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Critical Disability Studies
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Final Reflection

Prompt: How has your understanding of disability, disability studies, disability justice, or access been expanded or challenged? In what contexts did learning happen for you, and how did you contribute to others' learning? How were you able to engage with CCW artists and the exhibition? What will you take from this course into your future courses or career and your future as a human?

This course, in offering multiple domains to engage with the history, culture, and expression within the sphere of disability and disability justice, was a valuable chance to comprehensively question what I really know about disability spaces and societal constructions of disability. It acted as an advantageous sort of culminating point of reflection after taking 5 other classes in disability studies, and essentially finishing up the requirements for a minor. Though I came in with some knowledge of taking disability justice approaches and a familiarity with some of the material, especially that which overlapped with Portraits, I found so much more to learn still in the readings, dynamic and collaborative class environment, and out of class contexts.

A couple weeks of content stood out to me, which I want to discuss further here. Namely, those discussing historical contexts, academic ableism and neurodiversity, and disability arts and culture felt especially beneficial to new learning and frames of analysis. While excerpts from *A Disability History of the United States* helped frame my systemic thinking about the development of conceptions of disability, they also more generally provided context of the ways “validity” and “normality” have been built up in this country—a growing understanding of which I have engaged across classes this semester in contexts relating to access, education,

disability, and early childhood. Lennard Davis's discussion of normality and its interconnected origination in statistics also provided a useful frame for this.

Engaging with work relating to academic ableism and neurodiversity felt especially meaningful this semester also because of the ways I could relate ideas to other classes, and because of my previous knowledge of disability in these contexts. Prior to this class and my time at college generally, a lot of my learning about disability revolved around neurodiversity, which was involved in the majority of the experiential contexts of disability I had access to. Therefore, it was really cool to learn more about neurodiversity formally, as a mirror to my prior experience. In addition, taking two education focused classes in addition during this course, access and disability justice in education are overarching topics I have been grappling with in and out of this class. Interdisciplinary and intersectional discussions have heavily informed the directions I took my midterm and final projects, both revolving around access and ableism embedded in school contexts ranging from early to higher ed that appeared across classes. Price and Dolmage's work on academic ableism were particular sources of inspiration I used as jumping off points to explore experiences of ableism in higher education, while research into elementary special education in *Geographies of Learning*, and early intervention in the *Preschool Practicum* were jumping off points for exploring ableism in earlier contexts. Particularly in the *Geographies* class, it was really interesting to connect ideas of conceiving authentic care in settings of students holding traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised identities to the process of creating access and access as activism and care. The reflection and research I have done throughout the cross-contextual exploration process overall has helped reshape how I think about my own education experiences in the past and present, and how I want to engage in educational spaces in the future. Though I'm not exactly sure yet how my career will intersect with education, the

combination of threads of learning throughout all of these courses this semester have given me a comprehensive understanding of both how “norming” occurs in education, and critical frameworks I can use to question it and the assumptions about value built into educational structures and spaces.

Lastly, our time spent on disability arts and culture felt meaningful in the ways it prompted me to deconstruct what I thought I knew about ways of expression and the importance of being expressive and inclusive in creative ways. Though I experienced facets of arts and culture in Portraits and other disability studies courses, it was helpful to reground myself in discussions of it here with new voices and justice-specific frames of thinking. The class conversations about how disability culture is created and how access within it is a dynamic and actively continuous process were some that pushed my thinking most, and really helped me conceptualize what it means to create culture and access within it. It also helped me better envision practical ways this can be done in different contexts, like dance, design, and visual art. Such conversations emphasized to me just how valuable it has been to get a range of peer perspectives throughout the course, coming from diverse yet interrelated backgrounds in, for example, math, stem, art, or design. In collaborative and informal discussions, especially in smaller groups when given the chance to take structured prompts in new directions, I was able to both learn from other’s varied perspectives and experiences, and contribute to others’ learning through offering my own experiences.

Additionally, the window to art and culture in the collaborative process of setting up the exhibition took these understandings from the class setting into practice in new ways for me. I had never truly considered what it took to create an accessible and multi-modal exhibition or celebration of creativity, and thus gained a lot of insight from the active experience of directly

contributing to the planning and access features of the exhibition with the CCW community. In general, it was so valuable here and throughout the semester to collaborate with the CCW. This multi-layered experience was truly a window into disabled joy and expression, which I have not been able to experience so clearly elsewhere during my time at Haverford. At home, I have experience with inclusive expressive spaces specifically for kids and young adults, so it was so refreshing and invigorating to see that these spaces and communities so vibrantly continue across ages. The experience was also a very appreciated reminder that learning can be experiential, which is something I've only experienced in education classes that focus on school and early education settings. In contrast, the partnership here with a wider community outside of such a structured setting was very freeing and informative to my ways of being as a community member.

Ultimately, this course and the variety of modes of learning it offered by bridging theory, experience, and practice, were such a meaningful way to round out my minor requirements in Disability Studies, and leave the first half of my undergrad experience. The reinforcement of critical lenses for examining accessibility and working towards disability justice, as well as all of the experiential learning I engaged in, will inform how I approach analysis of and engagement with disability-related conversations in the future. They will also shape how I interrogate norms, the systemic structures of the environments around me, and my own ways of being, subsequently contributing to the focuses I take and the problems I want to solve in my future career, likely in something related to psychology and/or education, both of which foundationally depend on considerations of access. While we engaged in many heavy topics and domains of critical self-reflection—which is not always easy or comfortable, though it facilitates growth—I will miss the classroom community and atmosphere of access, belonging, and solidarity we created in

this course. Into the future, I will continue to think of the course as a pivotal point of learning and reflection, and a highlight of my time at Haverford.