

Disability Ethics
Baylor University REL 4389
Spring 2026
T/TR 3:30-4:45pm
Tidwell 101

Instructor Information:

Professor: Dr. Devan Stahl

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Course Description

This course introduces different conceptions, definitions, and expressions of disability. Together, we will explore the history of disability in the U.S., various definitions and models of disability, as well as portrayals of disability in the Bible and Christian theology. Students will consider disability from a Christian perspective and how to include people with various disabilities into our systems, structures, and friendships.

Virtue Formation in this Course

This course is not only about acquiring new information, but it also aims to form virtue. Think of this class as a community in which we practice virtuous habits together. We will practice virtues through our engagement with one another, course texts, and our local community.

Although all the virtues are linked, we will focus on three virtues in our time together:

1. Compassion - This course will introduce you to several first-person accounts of disability and allow you to spend time with people with disabilities to understand their lives, their gifts, and their challenges. For some students, practicing compassion will mean setting aside preconceived notions or feelings of pity to see people with disabilities as they truly are. Other students will practice compassion by forgiving others' lack of experiential knowledge and becoming a peer mentor.
2. Courage - It takes courage to rewrite our cultural narratives around disability. We will practice courage by sharing our lived experiences, freely admitting what we do not know, and gently correcting one another when we say things that are callous or hurtful.
3. Justice- This course will help you understand how far the disability rights movement has come, but also what is still left undone. We will attune ourselves to disability accessibility by auditing the Baylor campus, probing our church experiences, and advocating for policies and practices that honor disabled lives.

My hope is that you will learn from and with people with disabilities in a spirit of openness and humility with an eye toward disability justice.

Class Culture

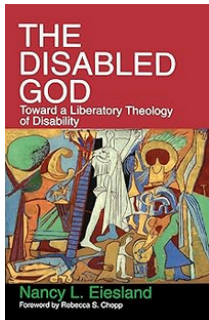
Learning stance – Some of us come to this class with lots of disability experiences, others with very few experiences. Come with your whole self and feel free to share what you feel comfortable sharing. My desire is that we learn together and share our experiences.

Course Objectives:

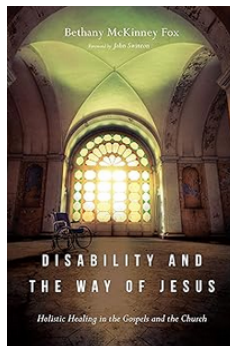
The student should be able to...

- Understand the history of the disability rights movement in the United States.
- Identify the major sources of tension that exist for the disability community with regard to medicine, politics, and religion.
- Describe the major models of disability and their usefulness.
- Provide a theological account of the Christian understanding of the human being.
- Appreciate the contributions of persons with disabilities to the wider society.
- Practice the virtues of compassion, courage, and justice.
- Engage and learn from people with disabilities.
- Engage one another in discussion in a competent, caring, and respectful manner.

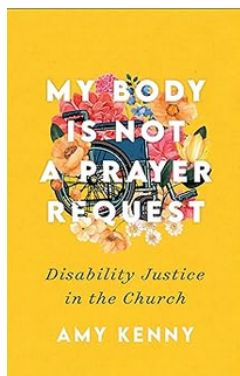
Course Texts:



Eiesland, Nancy. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Abingdon Press, 1994). [DG]



Fox, Bethany McKinney. *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church* (IVP Press, 2018). [DWJ]



Kenny, Amy, “My Body is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church” (Brazos Press 2022)

Attendance, Class Participation

10% of final grade

Class participation includes preparing for class, engaging with the course readings, completing assigned surveys, and contributing to class discussions and exercises. Because class mini-lectures are supplemented with discussion and group exercises, your participation is critical to the success of the course. In order to prompt conversation, I will sometimes call on you and your classmates for responses to readings, lectures, one another, and so on. Because you will be preparing for class with specific exercises, you should have little problem demonstrating your knowledge of the texts.

Off-task internet use (surfing the web, Facebook, emailing, etc.), cell phone interruptions, or sleeping during class will be penalized as absences. If you have an illness, University-related activity or interview, I will consider counting it as an excused absence. An excused absence does not lower your class participation grade. To receive it, you must provide official documentation (a doctor's note or school letter), notify me in advance, and make accommodations for that day's work.

To earn course credit in any course within the College of Arts & Sciences, a student must attend at least 75 percent of all scheduled class meetings. Any student who does not meet this minimal standard (more than 7 absences) will automatically receive a grade of "F" in the course. Any University-related activity that necessitates an absence from class (even if excused by me) shall count as an absence when determining whether a student has attended the required 75 percent of class meetings.

Disability in the News Report

5% of final grade

On the first day of class, students will sign up for a day to report on "Disability in the News." Students will choose a story from the news to discuss at the beginning of class for 10 minutes. Dr. Stahl will model how this is done in the first 2 weeks. **Students should post their story to the discussion board 24 hours before the class** in which they give their report. Students will be asked to explain the story, its connection to the course, and evaluate the merits of the story for disability representation and culture.

First-Person Disability Narrative Reflections

15% of final grade

Beginning in week 4, students are expected to find a first-person narrative written by a person with a disability. Students will submit a two-paragraph reflection on the narrative. Each week, students will reflect on the virtues practiced by the author of that narrative. Prompts can be found in Canvas. Reflections are most Thursdays at 10am. There will be a total of 11 reflection assignments. Students may drop the two lowest grades from these reflections.

Potential sources for stories

- Alice Wong, [Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century](#) (Baylor Library Online)
- Disability Series in the New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/column/disability>
- [We've Got this: Essays by Disabled Parents](#) (Baylor Library Online)
- Eli Clare, [Brilliant Imperfection](#) (Baylor Library Online)

- Garland Thomson and Stahl, Encountering Disability Through Wonder (Canvas)

Project 1 “Definitions of Disability”

20% of final grade

*Option chosen must be pre-approved by Dr. Stahl

- Option 1—Paper: Students will write a 4-6-page paper describing the various models of disability discussed Unit 2 as well as their own definition of disability and how this definition helps to better understand and advocate for persons with disabilities in our society.
- Option 2—Podcast/Video: Students will record and edit a 20-30 minute podcast or video recording describing models of disability, why they matter, and what model they prefer and why.
- Option 3—Other: Other projects will be considered on an individual basis.

Project 2 “Disability in the Christian Tradition”

30% of final grade

*Option 2 must be pre-approved by Dr. Stahl

- Option 1: Students will write an 8-10-page final paper which picks up on a theme discussed in of the course. Topics will be pre-approved by the instructor.
- Option 2—Other: Other projects will be considered on an individual basis

Project 3 “Disability-Centered Project”

20% of final grade

*The option chosen must be pre-approved by Dr. Stahl

- Option 1—Final Presentation: Students will prepare and record a final project (approx. 15 min per student), which highlights what they have learned from their disability mentor and how it relates to the readings and discussions within the course.
- Option 2—Syllabus: Create a syllabus designed for a course in Disability Ethics, Disability Theology, or Disability and X (your choosing).
- Option 3—Book Report: Students will write a 4–6-page book report choosing one of the books listed on Canvas.
- Option 4—Other: Other projects will be considered on an individual basis.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments:

Please come to class on time, having read, reviewed, and completed all assignments prior to its start. Do bring the assigned readings to class on the days they are to be discussed, either printed or downloaded to your laptop or tablet.

The course is structured around 5 units:

1. Disability History
2. Models of Disability
3. Disability in the Bible
4. Disability Ethics and Theology
5. Disability in Contemporary Life