



Sociology 3339f (570)
Disability Cross-Culturally
Fall/ Winter 2026-2027

Instructor: L. Besen

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Course Information

Calendar Description:

Explores how different cultures construct disability. Uses cases to examine the way diverse socio-cultural norms inform definitions, policies, practices and attitudes towards people with disability and how this varies internationally.

Antirequisite(s): [Disability Studies 3339F/G](#).

Prerequisite(s): 1.0 from Sociology courses at the 1000 level, and 3rd or 4th year standing in a Sociology, Criminology or Disability Studies module, or with permission of the instructor.

Extra Information: 3 lecture hours. Cross-listed with [Disability Studies 3339F/G](#).

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category A

Subject Code: SOCIOLOG

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), 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.

Disability Cross-Culturally

Fall 2026

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will explore the concept of disability from a cross-cultural perspective, examining how different cultures perceive, experience, and respond to disability. To achieve that, we will draw on theories and concepts from Disability Studies and Anthropology to examine different domains of disability expertise by engaging with various ethnographic accounts of cultural narratives, policies, and practices.

Learning Outcomes

In this course, students will:

- Examine the construction of disability cross-culturally and analyze different domains of disability expertise;
- Develop critical thinking and empathy towards diverse experiences of disability to understand the meaning and significance of disability expertise in different cultures and domains;
- Examine cultural representations of disability that serve to marginalize and oppress disabled people and alternate empowering representations; and
- Develop cultural awareness through an understanding of cultural competence, the ability to work with people from diverse cultures, and cultural humility, the ability to question one's own cultural biases and limitations.

Mode of Instruction: in-person.

REQUIRED READINGS

There is no text to purchase for this course. All required readings are available through the library or will be posted in OWL Brightspace. A full reading list will be posted at the beginning of the course.

EVALUATIONS

In-class Activities Ongoing 25%

Students will participate in graded, in-class small-group discussions and activities throughout the course. Students can drop the lowest-graded activity.

Activity #1	Week 2	Cultural bias (estranging the familiar)
Activity #2	Week 3	Cultural representations of disability (Collective Mental Map)
Activity #3	Week 6	Capstone Group Project (In-class analysis practice)
Activity #4	Week 9	Capstone Group Project (In-class analysis practice)
Activity #5	Week 11	Capstone Group Project (In-class analysis practice)
Activity #6	Week 12	Advocacy letter (Applying Cultural Competency and Humility)

Annotated Bibliography of Assigned Readings Submitted Weeks 4 & 12 20%

Students will complete an Annotated Bibliography of ten (10) course readings. Each individual annotation should be 300 words. An annotated bibliography should go beyond providing a summary of each course. To engage with the reading, you may also include key concepts or arguments, questions/confusing points, and connections to course themes or real-world examples. This assignment asks you to slow down your reading process and critically engage with the ideas presented in course readings.

Annotated Bibliography #1 Submitted Week 4 8%

Weeks 2 and 3: 4 course readings. 300 words for each course reading. 1200 words in total.

Annotated Bibliography #2 Submitted Week 12 12%

Weeks 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11: 1 course reading for each Disability Expertise Domain. 300 words for each course reading. 1800 words in total.

Midterm Exam Week 7 15%

The midterm is designed as an early check-in to ensure that you are keeping up with foundational course material. It will focus on key concepts, definitions, and frameworks introduced in the first four weeks of the course. You will be expected to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the different domains of Disability Expertise;

- Provide definitions for course concepts; and
- Show familiarity with course readings and lecture material.

The midterm format is:

- Primarily multiple-choice questions, along with a small number of short-answer responses;
- Up to 3 hours, in-person, written with a cheat sheet that is submitted with the exam.

Capstone Group Project	Due Week 13	25%
Research paper		15%
In-class presentation		10%

In small groups, students will research, explore, and analyze a cultural disability artifact or representation of disability. Students will analyze the representation and significance of disability through a cultural context and examine how the artifact contributes to societal perceptions and awareness of disability.

Academic Paper 2000 words. In-class presentation of findings.

Final Exam	Exam Period	15%
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The final assessment is cumulative and will ask you to engage with ideas from across the course. You will analyze two case studies to demonstrate your ability to connect concepts across different weeks. You will be expected to:

- draw on multiple course readings and concepts;
- demonstrate clear, structured analysis; and
- engage thoughtfully with the tensions and debates explored in the course.

The final exam format is:

- Two case studies that you will critically analyze based on the different domains of Disability Expertise, and concepts from Disability Studies and Anthropology;
 - 3h exam, in-person, written with a cheat sheet that is submitted with the exam.
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COURSE PLAN

COURSE PLAN		
Date	Topic	Evaluation
September 15 (Week 1)	Introduction to Course - What is culture? - What is disability?	
September 22 (Week 2)	Disability Anthropology - Cultural relativism and ethnocentrism - How to read an ethnography and cultural artifacts	In-class activity #1 (5%)
September 29 (Week 3)	Disability Expertise - Disability models - Disability in Western culture	In-class activity #2 (5%)
October 6 (Week 4)	Disability Expertise Domains Managing the Normate's perception / Pity	Annotated Bibliography (10%): 1st block due Oct 9
October 13 (Week 5)	Reading Week	
October 20 (Week 6)	Disability Expertise Domains Discursive strategies / Citizenship and personhood	In-class activity #3 (5%)
October 27 (Week 7)	Midterm Exam	
November 3 (Week 8)	Disability Expertise Domains Living under surveillance and domination	
November 10	Disability Expertise Domains	In-class activity #4 (5%)

(Week 9)	• Creating disability worlds / Cultural production	
November 17 (Week 10)	Disability Expertise Domains • Crip time / Temporality	
November 24 (Week 11)	Disability Expertise Domains • Futurity	In-class activity #5 (5%) Annotated Bibliography (10%): • 2nd block due on Nov 27
December 1 (Week 12)	Cultural Competence and Humility • Cultural barriers • Strategies for inclusion and respectful engagement	In-class activity #6 (5%)
December 8 (Week 13)	Capstone Group Project • Cultural Artifact Presentations	Capstone Group Project (15%): • Cultural Artifact Analysis due Dec 8

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Classroom Climate

Throughout the semester, we will work towards building a collaborative learning environment so we can all learn collectively. We all have different backgrounds and can all contribute to the discussions, as we will certainly engage differently with the readings. Some of the topics we will address this semester may be more sensitive to some of you than others, so it is crucial that we have supportive and respectful interactions in our classroom.

- Always address me and your peers by preferred names and use correct gender pronouns. (My pronouns are he/his, and you can call me Dr. Besen or Professor Besen).
- Respect the speaker, even when you do not agree with the point the speaker is making.
- Practice Active Listening, that is, paying attention to what people are talking about.
 - Give others a chance to contribute to the discussion; remember that our goal here is to build a collaborative and collective learning environment, so all should have a chance to participate.
- Don't make assumptions about your peers and what they're saying; ask questions to learn more about other perspectives, especially those that are different from your own.

Inclusive Classroom Statement

All bodyminds are welcome in my class, and this course is designed to be inclusive of all students. All students will be treated with respect and dignity and expected to treat their peers the same. We strive to create a supportive, collaborative environment that facilitates respectful communication and community-building. If you encounter any barriers to your learning in my class, please reach out and we will work together toward a solution. If you are a student with disabilities, note that you DO NOT need a letter to have your access needs met in this classroom, nor should you have to “mask” or “compensate” to make the most of our course. If you have any other questions, concerns, or access needs, please reach out to me. Please see the University Policies section for more information about receiving accommodations and contacting Accessibility Services.

Attendance

This is a discussion-based class, so if you miss a class, you will be missing some of the most important parts of it. Also, if one of our goals is to build a collective learning environment, it is important to be present. This is the goal, but if we've learned anything in the past few years, it is that things will happen during the semester and we will do our best to accommodate them. If you need to miss a class for any reason, please contact me as soon as possible. Also, if there are accessibility-related barriers to attendance, please contact me as soon as possible, and we will find a solution. Once again, communication is key: if you are having a hard time attending classes, reach out so we can figure something out.

Email Policy

Please email me with your questions and concerns. I aim to answer student emails within 48 hours, except on weekends. Please be mindful of our time together. When emailing me, please put Disability 3339F in the subject field. When writing emails, please keep the following in mind:

- Please double-check the syllabus for answers to common questions before emailing;
- Please remember that emails are a formal form of communication – use proper grammar and complete thoughts; and
- Please note that some questions might be too complex to be answered in an email. I may ask you to talk to me before/after class, or during office hours. Also, I welcome questions during our classes.

Late Assignments

Due dates are a way for me to organize the semester, assess your learning progress, and manage my time so I can provide useful, effective feedback. I have arranged my schedule around the deadlines,

and if you don't turn in things in time, it may affect my ability to give you as good of feedback as I would like to. There is also a reason why we chose to dilute assignments throughout the semester so that we don't come to an overwhelming amount of work to do at the end. That being said, if you require any extensions, please contact me at least 48 hours in advance of the deadline to make arrangements.

All students have been given five (5) grace days for use throughout the course. You may use these days for one assignment (e.g. handing in 1 assignment 5 days late), or you may use the grace days in other ways (2 days for 1 assignment, 3 days for another). Grace days allow you to examine your own schedule and work within your many deadlines to be as successful as possible. Do not email me about the use of grace days. Simply write the number of grace days used on the front of your assignment. Grace days may not be applied to exams and in-class activities.

Late assignments past grace days will be penalized 10% per calendar day, up to a maximum of 5 days. After 5 days, the assignment will receive 0. Late assignments should also be submitted online through OWL. Do not send your assignment via email.

Academic Integrity

Intellectual honesty is expected of all students. Plagiarism and cheating are very serious scholastic offences with penalties at the University. For what constitutes a scholarly offence and penalties, see: https://www.uwo.ca/biology/pdfs/undergraduate/rights-and-responsibilities/scholastic_discipline_.pdf

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

Within this course, use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, co-pilot, translation tools, and grammar-checking tools) is not permitted for written work submitted for evaluation. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.

Notice of Turnitin Analysis

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. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2026-27**

1. Academic Accommodations (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](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website: <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this assessment.
- If instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs. (For example, if students need to submit X of Y assignments, this flexibility already provides consideration.)
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see
https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** 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 (i.e., you are scheduled to write 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](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University’s list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their 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.

3. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King’s University College:
<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King’s University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

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

Western's Mental Health Services site provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help:
<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's 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 (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. 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://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

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.

6. 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 https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.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 to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.