

HUMN 410 invites critical engagement on significant contemporary topics through textual analysis of academic literature from the humanities and social sciences. Readings draw from current, and sometimes controversial, topics related to health sciences, bioethics, medicine, and culture. Students will refine their reading comprehension skills and further develop their abilities to reason within and beyond the texts themselves. Through journal responses, short essays, discussions and debates, and multi-media presentations, students will demonstrate their abilities to engage critically with contemporary issues in science, technology, and culture.
(Catalogue Description)

Epistemology

This is the study of how we know what we know, and the story of how we arrived there. We will ask questions like: what kinds of questions have we asked about disability? what kinds of knowledge have been designated sufficient to answer those questions? who has made those determinations? who is allowed to know about disability?

History of Science

This is the study of how ideas, people, cultures, and technologies have influenced one another as they grow and change. We will ask questions like: how has the knowledge medical science generates impacted the way we understand disability? how has disability been excluded from those knowledges?

Medicine begins with a simple premise: to preserve, ensure, and restore health.

But as we begin to dig into the definitions of health in this course—a biological state? a social construction? a statistical average? a personal average?—we will see that “health” is not so straightforward as it might first appear. To make this journey, we will start with definitions of health and illness, heading toward consideration of what distinguishes illness from chronic illness from disability.

Then, we will ask a series of questions about disability: what is it? who gets to define it? who gets to decide what we know about it? is it bad? if it is, how? how should we think about disability and people with disabilities/disabled people (the language matters!)? We will conclude with a brief case study on autism.

Cultural Studies

This is the study of how cultural artefacts teach us about the people who made and used them. We will ask questions like: how has disability been represented? who has been allowed to represent disability?

What is an artefact? Any object made by a group of people that tells us something about how those people thought, felt, and lived. These can be text- or image-based: a movie, a book, a poem, an advertisement. They can be physical: a Tylenol bottle, a feminine hygiene product, a hospital. We will practice describing and reading these artefacts throughout this course.

Grade Percentages

Letter grades are based on the following percentages:

If admitted Spring 2022
or earlier

If admitted Summer 2022
and later

97-100% = A+	97-100% = A+
90-96.99% = A	94-96.99% = A
	90-93.99% = A-
87-89.99% = B+	87-89.99% = B+
80-86.99% = B	84-86.99% = B
	80-83.99% = B-
77-79.99% = C+	75-79.99% = C+
70-76.99% = C	70-74.99% = C
60-69.99% = D	60-69.99% = D
Below 60% = F	Below 60% = F

Weighting

I use a method of grading called “grade weighting.” This means that all of your assignments contribute a relative “weight” up to the 100% total of the class. A point on one assignment is not equal to a point on another assignment; it’s all proportional!

There are two main categories of work that we will do in this class:

Formative assignments are process-oriented.

These help you gauge where you are in your learning trajectory (and help me to know as well!), and reward effort and development.

This accounts for 30% of the work in this class.

Summative assignments are goal-oriented.

These ensure for both of us that you have reached a particular level of understanding for the course learning objectives.

This accounts for 70% of the work in this class.

However, these grades are still growth-oriented. I encourage you to try new argumentative techniques, writing strategies, etc.

Here is a general breakdown of the assignments that we will work on throughout this course. At the end of the course plan, you can find rubrics and more detailed assignment prompts.

**Engagement 15%
(Formative)**

Regular, punctual attendance; consistent, thoughtful participation in discussions; preparedness; appropriate behavior in class and in all communication. On most days, you will be invited to turn in at least one thoughtful question about the reading in-class on our Nearpod. I will release overall participation grades every 5 weeks.

**Short Essays 20%
(Formative)**

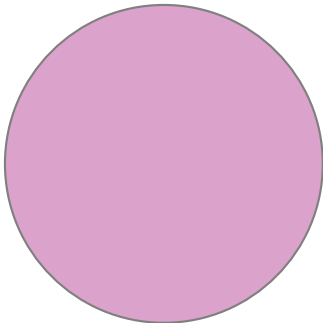
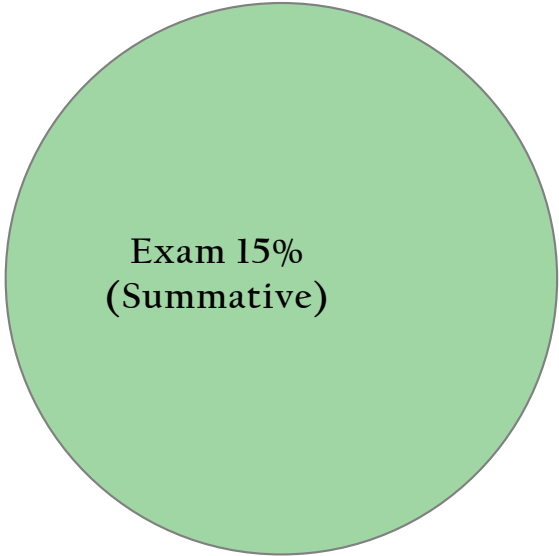
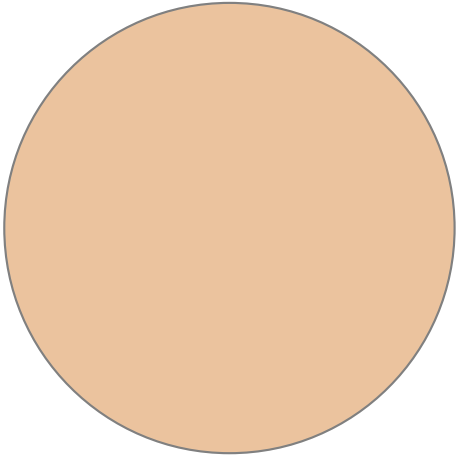
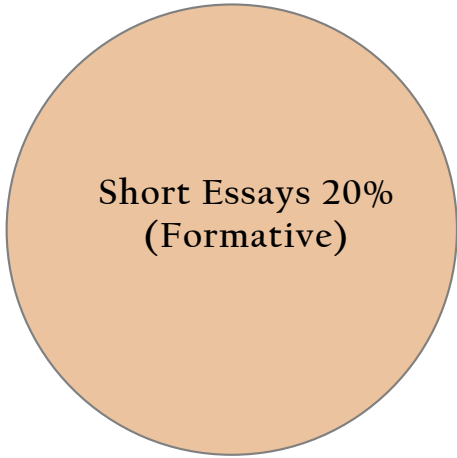
We will have two short essays throughout the semester that center around the readings from the last few weeks. These will have prompts to choose from, which will be outlined as we arrive at them.

**Exam 15%
(Summative)**

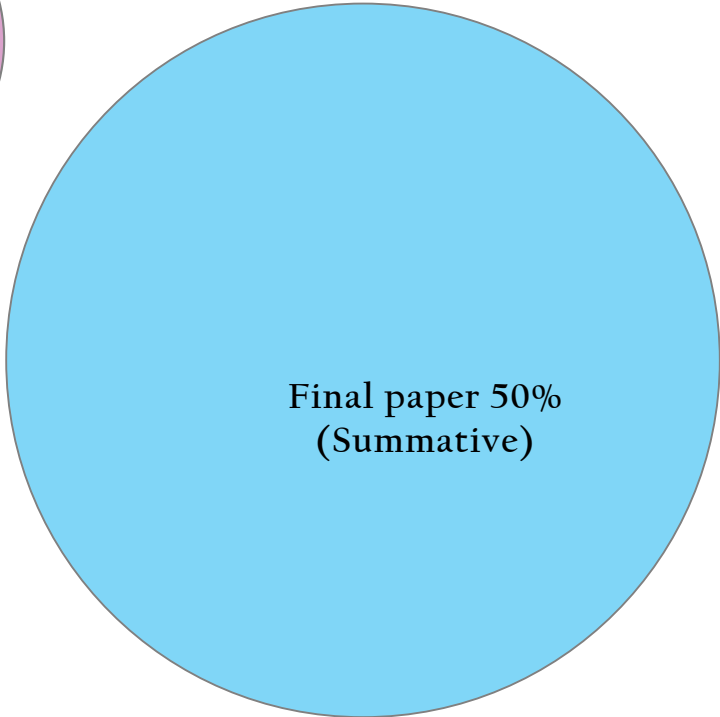
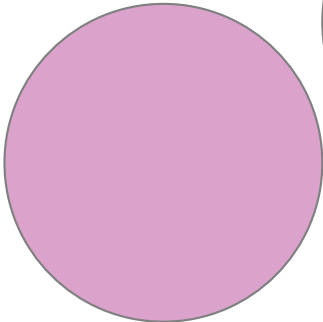
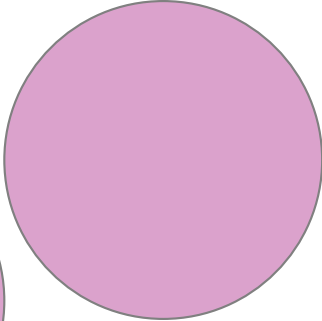
At the end of the “Defining Disability” section, we will have an exam on the different theories of defining disability. The exam will be open-note.

**Final paper 50%
(Summative)**

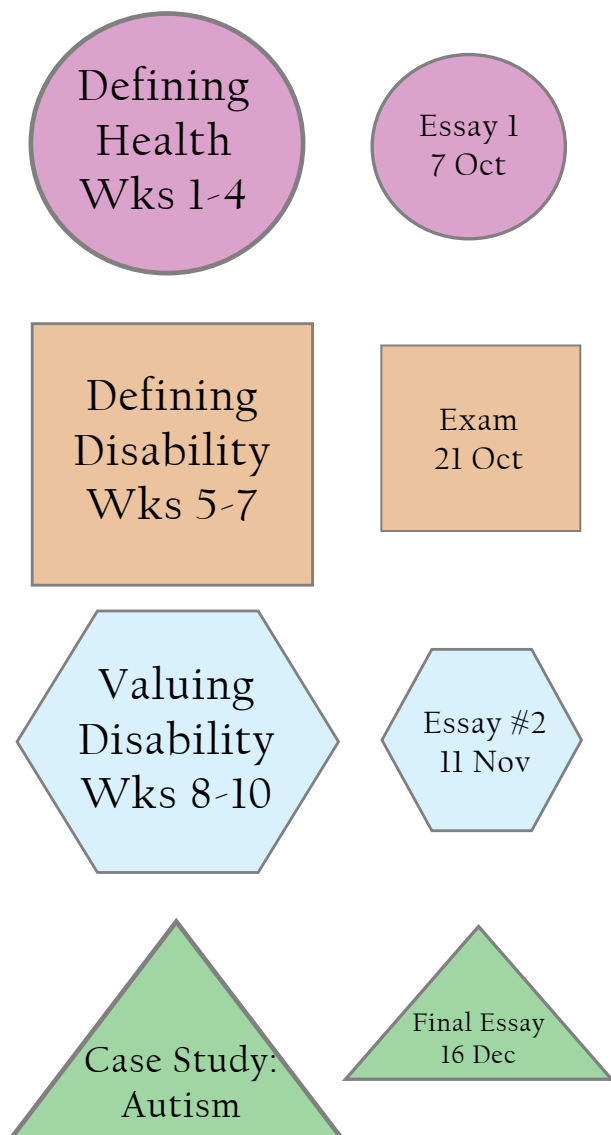
For your final paper, you will write a full-fledged seminar paper of approximately 10–12 pages on a relevant topic of your choosing. This paper is your opportunity to connect your learning from this course with your knowledge of medical science and philosophy of biology—so find something interesting to you! We will scaffold this piece throughout the semester.



Engagement 15%
(Formative)



Course Overview



The detailed guide below will let you know which readings are due, and when. These readings can be difficult, and may be different than other kinds of readings you've done before. To get the most from them, I recommend that you:

1. Read the assignment as closely as you can before the day listed below
2. Come to class ready to ask questions about definitions or ideas from the readings at the start of class check-in
3. Take notes and use your Key Concepts List during lectures/discussions
4. Use the check-in at the end of class to ask questions about any Key Concept or other term/idea you're still unpacking
5. Come to office hours if you still have questions

Canvas will always be our most up-to-date and accurate course schedule. If there is a conflict between the pdf syllabus and Canvas, Canvas is the correct source.

Let's talk more about ...

Engagement 15%
(Formative)

Score	Description
Exemplary (5)	Consistent, active engagement and attendance
Proficient (4)	Consistent attendance with less engagement (or vice-versa)
Emerging (3)	Inconsistent attendance or engagement
Initial (2)	Many absences or days with no engagement

Active engagement means asking question during lectures, conversing during discussions, and consistent effort to be present and grow together.

Philosophy invites us to explain our positions, hold them up to scrutiny, and adjust our views in the face of criticisms. I encourage all of us—myself included—to change our minds or modify our position about at least one thing by the time this course is completed.

You may sometimes disagree not only with each other, but also with me. This is what I love about philosophy, so please feel safe and welcome to do so. Differences in our opinions and beliefs enhance our learning and create an atmosphere where we will practice thinking critically and deeply together. In these engagements, we will all adopt an attitude of good-will and compassion—in both our assertions and our responses.

In our disagreements, we are all adults and will act accordingly. Sometimes, someone might say something that makes us uncomfortable; discomfort is healthy. But sometimes, someone may say something that is hurtful, whether to ourselves or someone else. If you ever feel unsafe or unwelcome because of something that a student or myself has said, please tell me (or Student Affairs, if you would prefer to keep it anonymous).

We will regularly encounter difficult topics that may touch scars or unhealed wounds. To show the most respect for our classmates' and fellow humans' dignity, we will always treat these issues with the gravity and care they deserve. If you need support, please come talk to me and/or reach out to the university counselling services. If for whatever reason, a topic is too much for you right now, please care for yourself and reach out to me for an alternate topic. You never need to tell me why.

Even despite our best intentions, learning is messy and requires mistakes. While we should never be unkind, it is almost obligatory that we should be incorrect at times. Never be ashamed if you say something incorrect, or struggle with an assignment, or make a suboptimal choice. Just learn from the experience and try something else next time.

More pragmatically: come to class ready to engage in discussion. I advocate remaining present and receptive, unencumbered by distractions like phones or laptops. Otherwise, we're all adults. Eat if you need to eat, go to the bathroom, take care of emergencies, whatever life requires—just be discreet.

In the case of illness, please provide documentation (doctor's notes, etc.) to the office of student affairs (chs.studentaffairs@cnsu.edu). You never need to tell me why or what is going on.

Some of this grade includes in-class discussion notes from group conversations. These cannot be made up. If you have an excused absence, you may come meet with me to chat during office hours instead within one week of your return.

Life happens. O-Chem happens. Sometimes, even with the best of intentions and time-management, we just can't find the motive or inspiration to write. In any and all of these cases, please reach out for extensions; I am always happy to grant them for writing assignments, as long as it is before the due date.

When you need an extension, you **do not** need to tell me any personal details about what you're facing. While I'm happy to talk about the extension in person, please follow-up with an email that says "Assignment: Extension to (Date)" as the subject header. That's all you need.

In most cases, this will be sufficient (and I'll respond as such), though we may need to talk about the date you set. If you find yourself needing repeated extensions, I may ask to meet just to ensure your success in the course. We will stay in touch as you're finishing up any extended work to make sure that you stay on-track to succeed in the course.

All late work without an extension will receive a 20% penalty per day, as will any late work after your extension deadline. Written assignments are due on the date specified, 15 minutes after class ends. Extensions granted after a due date will incur late penalties up to the point that the extension was granted (eg., if due Monday and extension granted on Tuesday, still 20% penalty for Monday), so please ask sooner, rather than later. Quizzes and process work cannot be made up.

Integrity

If I cheat in my ethics class,
but I don't get caught,
do I still fail?
(Yes)

The nature of philosophy is discussion and conversation. I do not mind if you talk about your papers with your classmates; in fact, I'd encourage it! Writing, as well, is collaboration. You will even be required to read one another's papers and offer feedback. Everyone must, however, write their own version of their argument.

Plagiarism becomes complicated in these collaborative settings. If I really, really like a phrase that you use in a comment, can I use it? Do I have to cite you? This is often what acknowledgements are for, or even footnotes if someone influences you significantly and you want to thank them.

At the risk of being too reductive, let's follow W.D. Ross's intuitionism for plagiarism in this class. If you feel a little unsure or like you have to justify something as not-plagiarism, it's probably plagiarism. But also, let's practice the ethics of care: reach out to your peers, and please reach out to me! I will never penalize you for asking if something is plagiarism, even if it is. If you're panicking, come to me instead of cheating; we can figure out how to make the experience caring, ethical, and edifying rather than judgmental and punitive.

Actions that are definitely plagiarism include the obvious (copy-pasting a peer's work or an online source), the less obvious (patchworking, or copying a sentence from a source and just changing some of the words), and the not-obvious (reading a claim or evidence from another source and not citing them). Everything will be turned in on Canvas and run through Turnitin.

Let's talk more about ...

Artificial Intelligence Dos

You are welcome to use AI as a tool to assist your writing. Please feel free to use AI for:

Editing tips

“How would you describe this writing? // How would you make it more [good qualities]?

How would you make it less [qualities that need fixing]?”

“How would you transition between these two paragraphs to emphasize [argument link]?”

Thought experiment ideas

“What are five thought-experiments that would help to demonstrate the following argument:
[your main claim]”

Clarifying major concepts

“Explain Kant's Categorical Imperative on an undergraduate level”

Finding foundational sources

Always double-check sources that AI suggest, especially more recent sources. But it's a great resource for the major sources.

“What are the most important sources on virtue?”

Breaking through writer's block

Ask for multiple suggestions, and think critically about them. “Based on these paragraphs, what are four ideas that would make sense as next steps for this essay that aims to argue [your argument]?”

Please do not use AI for:

First drafts

Struggling with ideas is part of the process. We do some of our best work when we make surprising or uncommon connections that a predictive language model will not make. If we let statistical language model AI define our arguments, we're only going to make predictable and mundane arguments.

Uncritically accepting too-general starting paper ideas

If we ask the AI “what is an argument I could make about dignity?”, those arguments may not be claims you would normally make, or that you feel passionately about, or that you are equipped to or interested in following through.

Just straight-up writing your essay

AI can help us to refine our writing, find sources, or break out of writer's block. But simply telling it to write an essay about why deontology is more sound than utilitarianism in the case of euthanasia 1) will not really teach us anything and 2) will produce a mediocre essay at best.

Please include your ChatGPT (or other AI) chat logs as a separate file in your essay submission. We are all coming to understand what this technology means for education, and I hope to use this as an opportunity to improve all of our learning.

Do nots