**

For this assignment, read the materials specifically assigned to you. In 1-2 pages answer the following questions:

1. What is eugenics and how is it related to Disability?
2. What are the main points of the two readings you covered?
3. Which ONE factor is the most significant for understanding eugenics and Disability: policy, science, or representation (meaning depictions of something)? Using the essays you read, defend your answer.

**Readings:** Everyone go to this website and pick one of the topics to read through (scientific origins, traits studied etc but not staff/advisors or author information).  
<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/>

Group A also read Winzer, "Threat of the Feeble-minded," from *History of Special Education*

Group B read Pernick, "Defining the Defective," from *Body and Physical Difference*

Group C read Burch, "Full Court Press," from *Signs of Resistance*

### **Assignment #4 Representations of Disability**

**Due by 27 June at 12:00 pm (EST)**

For this assignment, read the materials specifically assigned to you. In 1-2 pages answer the following questions:

1. According to the authors you read, how are Disabilities represented (make sure to address each work you read)?
2. Why are these representations of Disability important? (What do they tell us about the time period, or society etc.?)

**Readings:** Everyone read Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book (WBMB)*, Chap. 7 and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "The FDR Memorial: Who Speaks From the Wheelchair?" <http://www.disabledinaction.org/activist/2001-05/>  
[note: you will need to scroll down the site to locate this article]

Group A read: Beth Haller, "The Misfit and Muscular Dystrophy," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 21, no. 4 (1994): 142-149.

Group B read: Brockley, Chap. 11 in *NDH*

Group C read: Longmore, "Conspicuous Contribution," from *Deviant Bodies*

### **Assignment #5 Disability activism**

**Due by 8 July at 12:00 pm (EST)**

For this assignment, read the materials specifically assigned to you. In 1-2 pages answer the following questions:

1. How have Disabled people fought for Civil Rights?
2. Using your own knowledge of American history and society, compare Disabled people to one other minority group (African Americans, women, Native Americans etc). How is Disability Civil Rights similar to or different from other Civil Rights activism? (consider the types of oppression, strategies used to achieve civil rights etc).

**Readings:** Everyone read Shapiro, "From Charity to Independent Living," from *No Pity*

Group A Longmore, "League of the Physically Handicapped," from *Why I Burned My Book*

Group B also read Kudlick, Chap. 7 in *NDH*

### **Assignment #6 Policy and Personal:**

Due by 18 July at 12:00 pm (EST)

For this assignment, read the materials specifically assigned to you. In 1-2 pages answer the following questions:

1. Why is policy and important issue in Disability history?
2. Respond to Longmore's essay. What did you find significant in this piece, what do you think he's trying to prove, and what questions do you have?

**Readings:** Everyone read Scotch, Chap. 14 in *NDH*; Longmore, "Why I Burned My Book," from *Why I Burned My Book*

**Final assignment**

Thought paper due 24 July at 12:00 pm (EST)