



# Dr. Laura M. Stough

Montague-CTE Scholar  
Department of Educational Psychology  
Center on Disability and Development



## Reframing the Concept of Disability Through a Disability Studies Perspective

### Overview

The Montague Teaching Award has supported my leadership in three highly interdisciplinary teaching initiatives that affect how students and faculty at Texas A&M University view the potential of individuals with disabilities in our society. The award has supported my investigation of Disability Studies as a theoretical frame for university coursework, teacher preparation, and instructional collaboration across disciplines and colleges at Texas A&M University.

### What is Disability Studies?

Disability Studies is an emerging multidisciplinary area of theoretical and practical discourse, incorporating a range of methods, ontologies, and epistemologies in an effort to advocate for, and foster the full participation of, persons with disabilities in society. Disability Studies reframes the study of disability by viewing disabilities as a social phenomenon, social construct, metaphor, and culture, utilizing a minority group model. It examines ideas related to disability in all forms of cultural representations throughout history, and examines the policies and practices of all societies to understand the social, rather than the physical or psychological determinants of the experience of disability. Disability Studies both emanates from and supports the disability rights movement, which advocates for civil rights and self determination (Litvak, 1994).



Photo by Sharon Farmer, <http://www.ncil.org/about.html>

### Disability Studies Certificate

As Interdisciplinary Training Director at the Center on Disability and Development, I am developing an interdisciplinary training program that will result in a Certificate in Disability Studies that will become part of a student's transcript. This Disability Studies Certificate will focus on the complex social, political, cultural, and educational issues that surround individuals with disabilities and their families. It will address the need to increase the number of appropriately trained personnel across disciplines that provide services and supports for individuals with disabilities. The program will prepare post-baccalaureate students as well as those seeking graduate degrees across campus wishing to make the program part of their degree plan.

### Disability Studies Working Group

The Disability Studies Working Group at Texas A&M University is funded by the Melburn G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research. The Disability Studies Working Group cultivates and disseminates the new, theoretically informed understanding of disability developed in Disability Studies. It develops, articulates, and critiques the new understanding of identity and its connection to the body and other contemporary approaches to the social constitution of identity and its cultural expression. The Disability Studies Working Group is interdisciplinary in nature and members span three colleges as well as the Division of Student Affairs.



Photos from: <http://www.nod.org/katrinaphotos/katrina9.jpg>

### Development of Disability Studies Course

- My course "Moderate to Severe Disabilities" has been restructured using the emergent view of disability as a socially constructed phenomenon.
- The course has thus undergone a radical reconceptualization, moving from a deviance/medical/intervention focus to a civil rights/social construction/support focus.
- The students are expected to become informed advocates for individuals with disabilities.
- The course is required as part of a post-baccalaureate program in Low Incidence Disabilities that is funded by the U.S. Department of Education
- Students who enroll are predominately teachers who are currently working with students with disabilities in public schools in Texas
- A TTVN link to the Woodlands Center allows teachers from the greater Houston area to attend classes
- Course is supported by web-based features such as streamed videos, weekly online discussion groups, and readings electronically accessed through library reserves.

### Acknowledgements

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- The Disability Studies Working Group of the Glasscock Center at Texas A&M University, Dr. Michael Hand, Ph.D., Convener.

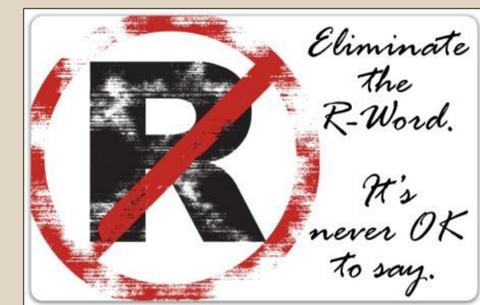


Photo from [www.sotx.org](http://www.sotx.org)

