MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES, B.A., APPLIED DISABILITY STUDIES OPTION

The framework for a Concentration in Applied Disability Studies combines courses in educational foundations with courses in social sciences and prepares students to work in the rapidly expanding area of disability services, education support and advocacy organizations. Employment opportunities exist in the government, business, and non-profit sectors. Regarding services for people with disabilities, for example, current Pennsylvania labor data reveals a need for middle level professionals with competencies in leadership, management and supports for people with disabilities.

CAREERS OPPORTUNITIES

Students are prepared to play leadership roles in the field of disability. Future careers include program director and policy positions in community service agencies, advocacy organizations, independent living centers, parent centers, planning councils, and government agencies.

- Protection and advocacy agencies
- Parent training and information centers
- State agencies for Intellectual/developmental disabilities
- Self-advocacy associations
- Community and family support agencies
- University or college offices for students with disabilities
- Independent living centers
- Inclusive Post-Secondary Education programs
- Human service organizations

Practitioners are working towards improving the healthcare for people with disabilities through disability studies. This multidisciplinary field of inquiry draws on the experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities to address discrimination. Inclusion of disability studies in medical, education and business curricula is being reported as a preliminary step towards bringing medical and business humanities into professional development (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability_studies (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability_studies)).

Disability Studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field of scholarship that critically examines issues related to the dynamic interplays between disability and various aspects of culture and society, including social services and government policy. Applied Disability Studies unites critical inquiry and political advocacy by utilizing scholarly approaches from the humanities, social sciences, and the arts. When specifically applied to professional development issues, it promotes the importance of infusing analyses and interpretations of disability throughout all forms of social research, professional preparation, and graduate studies (http://www.nl.edu/dse/SusanGabel.htm).

The essence of this curriculum is the combining of specific vocational competencies with skills and practice in critical thinking. The process nurtures the essence by evoking the model of individualized career planning. Who is the student, what are the student’s needs and how are the vocational and personal growth needs best met? The individualized approach is the foundation of advisement for each particular student.

PROGRAM GOALS

These goals are conceptualized as the ultimate “ends” we hope to achieve in educating students and trainees in disability studies.

- Promote full social integration by providing knowledge, awareness, and experience of inclusion and integration of people with disabilities as a foundational ethical principle of disability studies.
- Position disability as a social justice issue by exposing students to historical and contemporary disability issues and providing learning opportunities to identify, articulate, and address inequities and injustices affecting the lives of people with disabilities.
- Position disability as diversity by providing theoretical and practical contexts for thinking about disability as a component of human diversity, and providing students with tools to critically examine social and cultural constructions of disability.
- Create circumstances for the analysis and knowledge of the human services system and its role in shaping the life experiences (segregated & integrated) of people with disability.
- To provide an understanding of the social, economic, historical, political, cultural, and legal forces that shape policy and practices in the field of disabilities.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In order to assess the program and student learning, we have developed the following list of learning outcomes, which represent key areas of expertise for all students graduating with this concentration in the MDST major.

- Students will demonstrate competency in understanding the biopsychosocial implications of disability and in producing interdisciplinary disability studies research questions and analyses.
- Students will learn to examine and critique enabling and disabling ideological assumptions that shape social institutions, professions, policies, and systems of representation. Students will also demonstrate the ability to theoretically connect ideological assumptions about disability to those regarding gender, race, age, class, nationality, and sexual orientation.
- Students will gain knowledge and understanding about disability history, rights, policies, and contemporary issues, especially in terms of the way people with disabilities, through their own agency, advocacy, and voices, have shaped conceptions of disability in specific historical and contemporary contexts.
- Students will demonstrate improved skills in working with people with disabilities, and increased ability to understand individual and family concerns.
- Students will demonstrate a broad awareness of the applicability of disability studies knowledge to a wide range of professions, and increased understanding of specific careers related to