

19 - DECEMBER 2018

# RADICAL ROADS

LIFE IN DISABILITY STUDIES

Save the Date

Unlimited to Crippling the  
Arts

Deathnastics: Feminist Crip  
World-Making

Introducing the new ELA post-  
doctoral fellow

## Exploring the lives of the Ryerson Alumni of Disability Studies

RADS Roads is written by students and alumni for students, alumni and the DST community.

All DST students and alumni are encouraged to contribute pieces of writing and resources.

Together we make this newsletter. Submissions for the newsletter are welcome at any time.

Please send content to Kim Collins at:  
kimberlee.collins@ryerson.ca.

DECEMBER 2018

Kim Collins is the editor of RADS  
Roads

Click this button  
to come back to contents



---

## C o n t e n t s

- 2 Greetings
- 3 From the Director's Desk
- 7 Save the Date
- 8 Introducing the new ELA post-doctoral fellow
- 11 Unlimited to Crippling the Arts
- 14 Deathnastics: Feminist Crip World-Making
- 16 VOICE Lab
- 19 What are Students and Alumni up to?
- 23 Disability Studies in the news

\*\*Click the title you want to read



Director and Associate Professor,  
School of Disability Studies  
Kathryn Church, PhD

**W**elcome to a new academic year. By all accounts, the streamlining of Summer Institute courses that we began last year is a welcome adjustment in program delivery – and went more smoothly this time out. Everyone seemed better oriented to combining early course engagement on D2L with a one week intensive on-site – two weeks for those students who took DST 613 and DST 525 back to back. We enjoyed stellar contributions from our instructor team: the seasoned partnership of Dr. Esther Ignagni and alumnus Nelson Mugisha in Rethinking Disability; Dr. Mary Jean Hande returning for a second round with Strategies for Community Building, and Dr. Jessica Moore, a new course instructor who drew on her background in literary theory and narratology to give us a fresh “take” on Disability, Representation/s and Culture. Thank you for your leadership.

## **S** tudent Awards Highlights

It was a big year for the Annual Student Awards Ceremony as we distributed \$44,600 through 13 awards to 31 students. Faculty of Community Services Dean Lisa Barnoff and Dr. Michael Bennaroch, Provost and Vice-President Academic contributed a strong senior administrative presence. From his remarks it is clear that the Provost is alert to our program and its desires for further degree development. We celebrated Student Awards Selection Committee member Fran Odette as one of 61 Ryerson volunteers selected for the G. Raymond Chang Outstanding Volunteer Award recognizing exemplary contribution to the university. Fran is well known as an author, educator, and advocate for the rights of disabled women, and the expertise that marginalized people bring to the conversation. We honored Cheryl Maine, Senior Admissions Officer, who has handled all new program applications in Disability Studies for 20 years. Cheryl works tirelessly to bring new students into the School. She does her job with patience, humor, wisdom and optimism. Accessibility in Disability Studies starts with Cheryl. Thank you for your contributions. For the first time since it was created, we presented the David Reville/Working for Change course bursary as an endowed award – getting past our annual empty-your-pockets strategy! By covering the registration fee for a member of Working for Change to take Mad People’s History, this award bridges the gap between university and com-

munity to give Mad people back their own history. David and Friends generated \$34,231 – well past what was required. Key contributors included Working for Change, “Friends in Scotland”, the Dean of the Faculty of Community Services, the Dean of the Chang School of Continuing Education, and the Ryerson President’s Office. Kudos to my comrades Joyce Brown, Lucy Costa, Jijian Voronka, Jenna Reid and Danielle Landry.

Follow this [link](#) to Ryerson Today for more on that story.

## **E**thel Louise Armstrong Post-doctoral Fellow

We welcomed Dr. Loree Erickson as the 4 th ELA post-doctoral fellow in Disability Studies. Loree completed her doctorate in Environmental Studies at York University. Titled Unbreaking Our Hearts, her research engaged queercrip community as knowledge and cultural producers interrogating systemic oppression. She is at the forefront of theorizing and thriving through care collectives having met the majority of her care needs through her community for 20 years. She will foster interdisciplinary conversations of disability, gender, sexuality, normativity, embodiment and care. Check out Loree’s introduction in the Vision Passion Action [blog](#).

## **A**ctivist Lecture 2018: A Ryerson First

We framed this year’s Activist Lecture to address the Legacies of Ableism and Colonialism that have shaped and continue to have an impact on higher education. Featured speakers were Nicole Ineesh-Nash, Anishnaabe scholar, teacher and researcher, and Jay Dolmage, Associate Professor from the English department at Waterloo University, and author of Academic Ableism. Their presentations helped us to contemplate these resonant histories, and the question “where do we go from here?” The captioned podcast is available on the Disability Studies Ryecast channel. Follow this [link](#) to Ryerson Today for more on that story.

## ourse Instructors

As with universities in general and with just three full-time positions, Disability Studies relies heavily on course instructors who are not tenure-stream faculty members. Under precarious conditions of labor, they bring cutting edge scholarship with full accessibility to our classrooms. We sincerely appreciate the following individuals: some are moving on; some are just joining our instructor community. In August, Dr. Tobin LeBlanc Haley completed her term as ELA Fellow. Tobin has been tremendously generous in sharing her research and teaching on transinstitutionalization, her sharp analysis of current affairs, her enthusiasm and sense of humor. Fortunately for us – and for Ryerson – she has been hired by the Department of Sociology into a year-long Limited Term Faculty position. Dr. Chelsea Jones has been with us for several years as limited term faculty, instructor for many required courses, and designer of innovative new offerings. This month, while continuing to teach Research Methods, she has taken up a Mitacs Post-doctoral Fellowship in the Faculty of Media, Art and Performance at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan. Check out Chelsea's work on the Podogogies learning and teaching podcast! (Be sure to catch the [interview](#) with Dr. Eliza Chandler).

Over the past two winters, Dr. Katie Aubrecht was course instructor (on-line) for Disability, Justice and the Good Human Life. She now has a new role as Canada Research Chair Health Equity & Social Justice in the Department of Sociology at St. Francis Xavier University. In A History of Madness, Dr. Kendra-Ann Pitt was hired into the School of Social Work at York University while co-instructor Sarah Snyder has stepped away to concentrate on completing her doctoral dissertation. Welcome to Fiona Cheuk (doctoral candidate, UToronto) who is a new co-instructor with Esther Ignagni for Rethinking Disability in a somewhat experimental amalgamated delivery on-line this Fall to roughly 70 students; and to Dr. Jihan Abbas, a longtime friend of the program who has taken over instructing Leadership for Changing Times. In the Liberal Arts course A History of Madness, we are fortunate to have a freshly reformulated instructor team: Jenna Reid (York U), Danielle Landry (York U) -- both also Mad People's History instructors -- and Fady Shanouda (UToronto). Delighted to have you all. Gisele de Mozzi, is visiting us for six months. Gisele is a PhD student in Social Psychology at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) where she is a member of the Sexuality and Gender Relations Research Group (NUPSEX). By shadowing Dr. Eliza Chandler, she hopes to further explore the relations between disability studies and queer, crip and feminist studies.

## **P**rogram Development

Last winter we applied to Ryerson for space to mobilize research that engages art, aesthetics, technical and methodological innovation. Our aspirations relate to existing DST research programs as well as inter-disciplinary collaborations with others, for example, the Studio for Critical Media Studies. Against all expectation, we received approval to take over the space currently occupied by the Midwifery program (next door) once they move to a new building on Church Street. Currently seeking grant funds for renovations, the new area will give us, also, three internal and more secure offices in exchange for three along the south wall. Stay tuned on this one. No breakthrough comes without packing boxes!

This month the Dean's Office struck a search committee for a new director in Disability Studies. Amazing as it seems, I have done two terms (8 years) and will reach the end of this role on June 30, 2019. A new director will be in place by July in time for the Summer Institute. I am applying for a full year sabbatical beginning September 2019 with a plan to revitalize my scholarship through existing research collaborations and new works. Although the time will come (and perhaps in writing!) it is too early to reflect on this era! I need to get the final draft of our School Council By-laws into the queue at Senate. I am back working on our (endless) Periodic Program Review. We have started a different conversation with a new Vice-Provost of University Planning. And the 20 th birthday of the Disability Studies program is on the horizon for 2019-20.

## Kathryn



School of Disability Studies  
Is celebrating its  
20th Anniversary

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
Monday July 8, 2019

10:30-12:00 am Annual Activist Lecture  
(Speaker TBA)

4:00 pm Reception (with refreshments)  
followed by

4:30 pm Student Awards Presentations

Hi all!



I am thrilled to be joining all of the brilliant people here at the School of Disability Studies and an incredible group of ELA Postdoctoral Fellows, most recently held by Dr. Tobin LeBlanc Haley.

Here is a little more about me, but I look forward to getting to know you all as well. I am a white, queer, from a mixed class background. I grew up in the territory of the Piscataway and Haudenosaunee Confederacy in rural northern Virginia. I relocated to Tkaronto from Richmond Virginia where I did an undergraduate degree in Politics and Women's Studies and was a founder and coordinator for The Richmond Queer Space Project a.k.a. Queer Paradise, a community space and collective living project. Once I moved here I was part of the first group of students to complete the Critical Disability Studies Masters at York University in 2005. I then completed a PhD in Environmental Studies with a dissertation titled *Unbreaking Our Hearts: Cultures of Un/Desirability and the Transformative Potential of Queercrip Porn*. This research engaged queercrip community as knowledge and cultural producers to interrogate the manifestations and impacts of systemic oppression in our lives as well as highlighting distinctly queercrip practices of resistance with a focus on the collaborative production of queercrip porn. I am also the creator of *want*, an internationally award-winning queercrip porn film. I am a forerunner in theorizing and thriving through care collectives having met the majority of my care needs through my community for 20 years. I have organized with the Queer Liberation Front, 81 reasons, Prisoner Justice Action Coalition, DAMN 2025, Acsexxxable, and most recently

I will be organizing and hosting a weekend long summit called “Challenging Cultures of Undesirability and Cultivating Cultures of Resistance Summit.” I will be inviting 10 to 15 scholars, activists, and artists chosen in consultation with directly impacted communities (harm reduction advocates and users, sex workers, disabled folks, mad folks, trans community, Prisoner Justice activists, etc.) to share papers, performances, and strategies for making change in a variety of formats.

### Collective Care Digital Storytelling Project and Website

I started meeting my care needs through collective care because of the inadequacy of government funding to hire care attendants as well as homophobia and disableism from agency-provided care providers. So my friends and I familiar with grassroots organizing that centred community-based solutions to social problems started my very first care collective. I have been meeting my daily care needs (going to the bathroom, eating, maintaining my home) through a collective of volunteers from my community for almost 20 years. Having one of, if not the longest running care collectives in north America, makes me uniquely situated to lead this research. I also feel in taking up collective care as a site of queercrip survival and flourishing exposes oppressive normative ideologies and explores conceptual and practical frameworks for building practices to keep marginalized people safe when state interventions fail or expose marginalized communities to more violence and harm.

As so much of the learning and theory making and living of collective care happens between bodies, in private interpersonal moments the knowledge generated in this experience often remains with the people who are involved in the specific care relationships. For years now, people have approached me to share these experiences as well as create tangible resources for other people who wish to form care collectives or who have care collectives. This project is an answer to that call for a gathering of the collective knowledge generated in moments of politicized collective care. I plan on creating an interactive, social-media style website through which collaborators (including myself) can post digital media, and collectively analyze posts through comments and tagging.

### Care Cafés

I am thrilled to collaborate with Dr. Eliza Chandler, Dr. Esther Ignagni, and Kim Collins around their death cafés exploring the linkages and interdependencies between death and care.

## Queercrip Porn Focus Groups

The lack of representation that fully communicates and reflects disabled people's complex personhood is well-documented. One area of erasure that my research addresses is sexual representation. My video, *want*, was the first of its kind in 2006. When I embarked on my dissertation research there were a small handful (if 2 to 3 videos can count as a handful) of queercrip porn videos produced in the spirit of community-based art projects. This work is grounded in storytelling, embodied testimony, video and other participatory crip methods that are informed by transformative justice, queer theory, disability justice and radical access. Our co-created porn narratives have created spaces of community building where subjugated knowledges are revalued, practices and understandings of bodies, affect, disability and desire are transformed, and alternative worlds and imaginaries are made. I focused my dissertation on the transformative impacts of making co-created porn from a disability justice framework. I am hoping to hold between 2 and 4 focus groups where I would show the videos produced for my dissertation in order to discuss the transformative impacts of encountering queercrip porn on queer disabled communities and nondisabled queer communities.

## Come See Me!

I am also really excited to be getting to know all of the fabulous people involved with the School of Disability Studies! If you are a student or faculty and you are interested in chatting about any of these things or, even things that are adjacent to any of this, please come by my office (right inside the disability studies area) or send me an email [lore.e.erickson@ryerson.ca](mailto:lore.e.erickson@ryerson.ca) and say hello.



## What should disability-led arts look like in 2020?

written by Dr. Eliza Chandler

In early September, I had the good fortune of travelling with a Canadian delegation of disability artists to the [Unlimited Festival](#) in the UK. The Unlimited Festival is a biannual disability arts festival, mostly featuring performing arts, at the Southbank Centre on London's South Bank. When we talk about disability arts, we often look to the UK as being the global trailblazers, so I was curious to see what new information I might learn about accessibility and the arts and what new, fantastic disability artwork I might see.

The Unlimited Festival brought together disability artists from around the world, many who, like me, were sponsored by the British Council. The first two days of the festival was a conference wherein we talked about issues related to funding for disability arts, disability arts and intersectionality, and what we might want disability arts to look like in the near future -- many of the discussions we are having

here in Canada. An accessibility practice I was introduced at the conference was the practice of offering a brief visual description of oneself before making a comment. So, for example, I might say something like, “My name is Eliza and I’m a white, noticeably disabled woman with short brown hair wearing a black top and jeans.” (I was struck by how everyone described what they were wearing!). While I liked this practice when it was introduced, I quickly saw how it would go awry. People would often make a joke of this practice, saying things like, “I’m a devilishly handsome young man who isn’t wearing a shirt” (when this was untrue). Or, people would use this as an opportunity to make a fatphobic comment, such as “I’m a middle aged woman who should probably go on a diet.” Both of these ‘elaborations’ distracted from the purpose of the practice, to give blind people and people with low-vision access to information that sighted people visually. When I spoke to blind people about this, they said that they were annoyed by the jokes people were making and didn’t find that the information that was being delivered gave them any context to the statement that was being made, any more than a quick statement of positionality would have (eg ‘speaking as a white person,...’). All of this to say that it was a good reminder of the importance of consulting with users (in this case, blind people and people with low vision) when establishing an accessibility practice.

**F**ollowing the conference was a three day festival of disability arts. One of the pieces that really stood out for me in this festival was a performance by a group from Liverpool called House of Krip. A ‘house’ is a group of performers who compete using performance and dance in competitions known as Vogue Balls. This is a part of queer Black and Latinx cultures around the world. The [House of Krip](#) is the first House made up entirely of Deaf and disabled of colour dancers. They performed in one of the most beautiful and inclusive arts events that I’ve ever seen! Groups of dancers competed with other groups in categories such as choreography and footwork and the host kept the energy up and encouraged the audience to give the performers the praise that they deserved. At the end of the performance, they opened the runway up to Deaf and disabled people who didn’t belong to a House (orphans!) to move down the runway to thunderous response and encouragement from the audience. It was a truly beautiful event!

**A**n accessibility practices that I thought worked really well was the way that the BSL (British Sign Language) interpreters were integrated into the choreography of many of the performances. Instead of standing still off to the side of the stage, the interpreters would often 'shadow' the performer as they moved around the stage, sometimes even interacting with them. I liked this because it seemed as though it would allow people using the sign language to also be watching the performers instead of having to glance between the interpreter and the performer, as they would if the interpreter was to the side of the stage. I also liked this because it integrated accessibility into the aesthetics of the performance and you could tell that the performer and the interpreter rehearsed together. However, as much as I enjoyed this, I am not a deaf person and I wasn't using sign language as a way to access the performance. I didn't have a chance to ask a deaf person/sign language user how they felt about this, and I wonder what they would say.

I had a great time at the Unlimited Festival and it gave me lots of ideas for our upcoming Crippling the Arts Festival, which will bring together disability artists, curators, and academics from around the world -- and hopefully you! -- in a three-day symposium and performing arts festival at the end of January. So, stay tuned for your invitation! The Unlimited Festival also gave me lots of new material for DST 509: Crip Culture in Canada, an online class I'm teaching this winter, a course that is open for DST students to take as an elective

# DEATHNASTICS: FEMINIST CRIP WORLD-MAKING

written by Allyson Mitchell, Deirdre Logue,  
Kim Collins, Esther Ignagni, and Eliza  
Chandler

**D**eathnastics was a collaborative project between the Feminist Art Gallery (FAG) and the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University which embraces death as a starting point from which to think about (and trouble) crip vitality, crip queer feminist futurity, and most recently, the rub between death, sensuality, and a crip/ped ethics of care.

Kim Collins, Esther Ignagni, and Eliza Chandler from Ryerson's Disability Studies have been following the emergence of the medical assistance in dying (MAiD) legislation in Canada. The passage of MAiD in 2016 is regarded as a major defeat for disabled peoples and disability justice organizers, who see its significant implications for the treatment and understanding of disabled people - whose lives are constructed as costly, unworthy, and undesirable.

We came together with FAG's Deirdre Logue and Allyson Mitchell to develop interactive art events that create discursive space, provoke broader public dialogue, critical insights and reflexive questions around death, disability and MAiD - but also more generally, crip futures.

Our collaborative performance, called Deathnastics, was part of Lucy Pallawk and Hazel Meyer's *Gymsick* at the Bunker of Contemporary Art in early August 2018. For this performance, we decided to animate a story told by Catherine Frazee. Frazee, drawing from letters he wrote to the Montreal Gazette, told us the story of Archie Rolland, a man living with ALS in a healthcare institution, who recently accessed MAiD. In these letters, Rolland described how his unmet basic care needs - having the lights turned off when

he was going to sleep and having his lips moistened - led to this decision. Rolland knew that reports of his death would claim, in contradiction to his lived accounts, that the suffering which prompted him to access MAiD was caused by the pain of his impairment.

Through his story, we see how access to adequate care and access to medical assistance in dying can be two sides of the same coin; if you have one, the other becomes unthinkable. In conversation with artist Lindsay Fisher, we decided to animate one aspect of Rolland's story through creating a manual for how to moisten lips, your own and other's, in different ways for different purposes. Working with artists/performers

Vanessa Dion Fletcher, Sean Lee, Carrie Perrault, and Lindsay Fisher we developed this manual into a performance called Deathnastics.

The performance began with instructions for how to moisten your lips to communicate desire, with instructions like, "first slowly draw the tip of your tongue across the the upper lip. Repeat with the lower. Ensure that the lick is slow-moving and sensual in action." The performance then moved on to the type of lip moistening that Rolland required to live, with instructions like, "Using your index finger, apply the balm to the center of the bottom lip first, working your way toward the corners." As part of the performative, audience members were invited to 'try their hand' at different lip moistening techniques.

To close Deathnastics audience members and artists held a care cafe in the parking lot adjacent to the bunker. Conversation shifted from the importance of wearing lipstick as wedding day advice, to stories

of family intimacy where children were lined up by their mother to get lip balmed before going out to play in the snow, to a story of missing kissing in the wake of a break-up; to stories of being told to smile by friends and strangers alike after facial surgery to remove a tumour.

Deathnastics animated the slippage between sickness, sexuality, and desire, a slippage that was emphasized and explored in the care cafe held afterwards.

Moistening one's lips; changing one's tampon; even knowing when someone is about to fall asleep, are acts of care that are performed best when both people involved have intimate understandings of each other's bodies and embodiments. Care, the coming together of bodies, is intimate work. And intimacy, perhaps, can only be brought into the room through desire. Coming back to the example Rolland gave us through his letters, moistening lips is an indication that he is a desirable person, living a desirable life, and that moistening lips is a desirable activity meted out by desirable people (a desire for care work / care workers). Desire is what pivots care work from being strictly instrumental and, as Rolland tells us, ineffective, into an act in which we are recognized as vital. We wonder if desire is as essential for producing certain feelings in a kiss, as in an intimate act of care. We want to keep the desire alive, lean into its pleasures, rather than it be finite.

These questions of desire, embodiment and vitality were animated by FAG's large art piece, Killjoy's Kastle: a Lesbian Feminist Haunted House (KJK).

Killjoy's Kastle invited visitors to tour an unconventional gallery space designed in the tradition of carnivals, evangelical Christian fright nights, and lesbian feminist direct action aesthetics. The project engaged a range of queer and feminist publics in interactive encounters with the frightening spirits that haunt feminist and queer history. The name Killjoy's Kastle recognizes Sarah

Ahmed's popular notion of the feminist killjoy. We are unhappy and miserable, and in a way, ecstatic about it.

The real synergy between our death cafe, Deathnastics, and FAG's KJK, is the animation of conversations around death, politics and community. They are process-based, performative, collective. We engage in public, where we don't really know how people are going to react. These projects bring people together in a deliberate intensification, in order to invite them to talk about things that need to be talked about now.

Our collaborative work holds in common a shared political impulse to centralize death in our projects of world-making through attending to its generative aesthetic dimensions; for different and similar reasons, we have all felt that we cannot turn away from death.

However, bringing our work together has surfaced some temporal tensions. For example, crip has yet to occupy some of the concepts (eg the gender binary) KJK memorialized and marked as dead, and therefore approach this death-making differently. Our crip politic may call for the death of different concepts (eg the death of the pity trope). Some difficult conversations about the forms of ableism at work in our discussions about death remain.



# VOICE (Vocally Oriented Investigation in Creative Expression) LAB

The term “voice” is politically significant. In North America, many people involved in social movements have had the privilege of speaking dominant, normative languages. Yet, many disabled people remain on the outskirts of these movements, in spaces of silence. A mainstream response to this silence is to “give voice to the voiceless”—a powerful trope Meryl Alper breaks down when she suggests that “giving” voice normalizes a charitable approach to expression without challenging the ways in which voice is privileged, obtained, disavowed, and silenced. Indeed, “giving voice” has long been held up by feminists and critical race scholars as a colonial phrase. In her 2015 talk at Ryerson, Nirmala Erevelles drew on Arudhati Roy’s words when she told us that “there is really no such thing as the voiceless” when people are deliberately silenced and “preferably unheard.”

With this politic in mind, I am stepping on to a new, community-based research project at the University of Regina called the VOICE (Vocally Oriented Investigation in Creative Expression) Lab. The VOICE Lab will use software to measure and record vocal sound, and to build arts-based vocal creations. Working in the faculties of Media and Performance Art and Social work, my research will seek to understand whether and how the VOICE Lab’s construct of “voice” represents the experiences of the disabled people I will work with—some of whom will be “preferably unheard” people. I will begin research with the same premise that begins many of our courses: disability is a social category. This category is organized, in part, by ableist understandings of “voice” and communication. As I

turn my attention toward research, I feel fortunate to fortunate to be working in parallel to DST 88: Research Methods in Disability Studies students who will also be shifting into a research role over the course of the year and, in part, grappling with ways to usurp the trop of “giving voice” as we move our inquiry into community. Our research is politically significant, and I look forward to moving through its trials, tensions, and joys with you this year.



# What are students and alumni up to?

## Creating and Neglecting change by Dierdre Boyle

I graduated from Disability Studies in 2010 with the belief that my time at Ryerson had come to an end. Then in 2013 I started a job that did not require shift work or overnights and Ryerson called me back. I enrolled in the Master of Arts Public Policy and Administration (MPPA) program. Learning more about public policy and administration seemed like a good idea. I just barely made the application deadline and started in the fall of 2014. I am graduating on October 10th four years later (most students complete in 1 year full time or 2-3 years part time).

As I prepare for graduation and reflect on what I have learned, I have a much greater appreciation of the power and responsibility held by public administrators and policy makers. There were many days when I wondered what the heck I was thinking when I signed up for this degree! I thought I already knew what I needed to know to do my job, and I did. However, I have grown so much through this learning journey (even though some of it was dry, as I imagine most programs would be in comparison to disability studies) and I have come to recognize and appreciate how much better equipped I now am.

I was one of the older students in the program and definitely the only one with a DST background. At first I felt like a 'fish out of water' but eventually

I created a link to Disability Studies and even the activist learnings from my earlier Community Worker days at George Brown College. Disability Studies embedded within me a critical approach that brought a layer of richness to what some might say could be slightly dry policy and administration studies. Having worked for almost two decades with people experiencing homelessness I also had a practical understanding of how the application of public policy impacts some of the most vulnerable folks in our communities.

The topic of my Major Research Paper became clear when I started a new position last year as an Accessibility Consultant at the City. The timing was perfect! While I was facing the huge task of implementing the public policy known as Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) I had the opportunity to step back and consider my work from critical, academic and political perspectives. My research asked: how do you take a social public policy like AODA and put it into meaningful practice. It was a critical look at accessibility planning at the City, to explore the status quo and identify where we needed to go as a municipality to achieve our goals. I wanted to figure out how to implement AODA in a way that would be more than just compliance with minimum standards (out of fear of consequences) but in a way that would change the conversation altogether.

The first part of my paper is a literature review, considering research in areas such as accessibility planning, local governance, disability rights legislation, employment equity, and disability theory. In the second part I used a narrative case study approach, in which I share successes and challenges as a public servant faced with the task of

implementing accessibility legislation, while exploring the municipal processes for decision-making and action (or not) on those decisions.

I suggest that, "AODA is a really significant and important piece of legislation but due to the neo-liberal approach to governance in this province and City, the resources and enforcement required to realize the goals are lacking, resulting in less than fulsome implementation. The AODA generally reflects a social, human rights and inclusionary lens, however its implementation in Toronto thus far, demonstrates traditional and harmful understandings of disability, which continue to create exclusion and discrimination" (Boyle, 2018, pp7).

I question the resources dedicated to accessibility planning. "The small size of my Equity and Diversity unit reflects the move towards reduced government and less spending, especially on work that has traditionally been done "off the side of the desk" and believed by some to only benefit special interest groups" (Boyle, 2018, pp 7). I explain that political commitment must include resources in addition to nice words of commitment. Toronto's main source of revenue is from property taxes, which remain one of the lowest rates in Ontario. "The Council commitment to accessibility and recommitment last month by the adoption of the Corporate Accessibility Policy is an example of where council unanimously approves initiatives intended to improve life in the City and address critical needs. However the funds required to implement this policy are missing due to a lack of revenue generation City Councillors are willing to support" (Boyle, 2018, pp. 50). I argue that accessibility at the City is hollow as long as it is one or even a few staff 'files'. Rather it needs to be everyone's responsibility and incorporated by design into all of our work, ideally with the support of an accessibility office. "For this to happen we need a major shift in the workplace culture in respect to attitudes about accessibility and disability" (Boyle, 2018, pp. 6). I note that a Task Force on Community Access and Equity recommended the establishment of an Office of Disability Issues in 1999 and Council adopted the following: "The Chief Administrative Officer work with the Aboriginal Affairs and Disability Issues Advisory Committees towards the establishment of an Aboriginal Affairs Office and an Office for Disability Issues" (Boyle citing City of Toronto, Task Force on Community Access and Equity, 2001, p. 17). I have been told that policy initiatives move slowly at the City but this is really slow. That was almost two decades ago and unfortunately an accessibility office is not a political priority at this time. (However, we were successful this year in establishing a much-needed Indigenous Affairs Office, which is very hopeful.)

In summary, "The case study of accessibility planning at the City of Toronto, which I am deeply entangled with provided an example of a large municipality struggling to realize inclusionary goals whilst in the depths of a neo-liberal era of governance that neglects to recognize people with disabilities as citizens" (Boyle, 2018, pp 62).

References

Boyle, Deirdre (2018). Creating and Neglecting Change: Accessibility Planning at the City of Toronto. Major Research Paper. MPPA. Ryerson University



# EXPERIENCES OF A VIRTUAL STUDENT

written by Paul Benson

**T**he classroom experience is so much more than just listening to the instructor, asking a question or two, and taking tests. It is a social experience. You interact with your classmates, do group projects, and share your ideas on what information was presented, and how it relates to your own views on the subject.

But what if you can't come to class? Maybe you have family commitments that keep you at home, maybe you live in a distant location where travelling to class is not feasible. Maybe you have a disability that prevents you from going to the classroom. Or maybe you find the hustle and bustle of a busy classroom overwhelming. What are your options then?

You might be offered classes via distance education – conducted wholly over the internet, where you never see your classmates. For some people, this works perfectly well. But for others, they really want the “classroom experience” despite physically being unable to be present in class every day.

## Being “in class” from home

Through technology, there is a new option. You can participate in the classroom through an electronic connection. You see and hear everything that your instructor is presenting to the class. You have access to all the learning materials. You can see and hear your classmates and can talk with them. You can participate in team activities. It is as if you're there in the class, but your connection is over

the internet and you are at home, or wherever you want to do your learning (e.g., you might be in the library, or other quiet learning space). And, more and more, exams are completed online – it doesn't matter where you are and you can choose the time when you want to take the test.

This is the kind of learning that I experienced in the summer institute with DST 501 Rethinking Disability, in my first course in the Disability Studies program at Ryerson. I couldn't be physically present on campus because I am disabled and live in my local hospital as a long-term patient. But I got to enjoy the feeling of being part of the class, interacting with all my classmates, listening to all their ideas, and working with them on joint projects. I also got to go with the group on “field trips.” On a trip to the Toronto Deaf Centre, I went along by being connected through my professor's laptop. When the class went to a play, I had a full transcript describing all the action. When they went to a lecture on disability issues, I listened to the recording of that event. In short, I got to do everything that my classmates did! Choose the kind of learning that works best for you

I have done a lot of studying via distance education, and I thoroughly enjoy it. However, being a virtual student in a face-to-face class adds the classroom dynamics that online learning can't duplicate (seeing my classmates, watching their body language, and hearing the interaction between students and the instructor). You can't get that from an online discussion forum.

There are pros and cons for face-to-face learning compared to distance education delivered totally online. Online learning is usually asynchronous – it doesn't matter when you participate, as long as you keep up with the assigned work. By its nature, classroom-based interaction requires that you are ready to participate when the class is occurring. In the case of the summer institute, the intensive campus-based portion of the course required me to be "in class" from 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM every day for two weeks. The rest of my course work consisted of reading and responding to the class discussion forum – this was work that I could do any time, and from any location.

How do you get to be a "virtual student"?

At the moment, very few schools, colleges, and universities are ready for having "virtual students" participate in their face-to-face classes. If this is the kind of studying that works best for you, be persistent. If your chosen learning institutions says "no" to your request, ask them why not?

The more students who ask for this kind of learning, the more learning institutions will realize that they should be providing this option. They should be offering learning in the way that students want to experience it. From my experience, there are no technological barriers – most learning institutions already have the software to support it.

There will be only minor changes required – if any – to include "virtual students." These might be things such as ensuring that students use a microphone when responding to questions and ensuring that any guest speakers also use a microphone. The teaching remains the same.

Some schools, colleges, or universities might be nervous of providing this kind of learning. Yet they have everything to gain. More students enrolled, due to the increased accessibility of their courses, and potential recognition as a learning institution clearly focused on the learning needs of the individual.

Fortunately Ryerson University, my professor Esther Ignagni, her Teaching Assistant Nelson Mugisha, and the School of Disability Studies, were ready and able to support me as a "virtual student." I was very fortunate to find the right professor and learning institution!

I am convinced that there are many more students just like me – ready and eager to experience life as a "virtual student." Will you be a "virtual student" sometime in the future? Speak up strongly and it can be made to happen – no barriers!

# Personal Reflection on “Workshop on Doing Institutional Ethnography in/with Community Organizations”

By: Habiba Rahman

I am very thankful to Dr. Kathryn Church, Associate Professor and Director, School of Disability Studies, Ryerson University, for offering me the opportunity to participate in “Workshop on Doing Institutional Ethnography in/with Community Organizations.” This was a workshop for international sociologists and local researcher/activists. I was honored and privileged to get the opportunity to participate as well as have discussions with knowledgeable scholars. When I reached the workshop held on Ryerson campus I was warmly welcomed by Kathryn. She hugged me, and directed to sit beside two other participants with whom I had effective and energetic discussions on pros and cons of institutional ethnography as a research methodology. During lunch break, we also had vigorous discussions on a wide range of issues related to the topic of workshop. For instance, we exchanged thoughts and views on capitalism, colonialism, global politics and marginalization of minorities, systemic barriers and Canadian immigration policy, and so on.

It was a memorable experience to listen to the lively and spontaneous presentation by Julie Bomberry, Susan Warner, and Amye Warner on their institutional ethnography research work entitled “Building Change on and off Reserve: Six Nations of the Grand

River Territory”. The way the presenters delivered their speech by taking turns, and through mutual interactions, was a great learning experience for me to understand how conversational ease can be added in a formal setting.

As a first generation immigrant from South Asia I have limited knowledge about Indigenous people. This workshop was eye-opening for me as the presenters started their introduction with a brief history of the Haudenosaunee and the Six Nations of the Grand River. An essential part of their research was linked to Ganohkwásra Family Assault Support Services. One of the presenters explained that “Ganohkwásra” is a phrase in the Cayuga language meaning “Love Among Us”. The name is in keeping with the organization’s goal of establishing peace in families torn with violence by facilitating community support and hope.

What I found most interesting was the presenters’ sharing of experiences, knowledge, and views about institutional ethnography that they used in developing their project. Before attending this workshop, I had very limited understanding about institutional ethnography. I was introduced with this methodology in the course DST88 Research Methodology, but as I choose Narrative Inquiry

as a research approach to do my independent research project (as part of DST99). Thus, I did not dig into the core concepts of institutional ethnography. Therefore, in the workshop, when the presenters talked about this methodology, particularly highlighting the challenges they encountered in accessing municipal, provincial, and federal organizations to collect data, was illuminating to understand institutional ethnography works as a research methodology. The key learning or take away for me was researchers' repeated emphasis on "building relationships" as one of the core characteristics of institutional ethnography. I also understood that this research methodology does not test a pre-existent hypothesis; rather it looks for the problematic in the lived experiences of people in everyday world, and thus by exploring a problem from the bottom, it investigates through the use of interviews the systemic barriers ingrained in the institutional and organization processes.

It was really a memorable moment for me to have a chance to talk with Julie Bomberry during lunch break. At that time, Julie explained to me how I can apply my knowledge of narrative inquiry while doing any research project through an institutional ethnography lens.

Overall, as a novice researcher I was significantly benefited from the opportunity to participate in the workshop. At the end of the workshop, I had developed a keen interest in doing research through institutional ethnography in future.



- [Read](#) about ableism in online education written by DST instructor, Chelsea Jones
- [Read](#) DST faculty Esther Ignagni discuss why disability representation matters in Emmerdale
- [Read](#) the letters from the Minimal Action 3 event hosted by the School of Disability Studies which was an evening of letter writing to raise concerns about the Ontario Conservative government's reorganization of social services without community consultation.
- [Read](#) an article by adjunct professor, Tobin LeBlanc Haley titled, Resident Work in High-Support Housing: A Mad Feminist Political Economy Analysis
- [Read](#) about the annual activist lecture from the summer titled; Legacies of Ableism and Colonialism in Higher Education: Where do we go from here?
- [Read](#) about the endowment of the David Reville/Working for Change Mad People's History Course Award in Ryerson Today

## How to keep in Touch

- Check out the school's Facebook group page
- Follow the School's RyeCast Channel for the latest lecture and talks.
- Follow the school on Twitter at @DS\_Ryerson
- Follow the School on Instagram at DS\_Ryerson
- Follow the school's blog Vision, Passion, Action
- If you would like to submit a blog, please write 450-600 words and send it to kimberlee.collins@ryerson.ca
- Email us at rads@ryerson.ca