

**FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR REAPPROVAL FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON**

<b>COURSE TITLE:</b>	<b>DISABILITY STUDIES: REPRESENTATIONS OF AUTISM IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND FILM</b>		
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Chris Foss	<b>DATE:</b>	11-21-14

**RATIONALE.** Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM's basic components and new student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above).

This course is the most-taught FSEM in the history of UMW; I have offered 23 different sections of the course since its debut in Spring 2008, including the four most recent sections (two in Spring 2014 and two in Fall 2014) that already incorporate the new student learning outcomes into the course (see the COURSE GOALS/LEARNING OUTCOMES portion of the syllabus). The basic components of a FSEM at UMW have remained the same since the inception of the program, so these have been incorporated into all 23 sections previously taught (see the first paragraph of the COURSE DESCRIPTION portion of the syllabus). This course also features multiple meaningful assignments where both writing and speaking are concerned (see the COURSE ASSIGNMENTS portion of the syllabus). Finally, this course already has incorporated two of the new Canvas modules (CA and CRAAP) into its syllabus/calendar. Please let me know if you have any questions or need any further information.

**SYLLABUS.** *Attach a course syllabus.*

**SUBMIT** this form and attached syllabus electronically as one document to Dave Stahlman ([wdstahlm@umw.edu](mailto:wdstahlm@umw.edu)). **All submissions must be in electronic form.**

**FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR 100A4**  
**DISABILITY STUDIES: REPRESENTATIONS OF AUTISM**  
**IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND FILM**

FALL 2014  
SECTIONS 01 & 02  
12:00 & 1:00 MWF  
COMBS 348

**Dr. Chris Foss**

Office: Combs 307  
Hours: MWF 1:55-2:55, TR 11:30-12:30 (and by appt.)

Email: cfoss@umw.edu  
Phone: 654-1128

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

FSEM 100A4 is a student-centered course designed to introduce you to the pursuit (and the joys) of intellectual inquiry. All first-year seminars should provide you with the genuine opportunity to seek knowledge and meaning, and even to contribute to the creation of said knowledge and meaning; you therefore may expect the course format to emphasize active, discussion-based, participatory learning. Within this format you will use both speaking and writing as tools for the exploration and expression of ideas and arguments toward the ultimate end of synthesizing material from multiple sources (especially primary sources) in order to develop your own views on our topic.

All first-year seminars, while based on this common set of principles, revolve around distinct individual topics that reflect the particular instructor's background and interests. This section derives its focus from my work within the interdisciplinary field of disability studies. Throughout the semester we will be examining representations of autism in contemporary literature (both fiction and nonfiction) and film. As your pursuit of intellectual inquiry in this course is fundamentally exploratory in nature, I will give your class discussion and your formal assignments enough free range to allow you to engage in an intensive study of autism and/or to apply insight drawn from our more narrow focus on this one particular disability either toward a comparable consideration of other specific disabilities or toward a broader understanding of disability in general.

**COURSE GOALS/LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The main goal of this course is to help you develop the intellectual skills necessary for liberal learning. Consequently, this course should provide you with an opportunity to practice careful analysis of primary source material (both written and visual) in a focused and directed way. It also should allow you to demonstrate independent critical thinking skills in a variety of ways. Finally, this course aims to lead you to a complex, profound engagement with a variety of issues pertaining to autism and, by extension, to new ways of thinking about broader disability-related issues and about human difference in general.

These goals are designed to support the shared learning outcomes for first-year seminars, which are as follows:

- Utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments;
- Improve development and organization of written arguments;
- Demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process;
- Apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication;
- Communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.

**COURSE FOCUS**

For some time now the percentage of America's population diagnosed as autistic has been outpacing that of all other developmental disabilities. Many of us are now familiar with the startling numbers: according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 64 children now are diagnosed as on the autism spectrum.

What is autism? We will spend the whole semester just beginning to answer this question, so my brief characterization of it here necessarily needs to be understood for what it is—a cursory description. The Autism Society of America defines autism as “a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and is the result of a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills.” Consequently, most autistic individuals manifest marked deficits in language use (some are completely nonverbal) and in social skills. They also typically

experience delays in both fine and gross motor skills, and they typically experience difficulties with sensory integration. Finally, they may be likely to struggle with personality/behavioral issues ranging from particular perseverative language or actions (such as scripted and repetitive conversation or rocking and flapping) to more general tendencies toward aloofness, anger/defiance, and/or rigidity.

What else is autism? The Autistic Self Advocacy Network defines autism as “a unique form of neurological diversity that exists along a spectrum (much like a rainbow).” Consequently, most autistics “think about and interpret the world around them very differently than others.” They also typically manifest “detailed thinking” and a “passionate & deeply focused interest in subjects [they] enjoy.” Finally, they may be likely to evince hypersensitivities and/or hyposensitivities, as well as “moderate to high introvertedness.” For many autistics themselves, however, these differences are not to be seen as defects, or even deficits. In the words of Jim Sinclair, one of the founders of the neurodiversity movement, “Autism is a way of being. It is pervasive; it colors every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter, every aspect of existence. It is not possible to separate the autism from the person.” When one approaches autism through the lens of identity rather than of pathology, one may begin to understand why Temple Grandin, arguably the most famous autistic on the planet, now insists, “If I could snap my fingers and be nonautistic, I would not—because then I wouldn’t be me. Autism is part of who I am.”

Overall, this course will explore how an intensive immersion-experience with representations of autism might serve as a test case for how the disability studies perspective may help us increase our awareness of popular attitudes toward disability in particular and toward difference in general, and ultimately lead to acceptance and appreciation.

### **COURSE FORMAT**

For me, education should be all about process. Yes, you’ll need me to supply you with a fair amount of content-based information. At the same time, I never want my classroom to be a place where you come to receive passive information transmissions. It is what you do with such information—your process of actively engaging with the material—that is most important. Discussion, rather than lecture, is my primary method of delivery, precisely because I see it as the best means of fostering an environment in which process and multiplicity are encouraged (as well as an excellent means of honing one’s ability to think critically and to express oneself clearly and accurately).

I will offer you a variety of discussion-based formats: instructor-led large group discussions, student-led small group discussions, and electronic discussion forums. If any of this discussion is to be successful, you must believe that I value your personal opinions and that I value discussion which does not seek to close itself off by deducing or producing the correct answer. You must come to see that there are very few easy answers and that working to complicate rather than complete questions often times is more intellectually satisfying, if also more challenging. You must be free to disagree and comfortable enough to chance a potentially off-the-wall idea, even if you end up feeling a little foolish about it later; otherwise, as a class we may lose too many opportunities to move beyond answers one may simply memorize to a more complex consideration of multiple possibilities. You must be willing to explore questions without any pressure to decide upon final answers until later—sometimes as late as the final examination, or even beyond the end of the course.

Class time will revolve around the three inextricably interrelated activities of reading, speaking, and writing as the means for providing you both with a thorough knowledge of autism (and, to a lesser extent, of disability in general). Your homework and your in-class activities accordingly are geared toward providing you with a working knowledge both of basic methods for close reading of primary texts and of strategies for both speaking and writing about these texts. Whether our focus at any given time is reading, speaking, or writing (or some combination thereof), you will need to move away from the idea of the classroom as a place you go to be lectured at by a teacher. Instead, you must think of this classroom as more along the lines of a think tank where you come to share your own ideas, to listen to others’ ideas, and to reflect critically on all of these ideas together.

### **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

You will write two formal essays and an in-class final examination during the semester. You also will give two in-class oral presentations. You must complete all five of these major assignments in order to pass the course.

For your first essay, you will need to offer a detailed argument in support of a critical thesis drawn from ideas/issues presented in/suggested by the **Introductions** unit (this paper should be focused on the lived experience of disability rather than literary or cinematic representations of disability). You need not write on autism, but may decide to focus upon another disability or upon disability more generally. For your second essay, you will need to offer a detailed argument in support of a critical thesis drawn from ideas/issues presented in/suggested by the **Literary Representations** unit. You either may stick with one or more of the six assigned autism texts read during this unit for your focus, or you may identify and analyze representations of disability (not necessarily autism) in literary works beyond those featured on the calendar.

For your first speech, you will need to offer a detailed argument in support of a critical thesis exploring how your life has (or, has not) been impacted by disability. You may depart from our focus on autism in order to concentrate on a more personally meaningful disability. For your second speech, you will need to offer a detailed argument in support of a critical thesis drawn from ideas/issues presented in/suggested by the **Cinematic Representations** unit. You again either may focus upon one or more of our nine assigned films, or you may analyze cinematic representations of disability beyond those featured on the calendar.

Your final examination will revolve around the assigned reading for the **Final Thoughts** unit, Elizabeth Moon's novel *The Speed of Dark*.

### COURSE GRADING

The distribution that will make up your grade is as follows:

Speech #1	10%
Essay #1	20%
Essay #2	20%
Speech #2	10%
Final examination	10%
Quizzes	10%
Class participation	20%

Again, you must complete all five major assignments to pass this course. In all this work you must abide by Mary Washington's Honor Code and, thus, refrain from lying, cheating, and stealing in all their various forms.

### COURSE PARTICIPATION AND QUIZ GRADE INFORMATION

Your active class participation is required. The points for this portion of your grade primarily will come from oral contributions to in-class discussions (both in small-group and in large-group formats), plus any in-class or for-class informal writing assigned. Our discussions will ask you to practice close reading (or, viewing) of the assigned texts. Accordingly, you need to take these discussions seriously by coming prepared to talk about what you have read/watched. For those of you who wish to pad your oral class participation with extra-credit points, I will be setting up a Canvas discussion forum as an electronic supplement to our in-class work.

I invite you all to bring your laptops, phones, etc. to class in order to take advantage of what they have to offer your learning experience, but please do not abuse this invitation by texting, checking email or Facebook, etc. I consider such activities the contemporary equivalent of reading a newspaper in class. I'm happy for you to have your phones on (muted) so that you may be reached in case of emergency, but nonemergency messaging or browsing should not be taking place; it is not only distracting to me (and, likely, to at least some of your peers), but it is disrespectful. If you need to engage in such activity, please leave the room before doing so. If you abuse this privilege, I will (after a warning, of course) require you to leave all such devices at home for the rest of the semester. What is more, you may expect any issues/problems along these lines (as with any other disruptive/disrespectful activity) to negatively impact your class participation grade.

Finally, I also will be giving frequent unannounced quizzes (with no make-ups) as part of a separate quiz grade. Your points from these factual, content-based quizzes will be totaled and curved at the end of the semester.

### COURSE ABSENCE POLICY

You will be allotted **six absences** for this semester (this includes tardy arrivals, which accumulate into absences based on minutes late). More than six absences and you automatically will fail the class participation portion of the class (exceptions only under "exceptional" circumstances).

Of course, the more you are absent, the fewer total points you are eligible to earn for your class participation grade. Even more significantly, the more you are absent, the less likely you will be to as fully comprehend the course material and to keep abreast of our conversations about that material, which in turn usually means you will be less likely to succeed at your major assignments. So, conscientious attendance is strongly encouraged. Also, if you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out if you missed anything important. In particular, before the next class period you should check to see if the assignments on the calendar have been added to or changed in any way.

### COURSE TEXTS

You have nine books you are required to purchase (and read!) for this course. In order of appearance, they are:  
*Autism*—Stuart Murray

*Loud Hands*—Julia Bascom, ed.  
*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*—Mark Haddon  
*Nothing Is Right*—Michael Scott Monje, Jr.  
*Somebody Somewhere*—Donna Williams  
*How Can I Talk If My Lips Don't Move?*—Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay  
*How To Be A Sister*—Eileen Garvin  
*Not Even Wrong*—Paul Collins  
*The Speed of Dark*—Elizabeth Moon

You should have your own copy of the necessary text(s) at hand for each meeting; this means, for the texts you access online you either need to print out a personal copy or bring a laptop or other device that will allow you to find and read specific passages during our discussion time (or in case I assign an in-class writing exercise on a specific passage). Where the books are concerned, I am aware that, increasingly, students like to utilize electronic options such as Kindle. I am not going to forbid any of you from doing so (or from securing cheaper but different editions of the books from elsewhere rather than from our campus bookstore), but there are a couple of caveats you need to know ahead of time.

First of all, I cannot promise that I or the rest of the class always will be able to help you find your way to any particular passage under discussion. As noted above, if things go according to plan, we will spend a fair amount of time turning to specific pages and performing a close reading of individual sentences/paragraphs; thus, it is important for as many of us as possible literally to be on the same page—and, if you are unable to follow along with us, it makes it more difficult for you to participate as actively or fully.

Second, I will not grade any formal written work that does not use the pagination I have at hand in the instructor-adopted texts. I do not mean to appear unaccommodating in insisting on such a policy, but when I am grading your written work I want to be able to review any specific passages/sections you refer to with as little difficulty as possible so that I avoid wasting time that might otherwise be better spent formulating and writing responses to your essays.

You also are required to watch nine full-length feature films outside of class. In order of appearance, they are:

*Rain Man*  
*Silent Fall*  
*Mozart and the Whale*  
*Snow Cake*  
*The Black Balloon*  
*Mary and Max*  
*Adam*  
*My Name Is Khan*  
*Temple Grandin*

I will screen each of these the night before we are to discuss them, but they all also will be on reserve at Simpson Library, so you may watch them there or check them out whenever you are unable to attend a screening. There are two sections of this course, however, so please be aware that you cannot always rely on this option, as you may find the library's copy is already in use when you had hoped to watch it. Conversely, please be respectful of your fellow students if you do check out one of the films and return the DVD as soon as you are done viewing it. All of the films are also available through Netflix and/or other similar options (such as Amazon Prime).

## **COURSE DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**

I will make every effort to accommodate disabilities. The Office of Disability Resources has been designated by UMW as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you already receive services through ODR and require accommodations for this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Bring your accommodation letter with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise. If you need accommodations (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.) but do not yet have them in place, please call or visit ODR as soon as possible. You will need appropriate documentation of disability.

---

## **CALENDAR**

### **INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **WEEK 1**

M A 25

Syllabus overview

Autism Speaks, *Autism Every Day* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcNPTL7XKes>)

Baggs, *In My Language* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc>)  
Plank, *Autism Reality* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLOCYubVc7g>)

W A 27 Assign Speech #1  
Murray (xi-xiv & 1-59 [Preface & Chs. 1-9])

F A 29 Murray (59-107 [Ch. 10-Afterword])

### WEEK 2

M S 01 Sinclair, "Don't Mourn For Us" (Bascom 13-16)  
Montgomery, "Critic Of The Dawn" (Bascom 49-59)  
Ne'eman, "The Future (And The Past) Of Autism Advocacy" (Bascom 60-65)  
Bascom, "Quiet Hands" (Bascom 119-123)  
Gross, "Metaphor Stole My Autism" (Bascom 179-190)  
Durbin-Westby, "To My Beloved Autistic Community" (Bascom 276-277)

W S 03 **GROUP A SPEECHES**—*Groups B & C read below:*

Herren, "Loud Hands" (Bascom 91-94)  
Sequenzia, "Non-Speaking, 'Low Functioning'" (Bascom 107-108)  
Harp, "The Incapable Man" (Bascom 112-113)  
Sequenzia, "Just Me" (Bascom 114-115)  
Neumeier, "Inhumane Beyond All Reason" (Bascom 139-148)  
Sinclair, "Why I Dislike 'Person First' Language" (Bascom 152-153)  
Walker, "Throw Away The Master's Tools" (Bascom 154-162)  
Gross, "Killing Words" (Bascom 163-164)  
Harp, "Connecting Dots" (Bascom 177-178)  
Sequenzia, "Why Autism Speaks Hurts Us" (Bascom 192-194)  
Logsdon-Breakstone, "Plural Of Medium" (Bascom 203-205)

F S 05 **GROUP B SPEECHES**—*Group A read above & Group C read below:*

Harp, "Are You Listening?" (Bascom 215-217)  
Gross, "Pedagogy Of The Confused" (Bascom 221-222)  
Baggs, "The Meaning Of Self Advocacy" (Bascom 223-225)  
Bascom, "On Being Articulate" (Bascom 242-244)  
Sequenzia, "Loud Hands: I Speak Up With My Fingers" (Bascom 245-248)  
Gernsbacher, "On Not Being Human"

([http://gernsbacherlab.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/1/Gernsbacher\\_Humanity.pdf](http://gernsbacherlab.org/wp-content/uploads/papers/1/Gernsbacher_Humanity.pdf))

Cohen-Rottenberg, "The Empathy Issue is a Human Rights Issue"

([http://www.autismandempathy.com/?page\\_id=1537](http://www.autismandempathy.com/?page_id=1537))

Cohen-Rottenberg, "When Children Die, It's Time to Grieve and to Reflect, Not to Scapegoat"

(<http://www.disabilityandrepresentation.com/2012/12/15/when-children-die-grieve-reflect-dont-scapegoat/> )

Willingham, "Autism, Empathy, and Violence"

(<http://www.emilywillinghamphd.com/2012/12/autism-empathy-and-violence-one-of.html>)

Zaks, "I Have Asperger Syndrome, and I am a Parent"

(<http://www.dsqsds.org/article/view/1057/1243>)

Durbin-Westby, "Public Law 109-416 Is Not Just about Scientific Research"

(<http://www.dsqsds.org/article/view/1070/1245>)

### WEEK 3

M S 08 **GROUP C SPEECHES**—*Groups A & B read above*

W S 10 Assign Essay #1

Baggs, "Up in the Clouds and Down in the Valley" (<http://www.dsqsds.org/article/view/1052/1238>)

Prince, "The Silence Between" (<http://dsqsds.org/article/view/1055/1242>)

Yergeau, "Socializing Through Silence" (Bascom 213-214)

Baggs, "Autism, Speech, and Assistive Technology" (Bascom 226-228)

Baggs, "Untitled" (Bascom 229-235)

Silberman, "Autism Awareness Is Not Enough" (Bascom 254-275)

Harp, "Questions for discussion" (Canvas)

F S 12 **RESEARCH WORKSHOP— MEET IN SIMPSON 225**  
**CRAAP module** (Canvas)

**LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS**

**WEEK 4**

M S 15 Haddon (1-76 [Chs. 2-109])

W S 17 Writing Workshop (Documentation, Note taking, Plagiarism)  
Haddon (76-155 [Chs. 113-191])

F S 19 Haddon (155-226 [Ch. 193-App.])

**WEEK 5**

M S 22 Writing Workshop (Thesis, Evidence, Argument)  
Monje (5-117 [Chs. 1-5])

W S 24 Monje (118-216 [Ch. 6-Afterword])

F S 26 **NO CLASS—FOSS AT CONFERENCE**  
Williams (xi-82)

**WEEK 6**

M S 29 Williams (82-162)

W O 01 Williams (162-238)

F O 03 **INDIVIDUAL STUDENT-TEACHER MEETINGS (BRING COMPLETED PAPER)**

**WEEK 7**

M O 06 **INDIVIDUAL STUDENT-TEACHER MEETINGS (BRING COMPLETED PAPER)**

W O 08 Carlin and Rasbury (Canvas, or  
<http://www.michaelrasbury.com/music/maxunderstood/maxunderstood18.pdf>)

F O 10 **ESSAY #1 DUE**  
Assign Essay #2  
Preview of film unit featuring clips from *Change of Habit* and *The Boy Who Could Fly*

**WEEK 8**

M O 13 **NO CLASS—FALL BREAK**

W O 15 Mukhopadhyay (1-111)

F O 17 Mukhopadhyay (112-219)

**WEEK 9**

M O 20 Garvin (1-130 [Chs. 1-6])

W O 22 Garvin (131-252 [Chs. 7-11])

F O 24 Collins (3-109 [Parts 1 & 2])

**WEEK 10**

M O 27 Collins (111-229 [Parts 3 & 4])

**CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS**

W O 29 *Rain Man* (Screening: T O 28, 8:30 p.m., Combs 237)

F O 31 *Silent Fall* (Screening: R O 30, 10:00 p.m., Combs 237)

**WEEK 11**

M N 03 *Mozart and the Whale* (Screening: S N 02, 9:00 p.m., Combs 237)

W N 05 *Snow Cake* (Screening: T N 04, 10:00 p.m., Combs 237)

F N 07 *The Black Balloon* (Screening: R N 06, 9:00 p.m., Combs 237)

**WEEK 12**

M N 10 **ESSAY #2 DUE—GUEST SPEAKER: VIKRAM JASWAL**

W N 12 *Assign Speech #2 –CA module* (Canvas)  
*Mary and Max* (Screening: T N 11, 9:00 p.m., Combs 237)

F N 14 *Adam* (Screening: R N 13, 9:00 p.m., Combs 237)

**WEEK 13**

M N 17 *My Name Is Khan* (Screening: S N 16, 8:00 p.m., Combs 237)

W N 19 *Temple Grandin* (Screening: T N 18, 9:00 p.m., Combs 237)

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

F N 21 *Assign Final Examination*  
Moon (1-91 [Chs. 1-6])

**WEEK 14**

M N 24 Moon (92-169 [Chs. 7-11])

W N 26 **NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING BREAK**

F N 28 **NO CLASS— THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**WEEK 15**

M D 01 **GROUP A SPEECHES**—Groups B & C read below:  
Moon (170-254 [Chs. 12-16])

W D 03 **GROUP B SPEECHES**—Group A read above & Group C read below:  
Moon (255-340 [Ch. 17-Epi.]

F D 05 **GROUP C SPEECHES**—Groups A & B read below:  
Moon (255-340 [Ch. 17-Epi.]

**FINAL EXAMINATION PERIODS**

*Sec. 01: Mon., Dec. 08, 12:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.*

*Sec. 02: Wed., Dec. 10, 12:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.*