**Environment, Sustainability and Disaster**

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Office hours: just following class and by appt.

**Course description**

Through examination of disasters in Fukushima, the Gulf of Mexico, Bhopal and elsewhere, this course builds analytic tactics for understanding and responding to disaster – recognizing that while catastrophic disasters are always shaped by very particular conditions and dynamics, they are also sobering in their predictability. The course also explores how disaster analytics advance understanding of slow disaster produced by climate change, toxic contamination, structural adjustment and other slow but forceful sources of vulnerability and injury.

Throughout the course, we will continually elaborate a set of questions that need to be asked to understand what causes disaster, what creates vulnerability to the effects of disaster, and how disaster often engenders a “second disaster” through flawed relief and rehabilitation initiatives. Our efforts will be informed by literatures in cultural anthropology and Science and Technology Studies (STS), and also by the now vast literature focused on human dimensions of climate change (which explores various ways of thinking about disaster mitigation, vulnerability, and coping strategies, at local, national, regional and global levels).

The course builds in many documentary films that are available online. We’ll watch them with “double vision”: to simulate ethnographic field work in contexts of disaster, and as reference points for discussing the challenge and politics of representing disaster. Many films and research articles will be annotated, using a structure that draws out critical perspective. We’ll also do a set of short research exercises that will give us perspective on the need for and challenges of disaster research and teaching.

We’ll also discuss possibilities for the [Disaster-STS Research Network](http://disaster-sts-research-network.org), formed to bring together researchers from around the world, from many different disciplines, aiming to better coordinate efforts to understand, anticipate, prevent, and respond to disaster. A key goal of the network is to build an empirically rich, theoretically attuned, and comparative body of research on disaster, with practical relevance.

We will share course material at [http://thinkingthroughdisaster.wikispaces.com/home](http://thinkingthroughdisaster.wikispaces.com/home).

**SEE THIS WEBSITE FOR SYLLABUS UPDATES**

**Course credits and organization:**

This course meets for 3 hours every week-day, May 9-20, with a work load equivalent to a 12-week (full term) course. Students will need to begin work prior to the start of the course to be adequately prepared. Assignments will include annotations of readings and films, and three short research exercises (including a brief plan for disaster teaching). Readings and assignments listed in the daily syllabus below should be completed prior to the class for which they are listed. Note that there are many, short, informal assignments instead of a major paper; throughout the course, you’ll build a portfolio of fieldnote-like writing about disaster. For most
class sessions, students are required to watch one film (usually about 60 minutes), and annotate two research articles. Additional readings listed are optional.

**Course evaluation**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>8 film annotations</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 article annotation</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 research memos</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>class participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**Daily Syllabus**

Please complete the work listed for each day prior to our class session on that day. For most class sessions, please watch and annotate one film, and read and annotate two research articles. You can select among the articles listed; additional articles listed are optional. Each annotation includes a slide that can be shared during our class session. For three sessions (Wed, May 11, Tues, May 17, Thurs, May 19), you'll submit short research memos instead of article annotations. Guiding structures for film and article annotations, and for researcher exercises are available on the course website.

**Monday, May 9: Disaster Experiences**

Please watch the films and read the articles listed below before our first class. Nothing written is due.

**film**

- BBC: One Night in Bhopal (50 minutes)
- The Yes Men Fix the World (90 minutes)

**reading**


**Tuesday, May 10: Disaster Research Genealogies**

Please annotate the film, and two of the articles listed below.

**film**

- tba
**reading**


**Wednesday, May 11: Disaster Organizations**

Please annotate the film listed below, and complete a short research memo about a disaster organization. See the course website for a guiding structure.

**film**

*The Storm* (50 minutes) (about organizational failure in response to Hurricane Katrina)

**recommended**


Elliot, Justin and Laura Sullivan. 2015. *How the Red Cross Raised Half a Billion Dollars for Haiti and only Built Five Homes*. ProPublica. June

Elliot, Justin, Jesse Eisinger and Laura Sullivan. 2014. “*The Red Cross’ Secret Disaster,*” Propublica. October 29.

**Thursday, May 12: Disaster Talk**
Please annotate the film, and two of the articles listed below.

**film**
*Chernobyl Heart*

**reading:**


Button, Cat, Maria Adelaida Antonette Mias-Mamonong, Bernhard Barth and Jonathan Rigg (2013) “Vulnerability and resilience to climate change in Sorsogon City, the Philippines: Learning from an ordinary city?”, *Local Environment* 18(6): 705-722.


**Friday, May 13: Disaster Criticism**
Please annotate the film, and two of the articles listed below.

**film**
*TB Silent Killer*

**reading**


**Monday May 16: Disaster Criticism**
Please annotate the film, and two of the articles listed below.

**film**
tba

**reading**


**Tuesday, May 17: Disaster Mapping**
Please complete a short research memo about the disaster vulnerability of a particular place. See the course website for a guiding structure.

**Wednesday, May 18: Disaster Representations**
Please annotate the film, and two of the articles listed below.

**film**
*Darwin’s Nightmare*

**reading**


**Thursday, May 19: Disaster Literacies and Teaching**
Please annotate the film listed below, and complete a short research memo about disaster teaching. See the course website for a guiding structure.

**film**
*Children of the Tsunami*

**Friday, May 20: Disaster Research Networks**
Please annotate two of the articles listed below.

**reading**

Course policies

Academic Dishonesty
You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity. The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:
1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities
Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or email sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Statement on Electronic Resources
In this course we will share course material at http://thinkingthroughdisaster.wikispaces.com/home.

Course Modification Statement
The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-Mail Communication Policy
Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion. Email Forwarding in MUGSI:
http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html *Forwarding will take effect 24-hours after students complete the process at the above link.