

digital 258 // english 216

#NoBodyIsDisposable: IMAGINING DISABILITY FUTURES

>> fall 2023, [REDACTED] <<

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>> Course description

In this class, we'll think together about disability's technological pasts and presents.

Drawing upon a wide range of media, digital life writing, and scholarly essays, we'll collaboratively imagine what an accessible future might look like. In particular, we'll work from an understanding of accessibility as a lived practice that generates embodied insights about the digital and physical world around us. Over the course of the semester, we'll have a chance to learn from local disability leaders both within and outside UM. Among other topics, we'll examine the disability dongle effect (or, the impact of useless technologies made for disabled people), academic ableism, crip ingenuity and/as access creation, and digital disability advocacy. These conversations, and more, will challenge us to think more complexly about what responsible computing means for disability's future.

Our course community is built around interdisciplinary knowledge-making: Whatever your major, minor, or interests, this space is meant for you. We'll build many of our

discussions, class activities, and assignments around collaboration, drawing insights, variously, from the arts and humanities, computer science, engineering, architecture, medicine, education, and design.

Over the course of the semester, we will have the opportunity to talk with local disability leaders and design experts in support of our learning and the assignments we create for class. Our final project for the class, with your permission, will be shared with the Mozilla Foundation to serve as a public resource on accessibility and disability culture.

>> **Participation**

Participation is a loaded word. We all have different needs, experiences, and challenges when it comes to discussing and engaging with class material. This is especially thrown into relief given the ongoing nature of COVID-19, and it is a challenge we will collectively embark upon during the fall. In our class, we will collaborate to create both digital and physical spaces that enable everyone to contribute meaningfully through the media and platforms that work best for us.

This is a blended class. We will primarily meet in-person, but we may occasionally meet in a hybrid format that combines in-person instruction with Zoom when we have guest speakers joining us, as well as when we are working on our digital projects. Zoom meetings will represent very few of our class meetings, and I will give you advance notice for any sessions that will meet on Zoom.

>> **Collective access**

For each assignment, you will be asked to provide textual descriptions of all visuals you submit, as well as captions for all video and audio content you create. Additionally, I hope that, in the course of our time together, we might invent or consider alternative ways of making our projects and in-class activities more accessible, or more collectively designed.

Accessibility and participatory design are not simply topics of discussion or abstract concepts from our daily reading. They are as much lived actions as they are conceptual. As a result, with each project, I expect you to consider critically who your audience is

and the ways in which your assignments make a statement, however implicitly, about how you enact accessibility and design in your everyday work.

>> **Accessibility & accommodations**

Services for Students with Disabilities, located in G-664 Haven Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Whether or not you have documentation from SSD, it is my intent to make our learning experience as accessible as possible.

Regardless of whether or not you are registered with SSD, please let me know what we can do to support your learning, participation, and general access in this course. You can contact SSD at (734) 763-3000 or <http://ssd.umich.edu/>.

>> **Assignments**

Below are quick summaries of our assignments this term. Additional details + examples will appear in Canvas under **Assignments** throughout the semester.

>>> **DISCUSSION, WORKSHOPS, & IN-CLASS EXERCISES (10%)**

Much of our time together in class will be structured around discussion and active learning, which will at times involve in-class exercises, reviewing each other's projects-in-progress, internet research, and low-threshold media production/play.



>>> BLOG RESPONSES

5 posts (200-400 words) + 5 comments (20%)

Throughout the semester, you will be contributing posts to [our class blog](#) that respond to our readings in some way. Your responses might connect one or more readings to a current event, a personal experience, a conversation with one of our guest speakers, or even discussions about disability that you've encountered online. Over the course of the semester, you will compose **five blog posts** and **five comments** on your peers' blog posts. Your first blog post response and your first comment are due on **Monday, 9/11**. Your remaining four posts and four comments, however, can be submitted on a rolling deadline throughout the semester. That is: write your responses and comments on days where the readings or guest speaker discussions resonate with you! I would suggest pacing yourself throughout the semester so that you are not writing all of your comments and posts frantically in December. **In early November**, I will check in with each of you to see how things are going and whether there's anything we can do that would better facilitate an engagement with our readings + digital play. Your posts and comments will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Please note: We will be using our Wordpress site for more than just reading responses – we'll also be using it for in-class exercises. This will help us to share all kinds of work with each other. Our in-class exercises do not count toward your five reading responses or five comments.

>>> ACCESS OBSERVATIONS

presentation + reflection of 500 words (15%)

You will be asked to observe and document in/accessibility in an everyday technology (meant broadly) that you use or encounter. For example, you might turn your attention to access signage (or lack thereof) in the Michigan Union, and time yourself as you attempt to navigate the building via the accessible entrances and pathways. Or, you might pull up your Twitter feed or TikTok "for you" recs and assess which videos in your stream are un/captioned, un/described, and/or labeled with content warnings or strobe warnings. Even still, you might visit a campus makerspace and consider the extent to which the space is sensory (un)friendly or physically in/accessibile for a variety of bodyminds.

For this project, you will document your observations (with still images, video, audio, or other media!) and share your findings with the class via an informal, 5-7 minute

discussion. At the start of the term, we'll pass around a sign-up sheet so that you can decide when you'd like to share your access observations with your peers. I'll also ask you to submit a short, written reflection of 500 words about your experience **within one week** of sharing your observations with the class.

My hope is that by doing this recursively throughout the term, we'll be able to better complicate and dismantle traditional notions of what it means to conduct an "access audit." As well, my hope is that we'll all build off of each other's work! For example, someone might choose to visit the Knox Center (UM's assistive technology lab) in October, and another person might choose to revisit their classmate's analysis in November. In this way, we might develop a more robust way of thinking about how our digital and physical environments reflect ideologies about disability.

>>> midterm project: DISABILITY DONGLE EFFECT
1200-1500 words (25%)

This project provides the opportunity to apply our readings and lessons from our class visitors on the (digital) ground! Using course concepts, you will be charged with analyzing an example of disability technology and assessing how that technology conceptualizes its users. In the lead up to this project, we'll be talking a lot about what Liz Jackson describes as the **disability dongle effect** – that is, when designers make something for disabled people that turns out to be useless, or even contrary to what disabled users need. We'll also spend some time talking together about **exigency**, or creative ways of imagining technological access needs, urgencies, and desires.

This project is, in part, research-based: In support of your analysis, you'll be looking at a range of materials that talk about your chosen technology. You might be analyzing things like a company's promotional materials, user reviews of the product on social media or ecommerce sites, videos in which someone is demonstrating the product or platform, and scholarly articles that discuss the technology, among other sources. As well, where possible, I'll encourage you to use the tech yourself; or, if that's not possible (it might be really hard to get your hands on an autism robot, for example), I'd strongly suggest that you do some analytical work around how your chosen technology would be used (or fail to be used) in everyday environments, both digital physical. For instance, if you're interested in a mobile mental health app, I'll suggest that you download it for analysis; or, if you're interested in an exoskeleton or mobility device, I might suggest that

you examine the architecture of your dorm and consider the extent to which the space imagines disabled residents.

>>> final project: **ACCESS HISTORIES, ACCESS FUTURES** multimedia/website (30%)

What is disability's future? How might we imagine technological histories and futures that are ethical and socially just? For our final project, you will work in small groups to develop a community resource that responds to these questions in the form of a website that will be shared with the [Mozilla Foundation](#). We'll collaboratively research access histories through the communities, technologies, and institutions we inhabit. Together, we'll also imagine how we might shift or build upon these stories in pursuit of radical accessible futures. As part of your final project, you will submit a proposal and a short reflective summary that describes your experience and challenges in creating the project.

>> **Policies and resources**

Attendance and deadlines. Because our class only meets once a week, we will only see each other 13 times over the course of the semester. As well, we will have guest speakers visiting our class at different points, and the success of these visits hinges on an active discussion among all of us. This makes attendance particularly important.

To facilitate access, I will do my best to record all of our class sessions. Our attendance policy, then, is that if you miss a session, you will need to watch the recording **and** make up participation credit by completing any in-class exercises and leaving a brief comment about the class discussion on our class blog. If you need additional time to do make-up work, please let me know as soon as possible!

At various points during the semester, I will send out polls and surveys about how our workload and schedule feel. Based on your responses, we might make changes/reductions to our curriculum, or revise certain policies. **If you need an extension for an assignment, please let me know as soon as you can; where possible, I will grant you an extension!**

Revision. Our class goals are shaped around accessibility, learning, and growth. These goals make revision – or, the opportunity to rethink or re-approach your work – an important component of our class. For any of your projects, you will have the opportunity to submit an optional revision. If you'd like to revise a project, please contact me, and we'll discuss next steps and a revision plan together. Revised work will need to be submitted before finals week.

Copyright and fair use. Working in digital environments poses all sorts of questions regarding copyright, multimedia, and intellectual property, and we will discuss these issues during our time together. While it is important to respect others' intellectual property, it is equally important to assert the right to fair use granted you by copyright law. If you have any questions about copyright, intellectual property issues, or fair use (especially while working on your final project), please don't hesitate to ask.

Academic misconduct. The University of Michigan community functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. LSA promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity, and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. All cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the LSA Office of the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education. Being found responsible for academic misconduct will usually result in a grade sanction, in addition to any sanction from the college. For more information, including examples of behaviors that are considered academic misconduct and potential sanctions, please see [Academic Integrity](#).

Writing Center. The Sweetland Center for Writing is available to provide free writing tutoring and consultation during any stage of the writing process. Sweetland provides support for all multilingual and international undergraduate students, offering a range of credit-bearing courses and sessions at their Writing Workshop and Peer Writing Center. You can find a listing of Sweetland's online consulting services at [Writing Support | UM LSA Sweetland Center for Writing](#).

Mental health and well-being. Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressures and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc. If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, UM offers a variety of resources, many which are listed on the [Resources for Student Well-being](#) webpage. You can also search for additional

well-being resources [here](#). UM offers several confidential services that you might find helpful, including:

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): 734-764-8312, <https://caps.umich.edu/>
- Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) 24-Hour Crisis Line: 734-936-3333, <https://sapac.umich.edu/>

As always, please let me know how we can make your class experience more accessible.

Course recordings. In order to create accessible pathways, our course sessions may be video- or audio-recorded, and these recordings + text transcripts of our discussions will be made available to other students in this course via Canvas. If you do not wish to be recorded, please contact me at myergeau@umich.edu during the first week of class (or as soon as you enroll in the course, whichever is latest) to discuss alternative arrangements. In order to build community and maintain a safe learning space, these recordings and transcripts must not be shared, posted, or distributed outside of our class. If you need to share our recordings with a note-taker, transcriptionist, or other intermediary for access needs, please let me know, and we can work to make that happen via secure technology channels.


216/258 >> schedule

Canvas = Reading downloadable via Canvas

Week 1: What is accessibility?	
M 8/28 <i>Models of disability</i> <i>Disability justice</i>	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Berne, What Is Disability Justice?• Ellis & Kent, "Social Disability" [excerpt from <i>Disability and Social Media</i>] [Canvas] Criptech explorations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• #NoBodyIsDisposable• YouDescribe Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete [REDACTED] [due Monday, 9/11]• Sign up for access observations
Week 2: Labor Day	
M 9/4	NO CLASS - Labor day Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up your Wordpress account

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit your blog post by Monday, September 11 • Complete [REDACTED] by Monday, September 11
Week 3: Disability dongles	
<p>M 9/11</p> <p><i>Cyborgs, tryborgs, & exoskeletons, oh my!</i></p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jackson, Haaggaard, & Williams, Disability Dongle • Eveleth, The Exoskeleton's Hidden Burden • Weise, The Dawn of the Tryborg <p>Criptech explorations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ReWalk [FDA-approved exoskeleton] • Walk Again Project [exoskeleton]
Week 4: Design justice & responsible computing	
<p>M 9/18</p> <p><i>Design justice principles</i></p> <p><i>Theories of access</i></p> <p><i>WCAG and POUR</i></p> <p><i>Sensory access + design</i></p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costanza-Chock, Design Practices: Nothing About Us Without Us • Ellcessor, Interrogating and Integrating Access [Canvas] • Clark, Against Access • Weise, Common Cyborg <p>Criptech explorations:</p>

	<p>Use a mental health app (either via your phone or an emulator such as BlueStacks), OR explore an app or other software package that markets itself as assistive technology (download and use/test it.) Some possible examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woebot • NOCD • SilverCloud • VoiceOver (this is built into Mac OS and doesn't require a download on Macs) • Alt Text Tester (Chrome plug-in) • WAVE / Web Accessibility Evaluation (browser plug-in) • ... or another tool of your choice!
<p>Week 5: "Piss on pity"</p>	
<p>M 9/25</p> <p><i>Inspiration porn</i></p> <p><i>Crip memes</i></p> <p><i>"Gaming" the system</i></p> <p><i>Draft workshop</i></p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haller & Preston, Confirming Normalcy: Inspiration Porn and the Construction of the Disabled Subject [excerpt from <i>Disability and Social Media</i>] [Canvas] • Hamraie, A Smart City Is an Accessible City • Wong, Disabled Oracle Society • Young, I'm Not Your Inspiration [captioned video] <p>Criptech explorations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Greatest [Apple commercial]

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Xbox Adaptive Controller [Super Bowl 2019 TV Commercial] <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Dongle draft due by class [upload to Canvas]
<p>Week 6: Social media / social access</p>	
<p>M 10/2</p> <p><i>Accessing social media</i></p> <p><i>What's in a hashtag?</i></p> <p><i>Cultures of collaboration</i></p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cedillo, #DisabilityTooWhite: On Erasure's Material and Physical Dimensions • Jackson et al., Introduction: Making Race and Gender Politics on Twitter (chapter from <i>#Hashtag Activism</i>) [Canvas] • Mauldin, Care Tactics <p>Criptech explorations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore two hashtags on a social media platform of your choosing: #NoICUGenics, #NoBodyIsDisposable, #VaccineEquity, #CovidDisParenting, #DisabilityTooWhite
<p>Week 7: #AcademicAbleism and EdTech</p>	
<p>10/9</p> <p><i>Crip computing</i></p> <p><i>Automating in/access</i></p> <p></p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown, How Automated Test Proctoring Software Discriminates Against Disabled Students • Gaeta, There is No "Good Student": The Role of Mental Health Services in the University • Helms, Kirby, & Merrill, Designing for Fatigue

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rogers, Staying (at Home) with Brain Fog: “Un-witting” Patient Activism <p>Criptech explorations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girma, Avoid AccessiBe & Other Companies Claiming Quick & Easy AI Accessibility [video] • Proctorio [test proctoring platform] <p>Assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability Dongle project due Friday, October 13 by 11:59pm [upload to Canvas]
Week 8: Fall break!	
10/16	NO CLASS - FALL BREAK
Week 9: COVID and disability	
<p>M 10/23</p> <p><i>COVID activism</i></p> <p><i>Crip wisdom</i></p> <p><i>Disability futures</i></p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ginsberg, et al., From Quality of Life to Disability Justice: Imagining a Post-Covid Future • Barbarin, How to Properly Celebrate a Civil Rights Law During a Pandemic in Which Its Subjects Were Left to Die • Wong, I’m Disabled and Need a Ventilator to Live <p>Criptech explorations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Axis [select a keyword and watch at least two video clips] • Disability at Home [click through a couple examples]

Week 10: Surveillance	
<p>M 10/30</p> <p><i>Data and bias</i></p> <p><i>Artificial intelligence</i></p> <p><i>Proposal writing</i></p> <div style="background-color: black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shew, Ableism, Technoableism, and Future AI ● Samuel, To Cope with Digital Distraction, Embrace Digital Neurodiversity ● Whittaker et al., Disability, Bias, and AI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Note: Focus on these sections in the article: Bias at the Intersection of AI and Disability (pp. 7-11), Representation, Privacy, and Disability (pp. 19-22) <p>Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access Histories / Access Futures proposal due by the end of class [upload to Canvas]
Week 11: Digital phenotyping + wearable criptech	
<p>M 11/6</p> <p><i>Behavioral datafication</i></p> <p><i>Quantitative selves</i></p> <p><i>Obsolescence and criptech healthcare</i></p>	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tekin, Is Big Data the New Stethoscope? [Canvas] ● Elman, "Find Your Fit": Wearable Technology and the Cultural Politics of Disability [Canvas] ● Tran, Bionic Eye Patients Are Going Blind Again After Manufacturer Decides They're Obsolete <p>Criptech explorations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Purposefully engage with a self-tracking technology that is designed for daily use – e.g., FitBit, Apple Watch, digital mood tracker, poop tracker (yes, this exists!)

Week 12: Technoableism

11/13

Resonant design

Intersectional ableism

Readings:

- Pullin, Identity Meets Ability [**Canvas**]
- Gibson and Williams, [Who's in Charge? Information Technology and Disability Justice in the United States](#)
- Noone, [Flawed Data Is Putting People With Disabilities at Risk](#)

Criptech explorations:

- [ALT Text as Poetry](#)
- [Engineering at Home](#)

Week 13: Institutional violence & "special users"

M 11/20

Incarceration

Digital eugenics

#StopTheShock

Readings:

- Ben-Moshe, Alternatives to (Disability) Incarceration [**Canvas**]
- Neumeier & Brown, Torture in the Name of Treatment [**Canvas**]
- Köver & Reuter, [TikTok Curbed Reach for People with Disabilities](#)
- VICE, [Fighting the Use of Electric Shocks on People with Disabilities](#) [**captioned video**]

Criptech explorations:

- Explore #StopTheShock on a platform of your choosing

Week 14: Networked care work & mutual aid	
M 11/27 <i>Technocare</i> <i>Access is love</i>	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piepzna-Samarasinha, Care Webs [from <i>Care Work</i>] [Canvas] • Spade, Solidarity Not Charity [Canvas] • Kai Cheng Thom, "Belief in Mental Health" [Canvas] • Mingus, Wong, & Ho, Access Is Love Criptech explorations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD!
Week 15: Sharing our work	
M 12/4	Workshop - drafts-in-progress due! [upload to Canvas] Studio time + design tutorials
Finals week	
Projects!	Access Histories / Access Futures projects due Thursday, December 14