Julia Smith

5/16/18

**Semester Reflection**

I did have some background in disability studies from my writing seminar a few years ago, and I came into this class excited to expand on the topics we covered freshman year. Thinking back to when I first registered for this course, I was still confused about the many ideas surrounding disability, and I think I expected this course to help me learn the “right” way to think and talk about disability. If anything, this course made me even more confused, but in the best way possible. Now I know that there is no single “right” way to think about disability. There are so many voices, thoughts, beliefs, cultures, and ways of seeking justice and personhood in the disability community, andall of them should be heard and thought about. Disability studies is not one cohesive framework that can be easily written up or explained. Instead it has so many variables, it is constantly changing and evolving, and it welcomes in new voices every day.

Eventually I stopped wanting disability studies to be cohesive, and I embraced the multiple identities and ideas that will continue to change and evolve. In embracing this lack of cohesiveness, I think I learned something about myself as a learner and as a person as well. I stopped expecting my ideas to be a perfect string of put-together thoughts, and just let myself think deeply, even if that thinking was messy or discombobulated. I think I often hold back on sharing and discussing my ideas because I fear that they won’t make sense, or won’t sound perfectly thought out, but now I know that learning is messy, and it cannot happen without the process of being incoherent and imperfect. I hope that I can take that with me into other classrooms and other parts of my life.

This course was unique because instead of learning from a textbook or from lectures, I learned from each individual member of the class and from the combination of our ideas in discussions, posts, projects, etc. Every person in the class had something unique to bring to the discussion each week. Every time I read a book or an article or watched a video for the class, I would see a whole new viewpoint based on what others shared in class. This helped me to understand how important and complicated disability identity is. I am certainly walking away from this class thinking of disability as an identity rather than an problem, and I now understand that the problem lies in the way the world is designed to accommodate a “norm” rather than in disability itself. I am still wondering and thinking about ways to make the world more accessible and to rethink the norms that many of us adhere to. I hope that I can take this understanding with me beyond the walls of our classroom after this semester ends and keep sharing and listening to ideas.

Something that I really appreciated about this course was the partnership with CCW. It was a wonderful way to engage outside of the classroom and to become involved in the broader community. I remember feeling quite timid when I went to my first CCW visit because I didn’t know what to expect or what exactly I was supposed to do, but I quickly became comfortable in that incredibly welcoming space, and I had a great time getting to know Beth throughout the semester. Being at the gallery opening last week felt really special, and I was delighted to see how excited all of the artists were to be there. I think my perceptions of art have changed through my visits to CCW, and I hope that I can go back to visit more in the future.

Overall, I have really enjoyed this course and I feel confident that my interest in disability studies will not end here. There are so many different topics to delve deeper into and to keep reading about and discussing. I hope that I will find ways to engage with this interest outside of this class and even beyond my years at Haverford. Thanks to this class, I understand how important this topic is and I feel strongly that it needs to be talked about and thought about more.