

From the Director's Desk
February 2017

Disability Studies is popping with research production, multi-faceted student engagements, new projects and awards. Our curriculum is evolving to reflect the intricacies of Disability Studies scholarship as an increasingly sophisticated international field. Let me hit some high points about new course options, instructors and program directions.

This Fall **Dr. Eliza Chandler** taught a new “upper level Liberal” of her own devising titled *Crippling the Arts in Canada* to about 35 students Ryerson-wide. The course takes up the inclusion of disability arts ‘crips,’ or productively disrupts, arts and culture in Canada. If you are interested in a glimpse of how that went, check out this AMI segment:

<http://www.ami.ca/category/arts-and-culture-segment-atw-weekend-edition/media/cripping-arts-canada>

Eliza’s next challenge is to translate the on-site course into an on-line version for program students. Stay tuned! Meanwhile, she is delivering our newly amalgamated leadership course titled *Leadership for Social Action* (DST 727). Designed by **Dr. Jijian Voronka**, it rethinks leadership theories, practices of working across differences, and complicated empowerment/s in the context of intensifying neoliberalism.

PHL507 (Disability and Ethics) is being delivered this winter under a new course code and title, namely DST 507 *Disability, Justice and the Good Human Life*. Freshly reconstituted, it is being taught from Halifax by **Dr. Katie Aubrecht** who is Postdoctoral Fellow and Research Coordinator at the Nova Scotia Centre on Aging, and adjunct professor with the Department of Family Studies and Gerontology at Mount Saint Vincent University. We are lucky to tap Katie’s blend of intersectional, postcolonial, and interpretive sociological theories as applied to the question: “Do we own our own bodies?”

The course critically applies conceptions of justice, ethics, morality to issues such as disability discrimination, right-to-die, choice, autonomy, and assisted suicide. We thank **Dr. Jaipreet Virdi**, PHL 507 instructor, for the stellar instruction that enabled us to bridge from Philosophy to Disability Studies with this material.

In the May/June session, Disability Studies will offer – for the first time – a Current Topics course titled *Rethinking Disability in Education*. To be taught by **Dr. Kathryn Underwood**, Associate Professor, Ryerson Early Childhood Studies and to include ECS students, this course will consider the ways in which disability is constructed within educational spaces, both as a positive cultural identity and as a mechanism for exclusion and discrimination. Mobilizing Kathryn’s expertise with disability rights and inclusive education, it will intersect with critical race theory, radical inclusive education, and the movement toward critical disability studies in education.

Dr. Catherine Frazee, our Professor Emerita continues to sharpen the debate over medically assisted dying in Canada. Many will know that, with Dr. Michael Bach (Adjunct Professor) and other advisors, she co-authored the Vulnerable Persons Standard which lays out necessary protections for anyone vulnerable to coercion and abuse around medically assisted dying. She has advanced this position in several publications this year: the *Ottawa Life Magazine*, *Canadian Virtual Hospital*, *The Hill Times* (Ottawa) and the *Chronicle Herald* (Nova Scotia), along with the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and *The Lancet*. The group has now built a coalition of 50 expert advisors and an ambitious new plan of work for the VPS community.

Expanding our resources as new Adjunct Professor appointments are **Dr. Jijian Voronka** and **Dr. Cameron Crawford**. Well-known DST instructors, they are currently implementing strong programs of funded research: Cam through an SSHRC-funded one year, three phase post-doctoral fellowship that scopes the terrain of disability and decent work in Canada, as well as a busy consultancy; and Jijian in her final term of a two-year SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship that examines peer labor and the restructuring of housing policy hosted by Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University in New York. Congratulations and welcome.

Welcome, as well, to freshly minted **Dr. Tobin LeBlanc Haley** who has taken up the *Ethel Louise Armstrong Post-doctoral Fellowship in Disability Studies*. Tobin will be with us until the end of August with a possibility of extension..

Congratulations to **Kim Collins**, Student Engagement Facilitator and to the **Student Advisory Committee** who have been successful with several Awards Nomination Packages lately: **Dr. Eliza Chandler** for the *Sue Williams Excellence in Teaching Award* from the Faculty of Community Services; and, **Dr. Chelsea Jones** will receive the *FCS Excellence Award Contract Lecturers* later this month. They have also prepared nominations for people who were not selected, notably **Paris Master McRae** for the *Larissa Allen Employee Award*. Their citation for Paris highlights her achievements not just as a gold standard student affairs coordinator but as an award-winning graduate for whom Disability Studies is a community and a family. A savvy systems player, Paris is a change-maker and a tireless advocate for equity, inclusion, and diversity in the school, the faculty and the university. We have not given up on securing recognition for her and the way her infectious laugh opens doors to collegiality, camaraderie and solidarity.

Finally, as we head into Spring, I strongly encourage all students and alumni to seize the opportunity offered by Ryerson's hosting of the Social Sciences and Humanities Congress in May/June 2017 – and under that umbrella, the School's hosting of the Canadian Disability Studies Association meetings. Register! Attend! And drop by to visit. You are always welcome.

Kathryn