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Semester Reflection

This course has proven to be, hands-down, the most valuable I have had the pleasure of taking at Haverford. Ever since my introduction to disability studies first semester of freshman year, I have been searching for ways to articulate my interest in disability both to myself and to others. Overwhelmingly, the material, discussion, and experience of *Critical Disability Studies* have provided me with not only with the kind of framework I longed for but also a confidence in exercising it. As I worked on my sociology of sport final essay this past week, exploring disability as a topic that would bring value to a future version of the course, I was somewhat taken aback by the ease with which some of my core arguments flowed from my head onto my laptop screen. I experienced a similar sensation writing my midterm project for this course. I feel as though I have started to find a writing voice that is my own, separate from my “I’m writing an essay for class” voice, one that comes from a place of writing about things (aka disability) that I truly care about.

I feel as though this voice has also grown out of the many works we have read this semester that push against traditionally conceptualized boundaries of academia. I have a vivid association in my mind of going through the storytelling exercise led by Sula in class and reading the piece by Melanie Yergeau. For me, both of those experiences brought to life a vision of academia that invites more bodies and minds in than it shuts out. I have always loved school, but have not always felt in control of my education. Though I still believe there is value in some academic conventions, I think, I am increasingly imagining a world in which information is shared without concern for standards. As I move through my future medical education, a world well known for its standards and conventions, I hope to find ways to test the boundaries and see what results.

Though I often speak in my classes, my comments usually result from challenging myself (I am a competitive person) to not keep what I want to ask or share inside. In this class, I needed no such challenge. At the same time, I also became acquainted with many different ways one can participate in class. Participation is often marked on a syllabus as a percentage of the final grade, but not often do professors or my fellow students question what participation really means. Never before had I really taken a moment to wonder, why do we revere raising our hands and sharing a comment verbally as the golden standard for participation? Especially through working with the CCW artists, I gained a sense of the value in participating by actively “holding a space” for someone else. I hope to continue to hold spaces for all those in my life, and find ways to invite others to do the same.

One area in which I feel I pushed my learning this past semester was leaning into discomfort. The boundaries and conventions I have already touched on in this reflection, though restrictive, have also provided a sense of comfort for me throughout my academic career. Part of me still enjoys the essay prompts that ask you to address a specific question, in a specific way, or the exams that have a section based on straight-up memorization. Throughout my time at Haverford, I have put a lot of work into letting myself write first essay drafts that are actually rough and embracing thoughts before they are fully formed in my head. The work we accomplished in this course has reinforced for me that I can continue to push this aspect of my learning even further. I can ask difficult questions before I have an answer, I can make art even when I feel like I have no idea what I am doing, and I can ask a CCW participant to repeat themselves rather than pretending I understood what they said. There is value in disruption.

Every member of this experience, and there are many, has contributed something to my learning and for that I am beyond grateful. I am grateful for everyone who went along with the invisible bacteria, who offered a perspective from the many disciplines I have little experience with, who recommended more articles and books and videos that I may ever have time to enjoy, who held a space for me before I even knew what that meant. Perhaps most of all, this semester has proven for me once again what honestly wonderful things come from thinking about disability and I in my future as a human I now adamantly refuse to stop seeking that wonder.