

**RACKHAM 580**



**DIGITAL DISABILITY**  
**M 4:00-6:50PM • MASON G463**

**CROSS-LISTINGS:** ARCH 609 / EDUC 580 / ENGLISH 528 / KINESLGY 505 /  
PMR 580 / RACKHAM 580 / SOC 580 / SW 572 / WS 590

**PROFESSOR**

Melanie Yergeau  
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**OFFICE HOURS**

W 1:00-2:30 &  
by appointment

**CONTACT**

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## Course description and objectives • • •

Digital environments are supposedly altering our conceptions of what it means to communicate, as well as what it means to form and belong to communities, participate in grassroots activism, access information, and transform public discourse. In this seminar, we will consider the ways in which disability might afford us methods for reconsidering, reinventing, critiquing, and/or broadening how digital spaces configure bodyminds. During our time together, we will experiment with various modes of composing (in audio, video, and image forms). We will likewise discuss and examine the ways in which critical making affords, constricts, or troubles access.

Throughout the semester, we will explore the many inventive universes that disability – as embodiment, as critical modality, as site of reclamation and protest – yields in past and present moments. Among other items, our explorations will take us through rhetorical theory and theories of affect and embodiment, multimodal technologies, healthcare literacies, and intersectional discourses on disability, race, gender, sexuality, and class. Our conversations will consider the topics, commonplaces, and rhetorical affordances of disabled being in the world, by means of scholarly literature, public discourse, and multimodal and creative work.

## Materials • • •

- Meryl Alper, *Giving Voice: Mobile Communication, Disability, and Inequality*. [[Available digitally through the library.](#)]
- Olivia Banner, *Communicative Biocapitalism: The Voice of the Patient in Digital Health and the Health Humanities*.
- Elizabeth Ellcessor, *Restricted Access: Media, Disability, and the Politics of Participation*.
- Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*. [[Available digitally through the library.](#)]
- Readings posted to Canvas.
- Laptop, tablet, or other device (if you have one!).

# Assignments + activities • • •

**1 credit:** 6 reading responses (one of which *must* be a final reflection), participation & attendance

**2 credits:** 6 reading responses, discussion/artifact, participation & attendance

**3 credits:** 6 reading responses, discussion/artifact, proposal + final project, participation & attendance

## Blog posts + finger exercises

Throughout the semester, you will be expected to compose at least **six** responses to our course readings (to be posted to our class Wordpress site) and to comment on your peers' posts as well (roughly 10-15 comments throughout the term). These postings will contribute to our broader class discussions and thus be an important part of our time together.

Other than our first blog post, all blog deadlines are rolling: you can write responses at any point before semester's end (December 17). Your blog posts can be composed in multimedia form, if you'd like—ideally, you'll use these posts to stretch yourself a little bit, to become acquainted with forms of composing that go outside your comfort zone. Think of your blog posts as low-stakes composing: It's the place where you can wrestle with ideas and new media.

At times, we will use the blog in class for production-oriented activities and other classroom exercises. We will refer to these in-class activities as finger exercises so that we can easily distinguish these tasks from blog response posts. You will have class time to work on these activities, which will typically involve playing with different media or software, and we will use our blog as a space to share these works. Occasionally, you might want to continue working on a finger exercise outside of class. The goal of these exercises isn't to create polished products, but rather to experiment and learn.

## Discussion & artifact offering

In groups of 3-4 people, you will take part in leading class discussion for one half of a class period. Part of your work will involve reading all of the companion pieces for the week, as well as bringing in one or more artifacts from outside the class to share as part of our discussion for that day. You can (and should) interpret *artifact* broadly: you can share a cereal box, a film clip, a short *NYT* article, a book cover, or even a scholarly

abstract. More or less, these artifacts should involve disability and/or digitality in some way, and your offering should connect to or enhance our class conversations. You might think of our companion pieces as examples of the kinds of artifacts you could share.

Leading us in discussion ≠ lecturing or taking us through Powerpoint slides. You also don't need to be "on" for 90 minutes straight, either! Rather, my hope is that you might involve us in an active discussion of the readings – perhaps via discussion questions, a hands-on activity, blogging, or even a game. Think of this as an opportunity to direct us to your own interests, thinking, and ideas!

### Final project

This final project is a rather flexible one. You may compose your project in any form, mode, genre, or register that makes most sense for your field. Your project might take form in/as poetry, technical or field reports, seminar papers, multimodal narratives (video, audio, artwork), syllabi or lesson plans, and so on. Your project should be broadly comparable to what is being produced in a 500-level (i.e., intro to grad school) class in your home discipline. This means that your project should be researched, with relevant and supporting sources that take form as citations, interviews, and/or background work for your project. You might think of the artifact offering project, for instance, as a preparatory move in this regard.

As well, with your project I will ask you to also include a short statement (2 to 3 pages) that positions your work within the context of our class. This statement should be both explanatory and reflective: It should provide detail that guides our reading/viewing, but it should also reflect on the process of creation and its connections back to disability studies.

Midway through the semester (**November 5**), I will ask you to submit an informal proposal that describes your intent for the project, in terms of form, scope, topic, and audience. We will discuss your proposals in class together. As well, I have reserved our last two class sessions (**December 3 & 10**) for workshopping of your projects. During this time, you will share your work with the class, as well as offer feedback for your peers.

**\*\* 1-credit folks:** Your final reading response will take form as a reflection on the course, including some of your peers' final projects. You may use these workshop sessions as material for these reflections.

## Course policies • • •

**Participation //** Participation is a loaded word. We all have different needs, experiences, and challenges when it comes to discussing and engaging with class material. In our class, we will collaborate to create spaces, both virtual and physical, that enable everyone to contribute meaningfully through the media that work best for them. Some people best participate in person, others in writing. Please be prepared to make your thoughts known through the modality that works best for you.

**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.

## Access • • •

**Accessibility & 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 learning, participation, and general access in this course. You can contact SSD at (734) 763-3000 or <http://ssd.umich.edu/>.

**Our space //** Our classroom, G463 Mason, is designated as an “accessible” room. As we’ll quickly learn, an institutional designation of accessibility does not necessarily embody nor encourage inclusion or participation of every kind of bodymind. While

our classroom, for instance, has automatic door openers, it also bears furniture designed and arranged under normative conditions for normative bodies. We will, throughout the semester, tear apart this room—intellectually, critically, metaphorically, and physically. If, at any point, the design of our space is impeding access, please bring this to my attention (and, if you're comfortable doing so, to the attention of the class).

**LSA Instructional Support Services // ISS** provides equipment and technical support to students enrolled in LSA classes. Depending on your project choices, you might benefit from using ISS's resources throughout the semester. ISS operates centers where UM students may check out AV equipment for classroom use and for short-term loans. You can contact ISS at (734) 615-0100 or email them at [lsa-iss-reservations@umich.edu](mailto:lsa-iss-reservations@umich.edu).

# SCHEDULE

	Topics/Activities	Reading Due	Assignments Due
<b>Week 1</b>			
M 9/10	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Disability studies and/as methodology</p>	<p><i>Lateral</i> round table on critical disability studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minich, <a href="#">“Enabling Whom? Critical Disability Studies Now”</a></li> <li>• Kim, <a href="#">“Toward a Crip-of-Color Critique”</a></li> <li>• Schalk, <a href="#">“Critical Disability Studies As Methodology”</a></li> <li>• Minich, <a href="#">response to Kim &amp; Schalk</a></li> </ul> <p>Hershey, <a href="#">“From Poster Child to Protester”</a></p> <p>Weise, <a href="#">“The Dawn of the Tryborg”</a></p>	
<b>Week 2</b>			
M 9/17	<p>Digital politics / Disability politics</p>	<p><a href="#">Keywords for Disability Studies: “Activism” (Nepveux) and “Technology”</a></p> <p>Ellis, Goggin, &amp; Kent, <a href="#">“Disability's Digital Frictions: Activism, Technology and Politics”</a></p>	<p><b>First blog post</b></p> <p><b>Access survey</b></p>

<b>Week 3: Lydia Brown, they/them/theirs (Guest Speaker)</b>			
M 9/24	<b>Class meets in Angell 3222</b>	Readings TBD	
<b>Week 4</b>			
M 10/1	Access, experience, & regulation	<p>Elcessor, <i>Restricted Access</i>, introduction + chs. 1-3</p> <p><b>Companion pieces:</b></p> <p>Ratliff, <a href="#">"I Rely on Closed Captions"</a></p> <p><b>Watch</b> Brueggemann, <a href="#">"Why I Mind"</a></p> <p><b>Watch</b> Rhett &amp; Link, <a href="#">"CAPTION FAIL: Lady Gaga Putt-Putt Rally"</a></p>	
<b>Week 5</b>			
M 10/8	Content, complexity, & frustration	<p>Elcessor, <i>Restricted Access</i>, chs. 4-5 + conclusion</p> <p><b>Companion pieces:</b></p> <p>Grace, <a href="#">"Cognitively Accessible Language (Why We Should Care)"</a></p> <p>Leland, <a href="#">"A Poet With Words Trapped Inside"</a></p> <p>Livingston, <a href="#">"On Rage, Shame, "Realness," and Accountability to Survivors"</a></p>	



<b>Week 6</b>			
M 10/15	<b>FALL BREAK - NO CLASS</b>		
<b>Week 7</b>			
M 10/22	Disability rights movements  Theories & histories of design	<i>Building Access</i> (Hamraie), preface, intro, + chs. 1-3  <b>Companion pieces:</b>  <b>Watch</b> <a href="#">Drunk History, "Judy Heumann Fights for People With Disabilities"</a>  <b>Explore <u>Patient No More Exhibit</u></b> (skim & click through the links under "Virtual Tour")	
<b>Week 8: Aimi Hamraie, they/them/theirs (Guest Speaker)</b>			
M 10/29	<b>Class meets in Angell 3222</b>	<i>Building Access</i> (Hamraie), chs. 4-7 + conclusion  <b>Companion pieces:</b>  Alper, <a href="#">"Making Space in the Makerspace"</a>  Wong, <a href="#">"Introducing Team Free to Pee"</a>	

<b>Week 9</b>			
M 11/5	Constructing <i>voice</i> Linguistocentrism	Alper, <i>Giving Voice</i> , chs. 1-3  <b>Companion pieces:</b>  Milner, <a href="#">"Voice Giving (Way)"</a>  Savarese, <a href="#">"Passive Plants"</a>	<b>Final project proposals due</b>
<b>Week 10: Annette Vee, she/her/hers (Guest Speaker)</b>			
M 11/12	<b>Class meets in Angell 3222</b>	Vee, "Sociomaterialities of Programming and Writing"  Teston, "Rhetoric, Precarity, and mHealth Technologies"  <b>Companion pieces:</b>  Eubanks, <a href="#">"The Digital Poorhouse"</a>  Francher, <a href="#">"Composing Artificial Intelligence: Performing Whiteness and Masculinity"</a>  Lecher, <a href="#">"What Happens When an Algorithm Cuts Your Health Care"</a>  Stanley, <a href="#">"Pitfalls of Artificial Intelligence Decisionmaking Highlighted In Idaho ACLU Case"</a>	

<b>Week 11</b>			
M 11/19	Surveillance & big data Racialization & healthcare	Banner, <i>Communicative Biocapitalism</i> , intro + chs. 1-3  <b>Companion pieces:</b>  Mole, <a href="#">"Experts Raise Eyebrows at Digital Pill"</a>  Trew, <a href="#">"Pavlok is a Habit-Forming Wearable That Will Shock You"</a>	
<b>Week 12</b>			
M 11/26	Algorithms & metadata Community response	Banner, <i>Communicative Biocapitalism</i> , chs. 4-5 + conclusion  <b>Companion pieces:</b>  Nicodemo, <a href="#">"A Northeastern Professor's Algorithm Can Predict Behavior in Autistic Children"</a>  ASAN, <a href="#">"Community Concerns"</a>  Shankland, <a href="#">"EmotionML"</a>	
<b>Week 13</b>			
M 12/3	Sharing works-in-progress		<b>Bring your rough draft!</b>
<b>Week 14</b>			
M 12/10	Sharing works-in-progress		<b>Bring your rough draft!</b>

<b>Finals week</b>		Final projects + all outstanding work due by <b>noon on Monday, December 17</b>
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