Disability Studies

Vision: Making the world a more inclusive place for disability
Mission: Changing how students imagine disability through crafting an engaging and innovative education that empowers leaders who are both motivated and able to facilitate systemic change.

Creating a student-centric education that meets students where they’re at
Recognizing and valuing the insights, experiences and incipient curiosity that students bring to the classroom. Building in activities and assessment tools with opportunities for them to share and explore these insights in light of course concepts.
Combining what students bring with competent knowledge of the field to cultivate their academic consciousness.
Taking student needs, interests and level into account in planning a rigorous and innovative curriculum that develops key contemporary skills.

Exploding the typical meaning of disability and impairment
Questioning and unsettling common societal understandings of impairment and disability. Who fits into these labels? Why are they so often pathologized and medicalized?
Shifting student thinking away from the historically-exclusive focus on medicalizing and ‘fixing’ disabled people towards ways to change the disabling attitudes, policies, and structures of the world surrounding disabled people.
Considering how our understanding and planning can change if we imagine disability as difference, capacity or gift instead of as deficit, dysfunction, or problem.

Cultivating a constructive orientation to ableism
Learning how to be constructive in analyzing, responding to, and diminishing the effects of ableism and micro-aggressions.
Developing curriculum that takes seriously the project of making disabled lives better through a praxis orientation to disabling processes.
Including course content and case studies that explore micro- and macro-solutions and existing best practices and how they map onto DS concepts.

Valuing diverse positions, people and ideas
Exposing students to the unmediated voices, texts and representations of disabled people and their allies, even when their ideas differ from typical DS ones.
Promoting a learning culture in lectures that values diverse perspectives through multiple theoretical schools of thought and practical approaches.
Welcoming students with diverse disciplinary & demographic backgrounds into the conversation about disability, impairment & ableism. Preaching to the choir is insufficient because disability is societal – understanding this should not be limited to those with personal experience of it.
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Our Distinct Pedagogy

Our DS program works towards achieving these goals through deploying a distinct pedagogical approach. This approach is mindful of the nature of DS as an interdisciplinary field that encompasses upwards of a third of the population with diverse experiences and impairments. People with these labels share some common ground but also have quite distinct support needs, politics, and identities and this pedagogical approach is designed to encompass that diversity.

✓ **Plurality of ideas**: This DS program makes space to start and sustain conversations with students about ideas and phenomenon including some that may be controversial. The role of the Professors is not to dictate answers but to support students to learn to hold their thoughts or opinions up to the light of analysis using course concepts. DS theory is strong enough to be in conversation with or confronted by alternative world-views.

✓ **Inquiry-based learning**: Emphasis on learning research, analysis and communication skills versus ‘one right answer’; prioritize opportunities for student engagement in shaping and directing their studies.

✓ **Praxis opportunities**: All DS classes include engaged active learning opportunities for students to apply DS course concepts for analyses that lead to the creation of DS alternatives in formats ranging from case studies to field trips, reports to representations, policies to plans.

✓ **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**: We work with students, SSD counsellors and our Learning technology team to create courses that are as accessible and UDL-consistent as possible. DS professors integrate Differentiated Learning options into their assignment instructions so that a student knows it is possible to negotiate a distinct topic or format of their assignment if it meets that same learning objectives.