Disability and Disease: Why the Race for the Cure is Not Worth Running

Wednesday, November 4, 4 p.m., Trabant Theater

The T-shirts are ubiquitous: from breast cancer to autism, we are all running 5K races for the cure. But the controversy over “cures” in autism, provoked most intensely by the group Autism Speaks, opens onto a much broader and more disturbing dynamic in which intellectual and developmental disabilities are discussed (and even treated) as if they are potentially lethal diseases, with disease etiologies. This lecture will explain why this misunderstanding of disability involves a logical category error that has consequences for social policy—and for the lives of people with disabilities.

Michael Bérubé, former president of the Modern Language Association, is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Literature and director of the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of eight books, including Public Access: Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics; Life as We Know It: A Father, a Family, and an Exceptional Child; and What’s Liberal About the Liberal Arts?