DIGITAL 357/FTVM 366: Networked Disability Cultures

Winter 2024

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David Adelman

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Office hours: ████████████████████████

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or by appointment
Office: ████████████

Wordpress Website: https://courses.lsa.umich.edu/networksdisabilitycultures/

Other Information: While I will always strive to be responsive to your queries, concerns, and needs, please allow up to 24 hours for responses to emails, 48 hours on the weekend. You do not need to schedule an appointment to take advantage of my office hours. I will be available to you during this time.

Course Description

The internet has long been a space for disability community, mutual aid, and activism. Kate Ellis and Mike Kent, writing in *Disability and New Media*, suggest that the internet has "opened up" the world for disabled people. This course offers forth an opportunity to critically (and creatively) engage this sentiment, and others like it—what is disability culture online? Who gets to produce it? How does it get produced? What are its impacts across culture and technology? The course offers the opportunity to seriously (and playfully) engage these topics as they emerge, exist, and are debated and scrutinized online. No familiarity with disability studies is presumed or required, and we will be taking a deliberately intersectional approach to the study of disability culture(s), paying particular attention to the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class alongside disability in virtual spaces.

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, with the support of the Mozilla Foundation, we'll have a chance to learn from local disability leaders both within and outside UM.

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.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

• Articulate a range of theories and frameworks for understanding disability culture and activism, especially online.
• Become familiar with work in both disability and digital studies, as well as cultural studies and the history of care.
• Investigate a range of cultural productions related to disability, community, and culture.
• Explore a range of compositional mediums
 • Integrate existing scholarship into their own original research

For the purposes of this course, research as such includes both traditional scholarly product, as well as mixed methodology new media and artistic work.

Required Texts

All assigned written and texts will be accessible via Canvas.

Course Policies

Grading Criteria

Class Participation

Blog Portfolio   20%

Access Observations   20%

Midterm Project   20%

Final Project   40%

    Final Project Proposal   10%
    Access Checklist/Reflection 15%
    Final project Delivery   15%

A Note on what "Participation" means:

This is a hybrid course, which means that our course time will be distributed across both digital environments and in-person instruction. Modes of engagements will shift across platforms, and interact differently across individual access needs; however, in general, participation in the context of this course includes arriving on time, (digitally or in person) active listening,

completing in-class activities, being prepared to contribute your views on the assigned reading (via speech and/or writing) and contributing to classroom community and citizenship.

Building Classroom Community and Citizenship

It is our responsibility to work together to produce a classroom environment where everyone can share, discuss, and interpret the materials at hand as well as create and contribute their own work respectfully and productively. Disagreements and conflicting perspectives will, unavoidably, emerge. To ensure that participants feel comfortable contributing a diverse set of thoughts, comments, and views, we will not use oppressive or harmful language, tolerate harassment, personal attacks, and other forms of actions and expressions that unduly distract from the educational mission and inflict emotional, physical, or psychological harm on those involved. Part of the role of encouraging a diverse learning environment is acknowledging that individuals should feel safe and respected to contribute to the classroom in good faith. This involves not only allowing everyone opportunities to contribute their thoughts but to be mindful of how we recognize and address others.

Do not assume things about others' identities, backgrounds, or experiences—whether that is age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, etc… Refer to people by their names, pronouns, and other identifiers that they disclose. Avoid insisting on imposing identity markers onto others. Allow people to self-identify as they feel comfortable. Please discuss with me any concerns you have regarding an unsafe or hostile classroom environment, particularly if something arises that causes distress.

Copyright, Fair Use, and Plagiarism

Working in digital environments poses all sorts of new questions regarding copyright and intellectual property, and we will discuss these issues during our time together. Importantly, and especially if you wish to publish/present digital content outside the confines of this course, Fair Use is an affirmative defense. That is, it does not foreclose the possibility of other parties litigating your work. We will discuss the ramifications of this more in depth as we progress in our work. In short, however, in the course we will continuously practice ***ethical citation and sourcing of content.***

 Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of the words or ideas of another person. person. If you are found to have knowingly plagiarized, you may fail the assignment and potentially the course, your case may be sent to the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, and you may be placed on academic probation. Please read the LSA's policies on academic misconduct. The college's policy may be found in full here: https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity/academic-misconduct.html. If you have questions about how to reference material or what constitutes plagiarism, please email me, come to my office hours, or make an appointment.

Access and Accommodations

Services for Students with Disabilities, located in G-664 Haven Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. With or without documentation, 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 maximize your participation and general access in this course. You can contact SSD via http://ssd.umich.edu/.

Put another way, I do not need to be presented with a letter of accommodation in order to have a conversation with you about access and/or accommodation. However, if you have a disability, you may also be able to register with SSD. Please let me know how we can make your class experience more accessible.

Attendance

Much of our learning in this class will be through discussion and class activities—both online and off. Attendance is therefore essential to the success of this class. Excessive unexcused absences may result in the lowering of your final grade (beyond 3), especially without communicating with me. Note: If you are sick, **PLEASE STAY HOME**. Building community also involves community care. Do not stress if you are actively experiencing crises. Please use the resources listed further on in this document as necessary.

While excused absences include those for documented illness, family tragedy, religious observance, or travel for intercollegiate athletics, if life circumstances arise, please talk with me as early as possible. We can make arrangements and find a way to keep you involved and engaged with class material.

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Resources

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LSA Instructional Support Services

 ISS provides equipment and technical support to students enrolled in LSA classes. ISS operates two centers where students may check out AV equipment for short-term loans: G340 Mason and 2001 MLB. To check out equipment, you must provide your U-M ID, along with a course title and number to support your student status. You can contact ISS via http://lsa.umich.edu/iss.

Writing Center

The Sweetland Center for Writing is available to provide free writing tutoring and consultation during *any stage* of the writing process. Services include face-to-face tutorials in 1310 North

Quad and online tutorials. You can contact Sweetland at (734) 764-0429 or
http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/.

Mental Health Resources

As a student, you may experience challenges that negatively affect your learning, such as
anxiety, depression, interpersonal or sexual violence, difficulty with eating or sleeping,
grief/loss, and alcohol or drug dependencies. 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/

Assignments

Below are quick summaries of our assignments this term. Additional details + examples will
appear in Canvas under Assignments throughout the semester. 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. During the semester, we will occasionally have guest speakers joining us
from local disability organizations and campus labs, and offices. As part of your overall
discussion grade, you will be asked to bring two questions with you on days we have visitors in
class to help us collectively prepare and keep our conversation going. While these dates might be
subject to change, I anticipate that visitors will be joining us on **February 12, February 21,
March 4, March 26, and April 4th.**

Blog Posts (**20 percent**)

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 **Friday, 02/02**. 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
April. **In early March**, 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 (20 percent)

presentation + Access audit Post: 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/accessible 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 Week 3, a signup link will be available 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 February, and another person might choose to revisit their classmate's analysis in April. In this way, we might develop a more robust way of thinking about how our digital and physical environments reflect ideologies about disability. (15 Percent)

Midterm project: Class Sound Pod Project (**20 percent**)

Building off of the work of Janet Cardiff, Sound art, and the concept of the audio walk, you will pick a space you regularly inhabit, public or private, and move through that place, building an idea of the space, access and community through sound.

Final Project: ACCESS HISTORIES, ACCESS FUTURES multimedia/website (**40 percent total: 10 percent project proposal, 15 percent access checklist, 15 percent final delivery**) 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 fi nal project, you will submit a proposal and a short refl ective summary that describes your experience and challenges in creating the project.

The Final Project is due on April 30th.