

# Disability Histories

HSOC-041  
Spring 2007  
Wednesday 2-5PM  
Fisher-Bennett Hall  
Rm. 323

**Professor Beth Linker**  
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**Office hours: T: 3-4PM; TH: 4-5PM, or by appointment**

**Course Description:** This **freshman seminar** will explore the history of disability as a lived-experience told by the disabled themselves, a basis for nineteenth-century charity programs as well as “freak shows,” a medical diagnosis, a common outcome of

America's wars, a rationale for eugenic cleansing, a personal identifier that has sparked political controversy and activism throughout the last two hundred years. Some of the topics in this course will include the history of the "normal" body, eugenics programs, plastic surgery, prosthetic design and engineering, the development of the Veteran's hospital system, as well as the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

**Course Objectives:** The guiding theme of our course is disability. We will be addressing various kinds disabilities, those acquired at birth, as well as those acquired by war; those that are visible to other people (such as facial deformities and amputations) and well as those that are invisible (such as deafness).

Our disciplinary tool for coming to understand better the theme of disability will be history. Historians seek to understand how and why change occurs within societies and cultures. Thus, the topical question for this class will be:

- How has the meaning and definition of disability changed over time?

Other objectives in this class are pedagogically-driven and include:

- Become acquainted with the difference between primary and secondary source material
- Learn how to identify the argument(s) of any given text written by a historian
- Learn how to read actively and critically
- Improve speaking and discussion skills in a small seminar setting
- Gain a sense for how history is a form of interpretation

**Course Assignments\* and Grading:**

Participation (25%): Since this is a seminar, participation is required. Participation will take many forms. Every class session will include discussion of the readings, so you need to be prepared, both by having done the reading and by coming up with questions or observations on which you would like to focus our discussions. Some class session will include in-class writing or group work. Occasionally, you will be responsible for an oral presentation in class, either individually or as part of a group.

Midterm Exam (15%): In-class bluebook exam. Format of exam: identification and essays, both long and short. **Wednesday, Feb. 28, 2:00PM.**

Short Essay and Presentation [aka "Disability Museum" Assignment] (30%): Approx. 1,500 word essay that interprets a single artifact on the theme of disability history. See attached **addendum at the end of the syllabus for due dates.**

Final exam (30%) **Cumulative**, identification and essays, both long and short. **Thursday, May 3, 9am-11am.**

\***Academic integrity policy:** Students are expected to adhere to the university's Code of Academic Integrity (<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>) on all assignments. Students who violate these policies risk failing the course.

**Course Materials:**

The following books\* are **required**:

1. Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*

2. Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of Defective Babies*
3. Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Culture, 1900 to World War II*
4. Daniel J. Wilson, *Living with Polio: the Epidemic and its Survivors*
5. David Serlin, *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America*
6. Paul K. Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book: and other Essays on Disability*

\*Books can be found at Penn Book Center, 130 S. 34<sup>th</sup> Street, 215-222-7600.

***Readings and Assignment Schedule:***

- W Jan 10** Introduction and Overview
- W Jan 17** Bogdan: Preface, Introduction, Part I
- W Jan 24** Bogdan: Part II & Conclusion
- W Jan 31** Pernick: Preface & Part I  
**Disability Museum (DM) assignment #1 due**
- W Feb 7** Pernick: Part II (Library Session?)
- W Feb 14** Burch: Introduction & chapters 1-3 (Library Session?)
- W Feb 21** Burch: Chapters 4-5 & Conclusion  
**DM assignment #2—annotated bibliography**
- W Feb 28** **Midterm Examination**
- W Mar 14** Wilson: Chapters 1-5
- W Mar 21** Wilson: Chapters 6-10  
**DM assignment #3, first write-up**
- W Mar 28** Serlin: Introduction, chapters 1-2
- W Apr 4** Serlin: Chapters 3-4 & Epilogue  
**DM assignment #4, second write-up**
- W Apr 11** Selected readings from Longmore
- W Apr 18** **Short essay due; In-class presentations of essay topic**
- Th May 3** **Final Examination, 9:00-11:00AM**