



DISABILITY STUDIES 3321G (570)
Navigating Health Systems
Fall/Winter 2025 - 2026

Instructor: Dr. Stephanie LeBlanc-Omstead
Email: slebla8@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description: Interaction with health and social care systems is inevitable for many people who live with disabilities. This course examines barriers people encounter when seeking to access resources and services. Using narrative case studies grounded in lived experience, students practice applying theoretical concepts to develop practical solutions to real-world challenges.

Prerequisite(s): [Disability Studies 2201F/G](#) or [Disability Studies 2221A/B](#) or [Disability Studies 2292A/B](#) if taken in 2021-22, or permission of the Instructor.

Antirequisite(s): [Disability Studies 3395F/G](#) if taken in 2018-19, 2019-20.

Extra Information: 3 hours

Course Weight: 0.5

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.

Navigating Systems

King's University College @ Western University

Version Date – December 1st, 2025

Instructor Information

Stephanie LeBlanc-Omstead, PhD, OT Reg. (Ont.) slebla8@uwo.ca

Office Hours: By Appointment.

Lecture Information

Time: see Brightspace

Location: TBD

Course Information

Prerequisite: DS 2201 F/G or DS 2221 A/B or DS 2292 A/B (2021-2022)

Antirequisite: DS 3395 F/G (2018-2020)

3 hours (or equivalent) of weekly lecture content, 0.5 course (King's) Part of the DS Minor and DS Major Module: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/disability-studies/>

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll 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.

[Calendar Copy] This course explores health and social care systems through the interdisciplinary lens of Disability Studies. Students examine real-world barriers to accessing the resources that people need as they move through disability service, health and support systems, and apply theoretical and intersectional concepts to develop practical solutions.

Course Description

This course explores health and social care system navigation through an intersectional lens. Assigned readings will illustrate real-world challenges faced by people who live with disability, and whose experiences navigating health and social care are shaped by various forms of systemic oppression. Lectures will introduce theoretical concepts from disability studies to analyze these experiences. Through coursework, students will explore applications for these ideas in a real-world context.

Learning Outcomes

This third-year course builds on knowledge developed during the first two years of study in the Disability Studies module. This course invites students to:

- Describe health and social care system navigation
- Discuss the impact of systemic oppression on health and social care system navigation
- Apply disability studies concepts to identify and describe barriers to system navigation
- Generate strategies to support community members with system navigation
- Recommend steps that governing bodies and professionals can take to help mitigate barriers to access in health and social care systems
- Practice constructive group dynamics in a collaborative environment
- Self-reflect on positionality in relation to health and social care systems

Mode of Instruction

This is an in-person course. Beyond taking responsibility for your own learning, you are asked to contribute to a respectful, collaborative, and engaged classroom. Please come to each class prepared to participate thoughtfully and with a willingness to learn with and from one another. Each of you brings valuable knowledge, experience, and perspective to our learning community. Together, we will use course materials (readings, videos, discussions, lessons, and more) to support collective learning and critical reflection.

Technical requirements: Course reminders/updates, links to course readings, weekly lecture slides, and additional resources are shared through our course OWL Brightspace site. Assignment submissions and examinations are also completed and/or submitted online. You will need a computer as well as stable high-speed internet connection to access course materials.

Course Outline

01-09	Week 1: Introductions - What is Systems Navigation?
01-16	Week 2: Power, Oppression & The Architecture of Systems
01-23	Week 3: The Work of Systems Navigation
01-30	Week 4: Intersectionality, Standpoint & Social Determinants of Health
02-06	Week 5: Structural and Systemic Violence
02-13	Week 6: Education Systems
02-20	Week 7: Reading Week (No Class)
02-27	Week 8: Midterm Knowledge Exchange Café
03-06	Week 9: Policing, Carcerality & Surveillance
03-13	Week 10: Child, Parent & Family Care Systems
03-21	Week 11: Systems Navigation in Crisis
03-28	Week 12: Reimagining Systems & Systems Alternatives
04-03	Week 13: Wrap Up & Review (No Class) <i>This class falls on a holiday; in lieu of in-class hours, you will be given asynchronous resources to support your consolidation of key course concepts.</i>

Required Texts

Links to all readings and other required materials are posted on Brightspace.

Course Requirements & Evaluation Scheme

Connect & Reflect (Weekly Mini Assignments)	20 %
In-Class Participation	5 %
Mapping your own Systems Navigation Experience	20 %
Navigating Systems: Critical Analysis & Reimagining	25 %
Final Exam	30 %
Total	100 %

Assignment Details

1. Connect + Reflect Mini Assignments (7 x 2.86% = 20%)

Each week, you will submit a brief 'mini assignment' based on one (1) of our weekly assigned readings and/or other learning materials (e.g., video or blog post). These assignments are meant to support you in engaging critically and personally with our assigned course materials, rather than just skimming or summarizing them. Your submission should address the following two prompts about your *connection to* and *reflection on* the material:

1. **Connect**

Select one idea, quote, or concept from the assigned reading or video that resonated with you, challenged your thinking, or left you with questions. Briefly explain your choice.

2. **Reflect**

In just a few sentences, reflect on how this idea connects to:

- a disability studies concept
- your own assumptions or experiences
- broader systems or structures, or
- questions you would like to explore further

Format & Submission:

- **150-200 words**, submitted as a 'text submission' directly through Brightspace. (Tip: Write in a Word Document first, then paste into Brightspace).
- Clearly indicate which reading/video you are responding to.
- You may use tools like AI to support your learning, but your submission should reflect your own understandings and voice.

Due Date(s) & Built-In Submission Flexibility:

- Mini assignments are due **Thursdays at 5:00pm**.
- We have assigned readings for weeks: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, and 12 (9 weeks total).
- You are required to submit **seven (7)** weekly mini assignments, which gives you two (2) 'skip weeks,' without penalty.
 - **Tip:** You may use this submission flexibility strategically for busy periods or hang on to these skip days just in case something unexpected arises.

Evaluation:

Your weekly submission will be graded for basic completion and thoughtfulness:

- 2.86 points: Submitted on time; clear effort and reflection
- 0 points: Not submitted

2. In-Class Participation (5%)

Participation is an important component of this course. Diverse forms of participation are valued, including:

- Regular attendance
- Active listening during lectures and discussions
- Contributing to both small- and large-group discussions
- Asking or answering questions
- Sharing a relevant article, video or other resource along with a brief explanation of its connection to course concepts

Participation will be evaluated for both quantity and quality. Your participation will be evaluated holistically over the course of the term, and will take into account both instructor observation, as well as self-evaluation surveys.

3. Mapping Your Own System Navigation Experience (20%)

We all interact with health and social systems; sometimes with relative ease, and sometimes with significant barriers. Navigating these systems often requires time, energy, and familiarity with unspoken rules or pathways. In this assignment, you will reflect on and analyze a system navigation experience of your own. This assignment invites you to explore how systems shape access, belonging, and in/exclusion, and how individual experiences connect to broader social structures. You will be asked to recognize systems navigation as a form of labour and expertise, and to practice applying course concepts as you analyze and reflect on your chosen experience.

1. Choose a system navigation experience

You may choose to reflect on: your own experience, an experience you closely observed (e.g., supporting a friend or family member), or an anonymized, blended example that draws on elements from more than one experience (your own, someone else's, or publicly discussed situations) rather than a single identifiable event. Some examples include:

- Making or attending a medical appointment
- Applying for student loans, scholarships, or income support
- Seeking housing or accessible transportation
- Navigating post-secondary or workplace accommodations
- Interacting with child care, legal, or mental health systems

2. Describe the experience

Provide enough context to clearly describe what happened: What system or institution was involved? What were you trying to access or accomplish? What steps or processes were required? *You are not required to disclose sensitive personal details and are encouraged to select a scenario that allows for meaningful reflection without undue discomfort.*

3. Analyze your experience

Seek to answer the following questions in your reflection:

- What forms of knowledge, privilege, or persistence were needed to navigate this system?
- What barriers or facilitators did you encounter (e.g., accessibility, communication barriers/facilitators, stigma, bureaucracy)?
- How might your social location (e.g., disability, race, gender, class, age) have shaped this experience?
- Whose expertise or labour made navigation possible (your own, a partner's, a parent's, a service provider's, a friend's, a caregiver)?

- How does this example illustrate broader concepts from the course (e.g., systemic violence, gatekeeping, interdependence, or social determinants of health, etc.)?

4. Reflect on implications

As part of your reflection, consider what your experience reveals about how systems are designed, and who they are designed for. What might change if these systems were grounded in interdependence, equitable access, and dignity-conserving practices?

Format & Length:

- 750–1,000 words
- Word or PDF document
- First-person voice
- APA citation of course concepts and assigned readings where appropriate
- **Due:** Friday, February 13th by 11:59 pm

Further assignment details will be provided in class and on OWL.

4. Navigating Systems: Critical Analysis & Re-Imagining (25%)

Navigating health and social care systems is often complex and inequitable. In this assignment, you will (a) critically analyze a narrative scenario that illustrates real-world challenges in navigating these systems and then (b) reimagine how the experience could unfold within more accessible, equitable, and justice-oriented systems. Using disability studies frameworks, you will examine what the scenario reveals about how systems are designed and consider how experiences of navigation might change if those systems were built around, for instance, equitable access and dignity-conserving practices.

Part A: Critical Analysis.

Select one narrative (provided by your instructor), and using the provided chart to structure your analysis, examine:

i. Systems & Stakeholders

Identify and describe the systems, sectors, or institutions that the individual interacts with in the case (e.g., health care, housing, education, social assistance).

ii. Barriers & Facilitators

Analyze barriers and facilitators to the author's navigation of systems, using at least two course concepts (e.g., ableism, sanism, intersectionality, social determinants of health, crip time, etc.) to support your analysis.

iii. Strategies for Change

Propose concrete strategies at:

- Community level (e.g., personal supports, grassroots initiatives)
- Professional level (e.g., practice approaches, advocacy by service providers)
- Policy/system level (e.g., program reforms, structural alternatives)

Your strategies should be clearly linked to your analysis of barriers.

iv. **Positionality & Reflection**

Reflect on how your positionality (social location, lived experience, assumptions, training or worldview) influences:

- What you notice in the scenario
- How you interpret barriers and solutions
- How you imagine systemic change

Part B: Re-Imagined Narrative

Using key moments from the original narrative, write a short narrative scene (mini story, dialogue, or scenario) that illustrates how the experience could unfold differently in a more equitable, accessible, and justice-oriented system. Your reimagined scene should:

- Clearly address the barriers identified in Part A.
- Show how specific systemic changes transform the experience.
- Integrate course concepts explicitly

Guiding questions:

- What does this experience look like when barriers are minimized or removed?
- How do systems, service providers, or community supports act differently in this reimagined version of events? And, how does this support more equitable navigation?

(Optional) Visual Element. You may include a diagram, flow chart, storyboard, or concept map for either the original or re-imagined narrative. This is graded for clarity, not artistic skill.

Format & Length:

- 850–1,200 words
- Word or PDF document
- APA citation of course concepts and assigned readings where appropriate
- **Due:** Thursday, March 20th at 11:59pm

Further assignment details will be provided in class and on OWL.

5. Final Exam (30%)

The final exam will take place during the end of term examination period.

Course Policies & University Procedures

Device Policy

Students are welcomed and encouraged to make appropriate use of technology during class time. Please be aware that inappropriate use of technology during class time may be distracting to you, to other students and to the professor, and will not be tolerated. Examples of appropriate use of technology during class include using a device to take notes or to reference readings or other materials relevant to class. Using the internet to find information related to class discussion is also encouraged, provided it does not hinder your engagement in the class. Examples of inappropriate use of technology during class include using social media and accessing content that is not directly related to class discussions. Please excuse yourself from the room if you need to check email, message, text, make or take phone calls.

Safer Space Policy

Effective learning can only happen when everyone feels safe in our shared space. Each member of the classroom community is asked to be mindful of language and actions that may be perceived or experienced as disrespectful or discriminatory. Students are encouraged to communicate their own, and to be cognisant of others', needs and preferences. Please alert the professor at any time if you are feeling unsafe in the classroom.

Communication Policy

Students are encouraged to make use of the professor's office hours to clarify concepts or to engage in discussion about course material beyond what is covered during class time. You may also communicate with peers about course materials and evaluations. Before you contact the professor with questions about assignments, please ensure you have carefully read all provided instructions, including relevant sections of the course outline and course website.

If you contact the professor by email, you can usually expect a response within 1-2 business days (Monday-Friday). Please do not expect a response over the weekend. At busy times of the semester, it may take longer to get a response.

Support & Accommodations

I am happy to support any formal accommodations recommended by Accessibility, Counselling & Student Development (ACSD, <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/acsd-student-supports/>) or the Academic Dean's Office (ADO, <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/courses-enrolment/exams-and-tests/academic-consideration-requests/>). Please communicate with Dr. LeBlanc-Omstead early and often so that we can collaborate to ensure your full and equitable participation in this course.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) & 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, at the following Website:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

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. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>). Please note that Turnitin analysis now includes AI detection.

Within this course AI tools such as Chat GPT are permitted exclusively for information- gathering and preliminary research purposes. AI **may not be used to generate or write assignments, papers, reflections, discussion posts, or any work submitted for grading**, nor may they be used to paraphrase or substantially revise written work in place of the student's own thinking and writing. All submitted work must represent the student's own original analysis, voice, and engagement with course materials. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.

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/MC-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

Friday Make-Up Exams may only be written with the instructor's consent.

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.