ENG 298 – Disability, Literature, and Medicine

Professor Kim Adams
Tuesday & Thursday
11:00 AM – 12:20 PM

Course Description

What does race have to do with ability and disability? How did the policies of empire shape the practices of medicine? How did the science of race shape the medical treatment of differently abled bodies and minds? This course will examine the scientific discourses of race developed over the colonial encounter from the Enlightenment through the present, alongside the medical discourses of diagnosis and care for people with mental and physical disabilities. Using literature to contextualize our theoretical reading, we will ask how race and disability were co-constituted in the historical imaginary, and how this legacy shapes our present. This course fulfills the pre-1865 requirement for the English major.
Attributes (requested): WRIT, SP&I, Taylor & Lane

Please note that this syllabus is a live document, subject to change in response to the class dynamic and the everchanging world in which we are living.

Check the date in the file name. Note that there is a GoogleDoc version of our class syllabus which may be more current than this document.

Learning Goals
Learning goals will be created communally on the first day of class.
Goals for knowledge and skills generated in class on 26 August 2025 live here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gpyFHSGQY3tvquIGDnST_2sLYQ6q5Lir1R6HO9QsOfA/edit?usp=sharing

Content
In this course we will be reading and talking about challenging issues across the intersections of race, gender, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, and ethnicity. In the classroom we will approach these issues and each other with intellectual and emotional care and generosity.

Academic Accommodations
Academic accommodations are available and encouraged for students with disabilities. Please contact the Filene Center for Academic Advising, Support & Accessibility Services to register for accommodations as early as possible in the semester. They can be reached at accessibility@wheatoncollege.edu, by phone at 508-286-8215, or through their website: wheatoncollege.edu/academics/academic-advising/accessibility-services/

Attendance
You are permitted two absences for the entire course. More than two absences will count against your final grade. If you must miss class due to illness or religious observance, please let me know *in advance*. True presence involves not only physically being there, but also a strong sense of attention being paid, an absence of electronic devices that disturb others, and a consistent attitude of respect toward your fellow learners. Silence your phone, turn off the alerts on your computer, pay attention to your classmates, and contribute to the discussion.

Academic Integrity & Generative AI
College education is a credentialling exercise that shapes the society in which we live, and our lives within it. If you get ChatGPT or your roommate to write your papers for you, you will not learn how to write them yourself, and at that point, you would do well to consider why you are paying to take this class. Note that all of the writing assignments are structured to emphasize the writing process that leads to the polished result. If you intend to use AI at any point in your writing process, you are required to consult with me first. Academic integrity meant to be a positive thing: the development of habits and character traits that allow us to thrive in our academic lives with integrity. Wheaton has an honor code. Follow it. If you have questions, ask. Do the right thing. It matters.

Readings
In this class we will read one of the most canonical text in the English literary canon—*Paradise Lost* by John Milton—in concert with a series of critical articles on the intersections of disability, race, and empire. You will need to buy one book – the Longman *Paradise Lost*, edited by Alastair Fowler. *Paradise Lost* has been published in many editions since 1667. I have asked you to buy this one so we all have access to the same footnotes. You can buy the first or second edition, but it needs to be edited by Alastair Fowler. You are welcome to listen to the book as an audio book or read a digital version at home, but I ask that you acquire a print copy to aid our discussions in class. If you anticipate trouble purchasing or reading from a print copy of the book, please let me know **as soon as possible** and I will do my best to help.

All other readings will be available on the Canvas site for the course.

Assignments
The assignments in this class are structured to build towards an academic conference held by the class at the end of term. There are many assignments, but each one is only worth a small portion of your grade, so don't stress out about it! **You can choose to skip one of the 5% assignments (marked by an asterisk, see grade breakdown below). If you complete all the 5% assignments, I will drop the lowest grade among them.**

***Conference Title – group assignment – Sept. 11**
We will brainstorm conference themes and look at examples of calls for papers and conference websites in class. The class will work together to choose a name for the conference. After class, students must email the professor two sentences on their contribution to the discussion in order to receive credit for this assignment (adams_kim@wheatoncollege.edu). If you don't send the email you will receive a zero.

Call for Papers (CFP) – group assignment – Sept 15
Students will write two sentences for the CFP in this shared GoogleDoc by midnight on Monday September 15. In class on Tuesday September 16, we will work together to edit the sentences into a unified CFP. After class, students must email the professor two additional sentences on their contribution to the discussion (adams_kim@wheatoncollege.edu). The final draft of the CFP lives here.

***Keynote Invitation/Conference Website – group assignment – Oct 3**
For this assignment the class will split into two groups. We will use this document to select groups and brainstorm for the assignment. One group will work together to generate a list of potential keynote speakers for the conference, choose a speaker to invite, draft and send an email inviting them to speak. The second group will work together to make a conference website using WordPress. The groups will need to coordinate, so that the website can be linked in the email to the keynote speaker. Email should be sent and website live by 5pm on Friday, October 3. By that same day and that same time, students should email two sentences on their contribution to the project (adams_kim@wheatoncollege.edu).

Abstract – individual assignment – Due Oct. 10
This assignment is very straightforward. You will write an abstract for your conference paper, responding to the CFP. Be sure to follow the guidelines you wrote in the CFP. Abstracts are due via email by midnight on October 10. We will discuss the abstracts in class on October 14.

***Conference Invitations – group assignment – Nov. 4**
Using the material you generated for the CFP, keynote invitation, and conference website, the class will work together to advertise their conference. Email, poster, social media, it's up to you! In order to receive credit for this assignment, students should email the professor two sentences on their contribution to the conference invitations.

***Outline – individual assignment – Due Nov. 14**
Using the abstract you submitted on October 10 as a starting point, you will generate an outline for your paper. The goal of this outline is not to map out each paragraph, but to gather ideas and quotes in a semi-organized fashion, so you can find something interesting to argue in your paper. Submit the outline via email by midnight on Nov. 14.

***Draft – individual assignment – Due Nov 21**
Using your outline, write a draft of your paper. The draft doesn't have to be as long as the paper, nor does it have to be any good. It just needs to be written. Submit the draft via email by midnight on Nov. 21.

Paper – individual assignment – Due Nov. 24
Polish the draft you submitted on Friday over the weekend, and email it by midnight on Monday, Nov. 24. The papers will be distributed to your classmates to read over the break, in preparation for the conference.

Conference Presentations – individual assignment – Dec 2 and 4
You will present your paper to the class. The standard mode of presentation at academic conferences in the humanities is simply to read the paper. But if you feel like doing something more creative, go for it! Presentations should follow the guidelines established by the class in the planning process.

Grade Breakdown & Scale

You may skip or drop one of the 5% assignments.
Conference Title – group assignment – 5%
Call for Papers (CFP) – group assignment – 10%
Keynote Invitation/Conference Website – group assignment – 5%
Abstract – individual assignment – 10%
Conference Invitations – group assignment – 5%
Outline – individual assignment – 5%
Draft – individual assignment – 5%
Paper – individual assignment – 20%
Conference Presentations – individual assignment – 20%
Attendance and Participation – 20%

A+	**97-100**	**C**	**73-76**
A	**93-96**	**C-**	**70-72**
A-	**90-92**	**D+**	**67-69**
B+	**87-89**	**D**	**63-66**
B	**83-86**	**D-**	**60-62**
B-	**80-82**	**F**	**59 or below**
C+	**77-79**		

Schedule of Readings

<u>Week 1</u>
August 26
Introduction

August 28
George Bartley, "The Blindness of John Milton." *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* (April 1993) 68: 395-399. https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/action/showPdf?pii=S0025-6196%2812%2960139-6

Week 2
September 2
Lennard Davis's "Normality, Power, and Culture," in *The Disability Studies Reader.* ed. Lennard Davis, Vol. 4. New York: Routledge, 2013. 1-14.

September 4
Paradise Lost Book 1
Listen to audio recording and read along
librivox.org/paradise-lost-by-john-milton-2/

Week 3
September 9
Tobin Siebers, "Disability and the Theory of Complex Embodiment." in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard Davis, New York: Routledge, 2013. 272–291.

September 11
Paradise Lost Book 2

Week 4
September 16
David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor" in *Narrative Prosthesis.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 47-64.

September 18
Paradise Lost Book 3

Week 5
September 23
Rosemary Garland-Thompson, "Theorizing Disability," in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

September 25
Paradise Lost Book 4

Week 6
September 30
Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation–An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review,* 3 no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257-337. https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015

October 2
Paradise Lost Book 5

Week 7
October 7
Sunaura Taylor, "Animal Crips," in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation.* New York: New Press, 2017.

October 9
Paradise Lost Book 6

Week 8
October 14
No Class Indigenous People's Day

October 16
No Class MAP day
Paradise Lost Book 7

Week 9
October 21
Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017. (Selection TBA)

October 23
Paradise Lost Book 8

Week 10
October 28
Mel Y. Chen, *Intoxicated: Race, Disability, and Chemical Intimacy Across Empire.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023. (Selection TBA)

October 30
Paradise Lost Book 9

Week 11
November 4
Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. (Selection TBA)

November 6
Paradise Lost Book 10

Week 12
November 11
Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013. (Selection TBA)

November 13
Paradise Lost Book 11

Week 13
November 18
Alice Wong ed., *Disability Intimacy: Essays on Love, Care, and Desire,* New York: Vintage Books, 2024. (Selection TBA)

November 20
Paradise Lost Book 12

Week 14
November 25
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice.* Vancouver, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018. (Selection TBA)

November 27
No Class Thanksgiving

Week 15
Dec 2
Final Presentations Day 1

Dec 4
Final Presentations Day 2