

Disability, Technology, and Media

NYUAD J-Term 2026, 3 credits
Course: CCOL-UH 2063J
No prerequisites

Hours: 1-4 p.m. (+ field trips, guest lectures) Friday classes meet 2:20-5:20

Classroom: TBD

Professor Mara Mills

mmills@nyu.edu

Office Hours: *by appointment*



A collage from the Engineering at Home archive, a project by Sara Hendren & Caitrin Lynch at Olin College.
Design credit: Casey Gollan

Mondays, 9:30-12 Room: 25W4
C-10

Instructional Time

This course meets for 3 hours/per day (10 teaching days) in class and 12 hours of fieldwork (community-based learning) outside of class throughout the JTerm period. Instructional time requirements are met by the scheduled meeting times.

Course Description:

Starting from the premise that disability is a social phenomenon, rather than an individual and medical one, this course asks: How does the built environment shape disability? And how might disability studies inform better design? In our seminar discussions, we will consider the significance of media and technology to the definition and experience of disability in a cross-cultural perspective. Topics include: universal and critical design; “assistive technology”; visual rhetorics of disability in photography and film; and disability aesthetics. Following the principle “nothing about us without us,” we will host lecturers with a range of disability expertise. We will also practice access techniques such as captioning, alt text, plain language, and video description. An overarching question for this course will be how to shift access from a retrofit and compliance issue to a creative practice. An important component of the course are our partnerships with Mawaheb and with Zayed National Museum: each student will complete 12 hours of community-based fieldwork to help these organizations make their exhibitions accessible and visitor experience welcoming.

This course appears in...

Core Curriculum > Field Colloquia (partial fulfillment)

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) linked to Program Learning Outcome (PLOs) in Bold - see appendix 1:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the disability justice and disability rights approaches to accessibility (**4 medium**)
2. Explain different models of accessible design including universal design, critical design, and resonant design (**1c low**)
3. Compare definitions of disability in different national and cultural contexts (**3 high**)
4. Interpret symbols, metaphors, rhetorics, and aesthetics of disability in visual and text-based media, and understand how they shape identity (**1a,d medium**)
5. Create and edit captions for audio, video, and/or social media (following best practices for music, sound effects, etc.) (**2 medium**)

- Choose one artifact from our website and, after evaluating that it would be appropriate for a touch tour, draft a mini touch tour text with rich, descriptive language for that object.

- Make sure to adapt the tour to the UAE context, specifically Zayed National Museum.
This assignment will be completed in groups of 2, and time will be devoted in class for group work.

Reading Reflection

due 1/16

10%

[CLO 3]

& Question for Prof. Alshammari

You will write a short (1 page) reflection on selections of Prof. Alshammari's work, in response to a prompt from the professor. You will also write one question to potentially ask Prof. Alshammari at the end of her book reading.

Due by the start of class 1/16. Submitted via Brightspace.

Conversion table:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
[100-95]	[94-90]	[90-87]	[86-83]	[83-80]	[79-77]	[76-73]	[73-70]	[69-67]	[66-60]	[59-0]

Grading Policies

This course follows the standard NYU Abu Dhabi Policies & Procedures for academic integrity and grading:

<https://nyuad.nyu.edu/en/academics/registrar/academic-policies.html>

Attendance Statement:

Due to the condensed nature of J-Term, each day of absence is the equivalent of missing more than a full week in a regular semester – with less of an opportunity to make up for missed material. An unexcused absence results in the deduction of one full letter grade from the final course grade (e.g., from an A- to a B-). Excusing absence is at the discretion of the instructor. Students who miss more than two classes will not be able to complete the course: if one or more of these absences are excused, students will be withdrawn; if all of the absences are unexcused, students will fail.

Participation Rubric:

Your participation grade is based on discussion, readiness (bringing readings/notes to class), and attentiveness. Laptops/tablets will be allowed during discussions, but not screenings or guest lectures (unless otherwise announced); they should not pose a distraction to me, you, or the other students.

A general rule about class participation is “quality is better than quantity.”

The following scale will be used to grade participation overall (on a scale of 1-15):

15: Excellent preparation by in-depth reading of the assigned material, leads/contributes in a significant way to discussions, demonstrates consistent active involvement in discussion and small group work, and offers thoughtful analysis and critique of the course material.

12: Good preparation (knows facts, considers implications), offers interpretation and analysis, leads/contributes well in discussion and is consistently involved in the class.

9: Adequate preparation (knows basic facts of some of the readings but does not show evidence of trying to interpret and analyze), does not participate voluntarily in discussions, demonstrates sporadic involvement

6: Poor preparation (has minimal knowledge and understanding of the readings), infrequent involvement in discussions or speaks without engaging with the reading or classmates' comments; minimal completion of in-class work or group activities.

3: Very poor preparation (no evidence for reading assigned material), does not respond substantially when called on, participates very rarely in discussions and group activities.

0: No participation

Accessibility, Accommodations, Abilities:

I want this course to be accessible to all interested students. If you need specific

accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. I am available to discuss course accessibility in person, on the phone, or via email.

Moses Center for Student Accessibility (CSA): mosescsa@nyu.edu

New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. The Center works with students to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations that support equal access to a world-class education. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance. Disability-related information is never disclosed without student permission. Find further information [here](#).

Course Schedule

January 5 What is Disability? Terms, Boundaries, and Intersections

Introductions and Course Syllabus

Mini-Lecture on Key Concepts in Disability Studies: Impairment, Disability, Nondisabled, Ableism, People of Determination, Medical Model, Social Model

In class: start ADA Checklist Activity

January 6 Disability and Design / The Aesthetics of Access ADA Checklist Write-Up Due

In class small group work with some of the “boundary” terms in *Keywords for Disability Studies* (e.g. Deafness, Fat, Pain, Illness)

In class we will also watch: Jason da Silva, [The Disability Trap](#), NYT (2018)

In Class: Test and Complete Survey Form, “Introduction to Digital Accessibility,” for NYU IT

Simi Linton, “Reassigning Meaning,” from: *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (NYU Press, 1998), <https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/edu/essay.html?id=21>

Peter Conrad, “Medicalization: Contexts, Characteristics, and Changes” (ONLY READ Ch. 1 p. 3 to p. 8)

Mending Our Ways: A Selection of NYU Abu Dhabi Student-Led Proposals, Ch. 1, 52-56, 80-82, 120-129

Graham Pullin, *Design Meets Disability*, chs. 4 and 5

Optional:

NYU Accessibility Resources for Students,

<https://www.nyu.edu/life/information-technology/web-and-digital-publishing/digital-publishing/accessibility/accessibility-guides-by-role/accessibility-students.html>

Taeyoon Choi, “A Guide for Co-Creating Access and Inclusion,”

<https://thecreativeindependent.com/guides/a-guide-for-co-creating-access-and-inclusion/>

Accessibility Guidelines for NYU Gallery Spaces

https://docs.google.com/document/d/12QViugpFHh3HMms_5XUW8hhigCm1ib6xkmhOfomh9pQ/edit

January 7 Captioning

Captioning lesson by Prof. Mills (co-created with Marshall Sunnes of NYU IT)

In class viewing: Artist Christine Sun Kim rewrites Closed Captions,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfe479qL8hg>
Carolyn Lazard, A Recipe for Disaster, <https://vimeo.com/267429320>

Joseph Grigely, "Inventory of Apologies," <https://journal.voca.network/inventory-of-apologies/>

Sean Zdenek, *Reading Sounds: Closed Captioned Media and Popular Culture*, selections

David Owen, "Subtitling Your Life," *The New Yorker*, 28 April 2025

January 8 Field Trip: Zayed National Museum Traveling Exhibit (Ajman Museum)

Captioning Assignment Due

Zayed National Museum: Preliminary Visit and Discussion of Museum Inclusivity plans with Tahani Alashqar (or other member of ZNM accessibility team)

Meet outside welcome center for bus transport: Time TBD (Course LEO will announce)

Tour starts at 3:30 p.m. (@Ajman Museum), with lunch and dinner provided en route

January 9: Visual Rhetorics of Disability

Bring to class an advertisement or other visual representation of disability

In-class Screening: *Code of the Freaks* (2020, excerpt)

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Seeing the Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," *The New Disability History*

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (excerpt)

January 12: Alt Text as Poetry / Visual Description Workshop

In class: Watch excerpt from *Fire thru Dry Grass* in class with AD

"Bojana Coklyat in Conversation with Shannon Finnegan," *Believer Magazine*,
<https://thebeliever.net/bojana-coklyat-in-conversation-with-shannon-finnegan/>

"At SFMOMA, Disability Artwork Makes History," *New York Times*, 7 May 2024

Tobin Siebers, "Introducing Disability Aesthetics"

To be used for workshop in class:

Bojana Coklyut and Shannon Finnegan, *Alt Text as Poetry Workbook*
<https://alt-text-as-poetry.net/assets/Alt-Text-as-Poetry-Workbook-PDF-2020-12-01.pdf>

January 13: Field Trip to Mawaheb (Dubai)

Art Studio for People of Determination

We will receive an orientation to Mawaheb, followed by lunch at the Mawaheb [Community Café](#)

Victor Pineda, "Exploring Functioning and Freedoms in Dubai," Ch. 5 from pp. 103-113.

January 14: Touch Tours
Mawaheb Assignment Due (Image Description/Alt Text)

Georgina Kleege, "The Art of Touch: Lending a Hand to the Sighted Majority," *Journal of Visual Culture* (2021)

In class: watch Haben Girma, "How the Hand of Ableism Hijacks a Touch Tour for Blind Patrons at the British Museum" and module, "Touch Tours and other Tactile Experiences,"
<https://emuzeum.cz/admin/files/Navstevnici-se-zrakovym-znevychodnenim-02.pdf>

Second Half of Class: Work on Touch Tour with Partner

January 15 Plain Language Writing
Zayed National Museum Touch Tour Assignment Due

Class meets 1-4 p.m., Zoom Workshop with Kelsie Acton, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Kelsie Acton, "Plain Language for Disability Culture," *Crip Authorship: Disability As Method*, forthcoming, https://docs.google.com/document/d/11hhV-RQAsC9iUOZ72oz1_S4n_26MUJMb/edit

Gabrielle Peters, "Crip Class" (+ plain language version by Kelsie Acton)

Optional:

NYU Steinhardt: "Writing for Accessibility on the Web" [only read that section]
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rtEAX1EEUgTQgxXrcq0RoGxXTNvm5PR3AlbOqtGYNAk/edit>

Access Ability: A Practical Handbook on Accessible Graphic Design,
https://www.rgd.ca/database/files/library/RGD_AccessAbility2_Handbook_2021_09_28.pdf

January 16: Global & Comparative Perspectives: Shahd Alshammari Book Talk
Reading Reflection and Question Due
Friday Schedule, 2:20-5:20

3-4:30 pm Book Talk: Shahd Alshammari, author of *Head Above Water: Reflections on Illness* (2023)

Shahd Alshammari, "On Being Woman, Other, and Disabled," 1-11.
Shahd Alshammari, *System Shock* (excerpt)

Community-based Learning (CBL) Engagements

- 1 Field trip to Mawaheb Art Studio for People of Determination (Dubai) -- 5 h. (includes small project as homework)
- 1 Field trip to Zayed National Museum Traveling Exhibit (Ajman) -- 3 h.
- Group project assigned by Zayed National Museum Accessibility Coordinator -- 4 h.

Policy Statements:

Chat GPT / AI

AI (such as Chat GPT) will be accepted with prior permission for certain projects (such as captioning) as a starting point for a student's media accessibility projects. I reserve the right to use Turnitin for written assignments.

Student Commitment and Expectations:

Students should keep their calendars free of other commitments during J-Term for weekdays, weekends, and evenings until they have the final syllabus on the first day of class and can see what is required. J-Term courses are academically rigorous and, because of their intensive nature, demand a lot from students. Every day of a J-Term class is the equivalent of more than a week of classes in a regular semester. Students should expect to spend several hours each day preparing assignments for class. J-Term courses also feature distinctive community-based learning components, which add co-curricular activities outside of class time. These co-curricular activities are required and missing one is comparable to missing a regularly scheduled class period. Missing required co-curricular activities conducted outside of formal class time will negatively affect the final grade.

Academic Integrity:

At NYU Abu Dhabi, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students, faculty, and staff take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others. In turn, these values create a campus climate that encourages the free exchange of ideas, promotes scholarly excellence through active and creative thought, and allows community members to achieve and be recognized for achieving their highest potential. Students should be aware that engaging in behaviors that violate the standards of academic integrity will be subject to review and may face the imposition of penalties in accordance with the procedures set out in the NYUAD policy [here](#).

Health Resources:

As a university student, you may experience a range of issues that can interfere with your ability to perform academically or impact your daily functioning, such as heightened stress, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbance, strained relationships, grief and loss, and/or personal struggles. If you have any well-being or mental health concerns please visit the Counseling Center on the ground floor of the campus center from 9 am-5 pm, Monday - Friday, or schedule an appointment to meet with a counselor by calling: +971-2-628-8100, or email: nyuad.healthcenter@nyu.edu. If you require mental health support outside these hours, call NYU's Wellness Exchange hotline at 02-628-5555, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also utilize the Wellness Exchange mobile chat feature, details of which you can find on the NYUAD student portal. These services are available remotely for students studying outside of the UAE.

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center is an excellent resource for you to use throughout your university career. Consultants will meet with you to discuss your writing for any writing project. They don't do the work for you—they don't edit or proofread your work or give you ideas—but they can help you figure out what you need to do to improve your writing. To register and to schedule an appointment, go to <https://nyuad.mywconline.com>. It is wise to schedule appointments well in advance because appointment slots fill up. These services are available remotely for students studying outside of the UAE.

Appendix 1:

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for Core courses:

1) Critically examine historical and contemporary topics of global significance, which includes

formulating clear, precise questions and arriving at well-reasoned conclusions using

- a) qualitative,
- b) quantitative,
- c) contextual, and
- d) creative modes of reasoning;

2) Communicate effectively for various audiences and purposes, including participation in public settings;

3) Demonstrate self-understanding and intercultural competency; and

4) Identify and reflect critically on conceptual and ethical complexity.

Appendix 2: Course materials

Simi Linton, "Reassigning Meaning," from: *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (NYU Press, 1998), <https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/edu/essay.html?id=21>

Peter Conrad, "Medicalization: Contexts, Characteristics, and Changes"

Taeyoon Choi, "A Guide for Co-Creating Access and Inclusion,"

<https://thecreativeindependent.com/guides/a-guide-for-co-creating-access-and-inclusion/>

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<https://alt-text-as-poetry.net/assets/Alt-Text-as-Poetry-Workbook-PDF-2020-12-01.pdf>

"At SFMOMA, Disability Artwork Makes History," *New York Times*, 7 May 2024

Tobin Siebers, "Introducing Disability Aesthetics"

Victor Pineda, "Exploring Functioning and Freedoms in Dubai," Ch. 5 from pp. 103-113.

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Access Ability: A Practical Handbook on Accessible Graphic Design,
https://www.rgd.ca/database/files/library/RGD_AccessAbility2_Handbook_2021_09_28.pdf

"Celebrating Disability at the Met,"
<https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/articles/2022/7/disability-pride>

Describing Visual Resources Toolkit (read background page):
<https://describingvisualresources.org/background/>

Christine Sun Kim interview, <https://vimeo.com/31083172>