Disasters from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

Instructor: Robert Soden
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Class Meetings:
Tuesdays 3-6 pm; First class on January 11, 2022
Room: OL 4418
Zoom details for remote classes provided in Quercus.

Office Hours: TBA. By appointment for now.

Course basics are posted on Quercus. We will use Piazza for content delivery and course interaction.

Piazza enrolment: http://piazza.com/utoronto.ca/winter2022/env2002h

Course theme & objectives:

Perhaps no area of human-environment relations is as complex, engaging, and challenging as that of disaster. Disasters have inspired revolutions, religious fervor, and scientific and philosophical achievement. Today, as we continue to cope with the fallout of a global pandemic and climate disasters are part of the daily news, the topic is present everywhere. Understanding the impacts of disaster, what such impacts reveal about the social and political contexts in which they occur, and how our communities can best mitigate, prepare, and recover from disaster requires a wide breadth of knowledge from across a range of different knowledge traditions. The field of disaster research attempts to provide just this.

This graduate level course provides an introduction to disaster research from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Students will engage with a combination of foundational texts and emerging arguments, submit weekly response essays, and participate in seminar style discussion. Final research papers will connect themes from the course to students' own interests or ongoing research. Key topics covered will include the social production of disaster vulnerability, human behavior during emergencies, the uses and misuse of disaster data, social media and crisis, disaster and climate justice, and research ethics in disaster settings. Participants will develop a
firm grounding of major concepts and ideas in disaster research and experience conducting research in the area.

**Course Books:**

*For reference only. All required readings will be made available in Piazza.*


Supplementary Texts:


Course Evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Component</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Responses (10 throughout the semester)</td>
<td>5:00pm on Monday before class</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead Class Discussion</td>
<td>1 class during the semester</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project: Proposals</td>
<td>Feb 15</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-Class Research Presentation</td>
<td>Apr 5</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>Final Exam period</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Attendance and Participation (20% overall): You are expected to attend all classes, complete assigned readings prior to class meetings, and participate in class discussions. You should come to class with the assigned readings/notes so that you can locate specific pages/issues as referred to in discussion. Seminar discussions will be guided, but open. A successful and enjoyable seminar depends on the active and respectful participation of all those present.

Reading Responses (20% overall): Written commentaries in the form of critical reflections, roughly 1 page (single spaced) in length, are required each week. You can choose to write on one of the articles/books, or on a point addressed by several of the readings. Commentaries must be concise, and should be analytical and reflective rather than descriptive. They should reflect a critical reading of the material within the context of the class and/or your own research work. These response papers are due the evening before class (by 5pm). You should read and respond to other students’ contributions before class on Wednesday.
Lead Class Discussion (20% overall): Everyone is responsible for leading one class discussion. You must write a response paper that week and post your commentary and discussion questions by 5pm the day before class. Leading discussion includes a short presentation (5-10 min) designed to generate class discussion, guiding the overall discussion, and providing a summation of main points.

Final Project (40% overall): There will be a final research paper due at the end of the class. This final piece of work is intended to help rather than hinder your program of research. Therefore, deviations from the standard term paper are encouraged (research proposal, journal article draft, thesis chapter... etc.), the only requirement is that the subject of the written work overlap significantly with some of the material covered in the seminar. Paper proposals (1-2 pages) with a preliminary bibliography need to be submitted by Week 6. Each student will present their work, in class, during Week 12.

Class Policies:

Late Penalty for Assignments: If you are having difficulty completing your work for any reason, please discuss this with me before the due date, to arrange an alternative schedule. If you have not agreed an alternative plan prior to the due date, work submitted up to one week late will receive half marks; after this, it will not be accepted. Note: If you are unavoidably absent from the university, please contact the instructor as soon as you return, to discuss the situation.

Academic Integrity: Very few of us have truly original ideas – we almost always build on ideas and information provided by others. However, it is a serious offense to represent someone else’s words as your own, or to submit work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program. Assignments, reading summaries and exams will be reviewed for evidence of these infractions. Penalties for these offences can be severe and can be recorded on your transcript. Trust your own ability to think and write and make use of the resources available at U of T that can help you do so (e.g. professors, TAs, writing centres). See the U of T writing website, especially the “How Not To Plagiarize” document at http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/ and the website of the Office of Student Academic Integrity.

Accommodation: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca or http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/as
Important

Depending on our conversations and your interests, the reading list is subject to (slight) modifications. I’ll announce this both in class and on Piazza.

Jan 11 - Week 1: Introductory Discussion & Course Overview

- Dumit, Joseph. “How I Read.”

Jan 18 - Week 2: What is a Disaster?


Further Readings:

   https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/20201116_WorldDisasters_Full.pdf

Jan 25 - Week 3: Climate Change, Resilience, & the Social Production of Risk


Further readings:

   Natural hazards and earth system sciences, 13(11), pp.2707-2716.

Feb 1 - Week 4: Aftermath and Recovery


Further readings:


Feb 8 - Week 5: Aid, Humanitarianism, & NGOs


Further readings:

Feb 15 - Week 6: Community Response to Disaster: Advocacy, Solidarity, & Social Capital


Further readings:


Feb 22 - Reading Week: No Class

Mar 1 - Week 7: Disasters in the Media and Pop Culture

3. Watch a disaster film of your choice

Further readings:


Mar 8 - Week 8: The Datafication of Disaster


Further readings:


Mar 15 - Week 9: Ethical Considerations in Disaster Research


Further readings:


Mar 22 - Week 10: Disaster Equity & Justice


Further readings:

**Mar 29 - Week 11: What is a Disaster? Revisited**


**Apr 5 - Week 12: Final Presentations**