

Course Reflection: Taylor Hester

I think one of the biggest things I am taking away from this course is how much it expanded and deepened my understanding of disability. I have always been around disability in some way, especially through my involvement with Special Olympics and with my sister being a caregiver figure and advocate for her has shaped how I see the world in so many ways. Because of that, disability has always been something really personal to me. But this course allowed me to connect those experiences to something bigger through literature, history and especially art. It gave me a new way of thinking about disability, not just as something individual, but as something shaped by environment, access, and the way the world is designed. Throughout the semester, I found myself coming back to the idea of access again and again. Access to the small details like how a space feels, how something is written, how information is shared and who is able to participate and who is heard. I think this really came through in our work with CCW and the exhibition. Being able to engage with the artists and their work made everything feel so much more real and meaningful. It made me slow down and actually sit with things longer and appreciate forms of expression and art. It is a reminder that there is so much value in different ways of communicating and creating.

Reflecting on my midterm project, the alphabet collage and how much that reflected this idea of communication. It really made me realize that there is not one correct or “neat” way to express something. Communication can look so different depending on the person and that does not make it any less meaningful or important. If anything, it made me appreciate how creative and expansive communication can be, especially when we move away from rigid expectations. Working on the zine as my final project really brought everything together for me. It was such a collaborative and meaningful experience and I loved being part of something that reflected not just my own learning, but the class as a whole. It felt really special to create something that was about the artists, CCW and everything we have been a part of and learned this semester. Victoria and I thought a lot

about accessibility while working on it making sure it felt easy and welcoming for anyone to engage with. We focused on using simple language, a clear font, comforting colors, and an overall design that feels easy to read and visually accessible. Accessibility is not just something you talk about but something we must actively create and be thought about in the choices we make in and out of the classroom.

I also feel like this course helped me grow as a person beyond academics. It made me slow down more, listen more carefully, and be more open to perspectives that are different from my own. I feel like I became a more well-rounded and thoughtful person through this experience. Whether it was through class discussions, engaging with the artwork, or working collaboratively, I was constantly learning not just from the material, but from the people around me.

Looking forward, I also find myself thinking about how my mom and I could bring what I've learned in this class into other spaces. Being from the Virginia Beach/Hampton Roads area, we would love to be a part of creating something like this there whether that's helping bring a class like this into K-12 spaces or finding ways to connect art and disability more intentionally through programs like Special Olympics. I think this class showed me how powerful it is to create spaces where art, accessibility and lived experiences come together and I would love to help build that for others. It feels really meaningful to not just take what I have learned from this class, my classmates, the artist with me but to actually try to create something similar in the communities I'm a part of.

Also, this course will stay with me in a really important way especially as I move into healthcare. I will be attending Eastern Virginia Medical School next year for my Master's in Surgical Assisting and I think this class has already shaped the kind of healthcare professional I want to be. It reminded me that care is not just about treating a condition but about understanding the person as a whole and being aware of the systems and environments that impact their experiences or their voice. I want to carry forward the idea of advocacy and making sure people feel seen, heard and supported in every way. This

class has meant a lot to me in so many ways. It connected something I have always cared about to deeper ideas, history and perspectives and helped me grow both personally and academically. More than anything, it made me more aware, more thoughtful and more intentional in how and who I am in this world.