



**Disability Studies 2216F (570)
Disability And Popular Culture
Fall/Winter 2025-2026**

Instructor: Dr. Billie Anderson
Email: bander49@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description:

Examine cultural contexts and attitudes that produce diverse, evolving representations of disability and normalcy in private reflections and public media (news, policies, memoirs, arts, social media) by care professionals, law, state, church and family. Students critique existing media representations and work on constructive alternatives.

Prerequisite(s): [Disability Studies 1010A/B](#).

Antirequisite(s):

Extra Information: 3 lecture hours

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category A

Subject Code: DISABST

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course, or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

King's University College
DS 2216F 570: Disability and Popular Culture

Course information:

Course Name, Number, Section: Disability and Popular Culture 2216F 570

Instructor: Billie Anderson

Contact Information: bander49@uwo.ca

Office hours: See Brightspace

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Examine cultural contexts and attitudes that produce diverse, evolving representations of disability and normalcy in private reflections and public media (news, policies, memoirs, arts, social media) by care professionals, law, state, church and family. Students critique existing media representations and work on constructive alternatives. Extra Information: 3 lecture hours.

Course learning outcomes:

1. Identify and critically analyze recurring tropes of disability in popular media, such as the supercrip, tragic victim, evil cripple, and monstrous body.
2. Apply key frameworks from disability studies (e.g., narrative prosthesis, ideology, abjection) to the interpretation of cultural texts.
3. Assess the cultural, political, and emotional impact of disability representations across diverse genres and formats, including film, television, comics, and advertisements.
4. Demonstrate close reading and visual analysis skills, attending to form, aesthetics, narrative structure, and the politics of representation.
5. Collaborate meaningfully with peers in weekly group activities to develop, debate, and refine interpretations of course materials.
6. Reflect on their own assumptions about disability and how these have been shaped by media exposure and cultural narratives.
7. Construct clear, well-supported written arguments that engage both theoretical and popular texts, in both timed and take-home formats.
8. Imagine and propose alternative media representations that center disabled voices, challenge normative assumptions, and contribute to a more inclusive cultural future.

Mode of Instruction: In-person

Course textbooks/materials:

All required readings will be available via Brightspace for free under the content page for the week it is assigned.

..but you need to buy this: Cost of 100 3 x 5" index cards: \$2.29 plus tax (0.29) = \$2.58 (Cost at the UWO Bookstore.) If you split the cards with 9 other folks, it's 0.25 cents each.

Most of the films are accessible through Western Libraries' streaming services. In cases where a title is not available through the library, students will need to access it through a commercial rental or purchase platform of their choice (I have ensured all are available through Apple (\$14.99/month) or Prime (\$9.99/month)).

You'll also need:

- Stable internet connection
- Laptop or computer
- Ability to print material (say, at the library)

Method of evaluation:

In this course, you won't be graded on "getting the right answer" but on how you apply critical tools from disability studies to new media forms. Your assignments are designed to help you engage actively—both individually and collaboratively—with films, comics, TV, ads, and other cultural texts. You'll experiment with close analysis, peer collaboration, and creative imagining, always asking "How does this representation shape our understanding of disability?" Whether it's through a sharp analytical essay or an inventive media project, you'll learn to move beyond summary and bring fresh insights to both familiar and unfamiliar texts.

Because this is a designated essay course, students will be expected to complete at least 2,500 words of written work over the semester, which will be met through cards, the midterm, and written components the final assignment.

ASSESSMENT	FORMAT	% OF GRADE	DUE DATE
Cards	Physical index card, handed in at the start of class.	15	Weekly (Weeks 2–12). Only one card may be submitted per week.
Weekly Group Work	In-class activity (may involve short group write-ups, presentations, or worksheets).	20	Weekly, assessed for engagement and completion.
Midterm	Handwritten in-class exam.	25	Held during class on October 22 nd .
Final Project Proposal	Digital submission via Brightspace (PDF or Word doc).	10	November 12 th at 11:59 PM
Final Project	Digital submission via Brightspace (PDF or Word doc).	30	December 2 nd at 11:59 PM

Academic Considerations:

What goals do I care about most?

1. Intense thinking: I will regularly ask questions to which I do not have "the" answer. My job is not to fill you with information nor to train you like a lab animal. Expect open-ended, improvisational conversations that leave room for everyone to learn and grow.
2. Personal maturation: I want every student to leave my courses a little wiser—and wisdom involves action, not just theory. I want you to want to be a better version of yourself:

more generous with others, better able to endure hardship, more determined to live with integrity.

3. Genuine community: This does not mean warm fuzzies, nor does it require wholesale agreement. It does mean building trust, pushing beyond superficial identities toward real understanding, and authentic curiosity about others' lives.

What priorities will make these things possible?

- Regular presence: Rather than rules about the number of classes missed or the use of electronic devices, I will just say this: I want you to want to be present—wholeheartedly—as much as possible. When we recognize barriers to that, let's figure out how to overcome them. If you start missing too many classes, I'll want to talk about options.
- Productive disagreement: I'm not here to clone myself, and none of us should be here to "win" arguments. We'll talk regularly about controversial topics, and we'll get better at being frank but not blunt, tactful but not wishy-washy. Our culture needs more gracious candour.
- Process above outcomes: Grades matter, but how you get them matters more. Think back across the best classes you've ever taken. What memories made them special? It's not the label that the registrar puts on your transcript, but the stories that you, your peers, and your faculty can tell.

What can you count on from me?

- Availability and responsiveness: In some ways, tuition is like a gym membership. My job is to make regular spaces ready for you to grow, both in classes and during office hours, and your job is to take advantage of them—and not just when deadlines are approaching!
- Honest, encouraging feedback: A good coach both competes alongside you and holds you accountable concerning the steps required by your goals. A grade reflects your work's status relative to peer benchmarks, but what matters most is your growth across our weeks together.
- Fairness and consistency: I will assign grades with an eye to all concerned, including peers past and present, and will discuss them as desired.

Universal/Resonant Design: My courses are intentionally designed to be modular and flexible and to address different learning styles and needs. Nevertheless, aspects of this syllabus—requirements, expectations, etc.—may conflict with your access needs. I can be flexible if you come to me within the first two weeks of class to discuss your access needs. Note that some accommodation requests could potentially conflict with others' access needs (or mine), and/or the pedagogical goals of the course, in which case they might need to be negotiated. I do, however, have a few non-negotiables:

1. I expect you to really try (which means it's also okay to fail).
2. Good faith and good humour toward your colleagues in the classroom. For both: disagreements are expected and encouraged, but please keep nitpicking to a minimum; personal attacks and intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstances. Follow the Golden Rule. Encourage basic questions as well as advanced ones.

3. Your job as a participant is to listen actively to what others have to say and advance the discussion. If you are a confident contributor, use your confidence for good and not evil. Help bring others into the discussion, refer to your classmates by name, and be encouraging about the contributions of those who do not say as much.
4. While personal anecdotes are allowed, keep in mind this is a shared space. Others may disagree with your interpretation of your experience. This is encouraged and allowed. If you are not comfortable with this, do not share your story. If you share your story and then decide you are uncomfortable with others discussing it, just ask us to stop and I will move the discussion along.
5. Awkward silences and hesitation are okay. Don't feel you need to rush to speak and don't worry if you need a little time to articulate something. Contributing to the class discussion is more than the frequency of the times your hand goes up and the number of words you say. **If you are struggling to articulate something, that's probably a sign that you are saying something that is new and not obvious.**
6. Difficult subject matter: As your prof, I will never do anything intentionally to shock or traumatize students. At the same time, it's our job to discuss difficult subjects in class, and nobody can predict the effect some materials may have on someone. I will try and give previews of the kinds of subject matter you will encounter before you encounter it, but I cannot guarantee I will preview the important thing. If I forget, feel free to ask. If you are having difficulty dealing with a class discussion or reading or recording, you may raise the issue as part of the discussion (keeping in mind #4 above), or you may simply discretely leave class. A note to me (the prof) would be helpful after the fact so that we know what happened and don't think you just got up and left.

While life does happen, excessive absences that are not discussed with me ahead of time could result in a reduction of your final grade if you have not compensated for it in your course contributions. There are no "excused" or "unexcused" absences, and you never need to show me a doctor's note, you just need to get in touch with me before the last minute.

Course Membership Rules:

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: To understand disability is to understand the perspectives of disabled people.

OUR CLASSROOM (AND ITS ONLINE MANIFESTATIONS) IS A DISABILITY-FORWARD SPACE: Differences are the norm, not the exception. We will learn with and from disability. But disability encompasses many different things, some of them contradictory.

MORE THAN ONE THING CAN BE TRUE: Cultural analysis only works if it is possible to hold onto apparently contradictory ideas at once and explain how they can both be true in specific circumstances.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE WRONG: Part of learning is changing one's own perspective. This is only possible where ideas can be expressed and challenged, and people are allowed to change their minds. But: no "devil's advocates" will be allowed.

IT IS EVERYONE'S JOB TO IMAGINE A BETTER WORLD: Any critique of how something is raises the question of how it ought to be. You will be asked to think carefully and imaginatively about alternatives to the way things are.

FOLLOW THE GOLDEN RULE: Treat others as you would want to be treated.

Academic Integrity / Remote Proctoring:

Link to Western Scholastic Discipline policy:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Course policy on use of generative AI, including translation/grammar aids

Students who use AI (such as ChatGPT, automatic translation tools, grammar checkers...) to complete assignments without attribution or permission from the instructor are committing a scholastic offence. Students in this class are reminded that plagiarism—using another’s work, ideas, or words without giving credit—is a serious scholastic offence. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized use of generative artificial intelligence to create content that is submitted as one’s own.

Should a concern about plagiarism arise, instructors may require the student to share their rough work, research notes, or previous drafts. Students are advised to retain these materials until the graded assignment is returned.

I’m happy to talk about what I’m asking for here and have us figure this out together:

1. I work from the belief that you are adults and have the right to pursue education the way you wish.
2. We all know that should you choose to use ChatGPT or another LLM, or image-generating prompt-bots like DALL-E, I probably won’t catch you, or figure out if you’re a machine or not.
3. (I hope you’re not a machine.)
4. We could spend time feeding these bots with things from your head, but I think you’ll be getting plenty of that in your future. Is there a rush to get into the future? Aren’t we already there? Just a few moments ago you read point [3] above—so that’s the past, now, yes? Point [5] below is in the (very near) future.
5. Most of all, it’s not what I’m here to do now in this time we have with each other.
6. I’d like us to talk together without being mediated (excessively) by machines.
7. I’d like us to think together, most of all.
8. I’m asking you, kindly and with understanding that many of you feel the world is a hostile place in which you must have every advantage possible, to be you.
9. Please don’t be a chatbot plus you. Please do not use a chatbot to help you brainstorm, think, write, draw or be. Do you need to hear your ideas out loud? Do you have a friend you could talk to?
10. For a very short while in your life here at university, and in this class, you won’t need bots.
11. In fact, they will, to paraphrase the immortal (well, we’ll see) Rick Astley, give you up, hold you down, tell a lie and hurt you.
12. Please choose to step out of the brain race, if only for the few hours a week this course asks of you.
13. If you DO REALLY want to use some version of AI to help you, could you raise it in class or with me personally, first? We can talk about it together like people. I’d really like and appreciate that, believe me. I won’t judge you; we’ll just talk. That’s why I’m here.

Schedule of Classes, Readings, Assessments:

DATE AND WEEK	SUBJECT	READINGS MEDIA	DUE IN CLASS
Week 1 September 10	Introductions: What do we mean when we talk about popular culture?	No readings	Nothing due this week!
Week 2 September 17	How to Read Media: Ideology, Mythology, Normalcy	Barthes Althusser	Card 1
Week 3 September 24	The Super Crip	Grue Schalk Daredevil Volume 1	Card 2
Week 4 October 1	Disability as Tragedy	Shakespeare Davis Assigned advertisements	Card 3
Week 5 October 8	Obsessive Avenger and Supervillains	Dahl McRuer Return of the Jedi (1983)	Card 4
Week 6 October 15	Disability and Monstrosity	Mitchell and Snyder Frankenstein (1931)	Card 5
Week 7 October 22	Midterm	No readings	Midterm
Week 8 October 29	Futures and Freaks: Disability in Science Fiction	Kafer Haraway Mad Max: Fury Road (2015) Excerpts from Parable of the Sower	Card 6

Week 9 November 5	Reading Week - No class!	No readings!	Nothing due this week!
Week 10 November 12	Disability and War	Serlin Handley-Cousins The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)	Card 7 Final Project Proposal
Week 11 November 19	Disability and Comedy	Sandahl Kuppers The Perks of Being Disabled	Card 8
Week 12 November 26	Disabled Aesthetics and Access	Hamraie Papalia Excerpts from Deaf Republic	Card 9
Week 13 December 3	Final Reflections	Longmore A Different Man (2024)	Card 10 Final Project

KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a "Multiple Exam Situation" (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

GBSV Support:

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality_Reports - TurnItIn.html.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.