**Intellectual Disabilities and Society**  
A SESP Student Organized Seminar  
Northwestern University, Winter 2006  
Course Syllabus

**Time:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 4 – 5:20 PM, Annenberg G15  
**Instructors:** Julie Keller (j-keller5@northwestern.edu; 206-683-9831) and Charles Rosentel (c-rosentel@northwestern.edu; 847-302-0358)  
**Office Hours:** By Appointment

**Course Rationale**  
College students, insulated in a selective environment largely unreflective of the outside world, have little experience with or knowledge of people with intellectual disabilities. This seminar will provide weekly face-to-face experience with Special Olympics athletes while examining intellectual disabilities, the issues that people with such disabilities face, the lens through which our society views these people, and the organizations that attempt to improve their lives and include them in society.

**Course Description**  
This course counts for an elective credit and is graded on a pass or not pass (P/N) basis. Designed for all Northwestern undergraduates, this Student Organized Seminar (SOS) will introduce college students to a group that has been historically brushed to the margins of society, but has been slowly emerging onto the television screens and into the discourse of modern culture. This SOS will inspect the status that 14- to 40-year-olds with intellectual disabilities hold in society and the eyes through which our culture views them. The first section of this course, framed by history and observed by students, will identify the medical, social, and political definitions of intellectual disabilities. The second part of the course will compare the realities of intellectual disabilities and the perceptions by which mainstream culture characterizes them. The final third of the course will scrutinize the intentions and effectiveness of organizations, especially Special Olympics, that have tried to support people with intellectual disabilities in an increasingly inclusive society. This SOS will utilize fiction and non-fiction readings, mainstream movies and documentaries, and speakers with experience in the week’s topic to enrich each discussion. Students will coach at Special Olympics sites in the community, writing weekly reflections on their real-world experiences to begin to understand a group of people with which they have had limited interaction.

**Content Objectives:**  
- To make developmental and intellectual disabilities have a more human aspect for Northwestern students, so that these conditions are no longer just “disorders,” but are connected in the minds of students with real people and experiences.
- To educate students on the current perceptions of disabled individuals, ages 14 to 40, in the justice system, the educational system, and the media.
- To give students a base of knowledge about the disabilities themselves from mental, psychological, emotional, and physical standpoints.

**Skills Objectives:**
- To familiarize Northwestern students with people with intellectual disabilities in a coaching setting as well as in an educational setting, through speakers and panels.
- To participate in discussions in which all members of the class feel free to express their opinions and ask questions.
- To participate in weekly coaching sites and submit written reflections on coaching experiences.

**Value Objectives:**
- To make students aware of their own misconceptions about intellectual disabilities and to have a critical eye towards the depictions of disabled individuals in the media and the legal system.
- To interact with other students in a comfortable way and be able to explore these issues without discomfort.
- To learn from interactions with people with disabilities and to develop a comfort level for future interactions.

**Course Readings:**
- Course Packet (Available at SESP Student Affairs Office on Annenberg 1st Floor)
- Haddon, Mark. *The curious incident of the dog in the night-time.* (Available at Borders or Barnes & Noble)

**Coaching Write-ups:**
Students are required to turn in a weekly 1-2 page double spaced reflection on their experiences at their coaching site. Write-ups should include what the student feels he or she has learned, if anything was surprising or thought provoking, and his or her general emotions and thoughts regarding the experience. These write-ups are designed to encourage serious thought about interacting with persons with intellectual disabilities and to provoke honest discussion during class, so please take them seriously.

**Grading Policies**
This class is pass/fail. However, we will not hesitate to fail those who do not adequately meet the course expectations. You are expected to attend every class, and if you do not make it to class, send an e-mail to Charles and Julie preferably beforehand or very soon after the missed class. More than two absences will hurt your grade. Frequent absences from coaching sites will also negatively affect your grade.
Final Paper and Presentation – 35%
Participation and Attendance – 25%
Coaching Write-Ups and Coaching Attendance – 20%
Small Research Assignments and Preparedness for Class Debates – 20%

Above 65% = Pass
Below 65% = Fail

**Students with Disabilities**
Any student with a documented disability needing accommodations is requested to speak directly to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) (847-467-5530) and to Charles and Julie as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first two weeks of class). All discussions will remain confidential. For more information, visit www.northwestern.edu/disability.

**Part I: Medical, Social, and Political Definitions of Intellectual Disabilities**

**Class 1: January 4**
*Introduction to the course, sign up for coaching sites*

**Reading(s):**

**Class 2: January 9**
*What are intellectual disabilities? What’s the difference between intellectual disabilities and mental illness?*

DUE: 1 page write-up of your definition of “intellectual disability” – no Webster definitions allowed!

**Reading(s):**
- Byrne, Peter. *Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap.* Pp. 16-44.
- Davies, Dr. Stanley Powell. *Social Control of the Mentally Deficient.* Pp. 27-46.

**CLASS DEBATE**

**Class 3: January 11**
*Down Syndrome*

DUE: Coaching write-up #1

**Reading(s):**

**Speaker(s):**
- KIDS (Keeping Involved with Down Syndrome)
- National Association for Down Syndrome
- Down Syndrome Network

VIDEO EXCERPT: EPISODE OF “LIFE GOES ON”

**Class 4: January 16**
*Down Syndrome*

**Reading(s):**

**Speaker(s):**
- KIDS (Keeping Involved with Down Syndrome)
- National Association for Down Syndrome
- Down Syndrome Network

**Class 5: January 18**
*Autism*

**DUE: Coaching write-up #2**

**Reading(s):**

**Speaker(s):**
- John Haderlein, Autism Society of Illinois
- Eric Smith, Autism Society of Illinois

**Class 6: January 23**
*Autism*

**Reading(s):**

**Speaker(s):**
- John Haderlein, Autism Society of Illinois
- Eric Smith, Autism Society of Illinois

**Part II: Mainstream Culture, Reality vs. Perception**
Class 7: January 25
The History of Intellectual Disabilities
DUE: 2 page write-up of summary of outside research on specific time period (to be assigned in class)
DUE: Coaching write-up #3
Reading(s):

Class 8: January 30
Media and Linguistics
Reading(s):
VIDEO EXCERPTS: *RAIN MAN AND THE OTHER SISTER*

Class 9: February 1
Media and Linguistics
DUE: Coaching write-up #4
Reading(s):
VIDEO EXCERPT: *I AM SAM*

Class 10: February 6
Media and Linguistics
Reading(s):
- Byrne, Peter. Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap. Pp. 108-121.

CLASS DEBATE: How are specific media representations of intellectual disabilities helpful? Harmful? Accurate? Inaccurate?

Class 11: February 8
The Minority Perspective
DUE: Coaching write-up #5

Reading(s):

Speaker(s):
- Equip for Equality
- Proyecto Visión

Class 12: February 13
Special Education

Reading(s):

Speaker(s):
Part III: The Effectiveness of Organizations That Intend to Help

Class 13: February 15
Special Olympics: Helping or Hurting?
DUE: Coaching write-up #6
Reading(s):
Speaker(s):
  - Global Messenger (Special Olympics Athlete)
  - Katie Grisham, Special Olympics Illinois
  - Lew Goldstein, coordinator of Special Olympics Program at New Trier
  - Leonard Woodson, coordinator of Special Olympics Program at Evanston Special Recreation

Class 14: February 20
Special Olympics: Helping or Hurting?
Reading(s):
Speaker(s)
  - Katie Keeline, Illinois Area 5 Special Olympics Coordinator
CLASS DEBATE: What’s your final verdict on Special Olympics as an organization?

Class 15: February 22
Assisted vs. Independent Living
DUE: Coaching write-up #7
Reading(s):
**Class 16: February 27**  
*The State and Intellectual Disabilities*

**Reading(s):**
- Heal, Dr. Laird W., Janell I. Haney, and Dr. Angela R. Novak Amado. *Integration of Developmentally Disabled Individuals Into the Community.* Pp. 245-271.

**Speaker(s):**
- Statewide Independent Living Council of Illinois
- Miller, Paul Steven
- Wilkinson, Wendy and Lex Frieden
- Trainer, Marilyn
- Heal, Dr. Laird W., Janell I. Haney, and Dr. Angela R. Novak Amado

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**Class 17: March 1**  
*The Justice System and Intellectual Disabilities*

**DUE: Coaching write-up #8**

**Reading(s):**
- Byrne, Peter. *Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap.* Pp. 74-78.
- Heal, Dr. Laird W., Janell I. Haney, and Dr. Angela R. Novak Amado. *Integration of Developmentally Disabled Individuals Into the Community.* Pp. 273-282.

**Speaker(s):**
- Wallace C. Winter, Disability Law Project Supervisor (Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago)
- Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission
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**Class 18: March 6**

**Student Presentations**

CLASS DEBATE: Which organization is the most beneficial to individuals with intellectual disabilities? Which needs the most improvement?
Reading Week

Class 19: March 8
Student Presentations

Finals Week

FINAL PAPERS DUE