SOC 438W SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTER
3 Credit Hours
Spring 2009

Location: CHSS 226

Time: T/TH 9:30-10:50 a.m.

Instructor: Dr. Lee M. Miller

Office: CHSS, Room 270M
Box 2446 SHSU
Huntsville, TX 77341-2446

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or by appointment

Course Description: Disasters are fundamentally social events. This course will investigate how culture, inequality, social structure shape how people face disasters, how they respond and the ways in which they recover or fail to do so. How disasters lead to rapid social change will also be explored. Students will learn the foundations of sociology of disaster theory, will examine a number of case studies and will apply theory to the in-depth study of one event. Writing enhanced. Prerequisite: SOC131.

Course Objectives: By the end of the course, students should be able to:
• examine natural, technological and human-initiated disasters from a sociological perspective;
• understand conflict models and theories of social vulnerability;
• apply these theories to case studies of disasters;
• think critically about how social dynamics shape the ways people and communities prepare for, face and recover from disasters.

Required Texts:


Additional required readings will be available electronically.

**Course Requirements and Grading Criteria:**

**Readings:** This course is organized around a set of readings that will be used to guide lectures and class discussion. The readings will also be used as a basis for the examinations and content analysis essay. Students are expected to complete all readings prior to the class period for which they are assigned. Not all reading topics will be discussed in the lectures, but you are still responsible for all of the material covered in the required readings. University courses are intense, and it is imperative that you stay on schedule with the readings.

**Attendance (30 points):** SHSU policy is that attendance is mandatory. Attendance is recorded at the beginning of class. Students who arrive once class is underway, or leave early, may be counted absent unless the late arrival/early departure has been negotiated with the professor prior to the class meeting. If you arrive more than 10 minutes after the start of class, you will be counted absent. If you leave more than 10 minutes before the end of class, you will be counted absent.

Your attendance is vital to this class, both for your own learning and for our growth as a community of scholars. Attending class will help you with your assignments and contribute to your development of a comprehensive understanding of the material. I will pass around a sign-up sheet each day in class. You will receive one point for each day you attend class (30 classes x 1 point = 30 points). In order to receive credit for the day, you must arrive on time and attend the entire class session. You are responsible for the material presented during class whether or not you attend. Please arrange with another student to get missed notes and announcements.

**Documentation is required** for an absence to be excused or to make-up exams or assignments. Attendance will be taken into consideration if your final average is on the cusp between letter grades.

**Exam #1 (100 points):** The first in-class exam will be administered on Tuesday, February 17. The exam will consist of short answer essay questions designed to reflect your understanding of the material covered in the first part of the course. The questions will be drawn from the readings, lectures, videos, and class discussions. The exam cannot be taken early or late, and no make-up exams will be given.

**Exam #2 (100 points):** The second in-class exam will be administered on Thursday, April 16. The exam will consist of short answer essay questions designed to reflect your understanding of the material covered in the second part of the course. The questions will be drawn from the
readings, lectures, videos, and class discussions. The exam cannot be taken early or late, and no make-up exams will be given.

**Content Analysis Essay (80 points):** This semester, you will research a natural, technological, or intentional human-initiated disaster, as well as a specific population or social issue in the context of that event. Based on your research, you will write a 8-10 page essay in which you will summarize the consequences of the disaster, analyze 10 newspaper articles covering the event, and review some of the academic research literature related to the population or social issue you are exploring. Detailed essay guidelines and grading criteria for this assignment will be distributed and discussed in class. The content analysis essay is due on Tuesday, May 12 by noon. Eight points per day will be deducted for late papers.

Below is a list of disasters you may want to study for this project. This list certainly is not exhaustive, but instead consists of a number of recent disasters that caused substantial loss of life, significant community disruption, and major economic losses. If there is a disaster that you are interested in studying that is not listed, you are welcome and encouraged to do so. However, please make sure that the event received sufficient media coverage to complete the assignment.

2. Sichuan, China Earthquake (2008)  
15. Midwest Floods (1993)  
17. Oakland Firestorm (1990)  
18. Big Thompson Flood (1976)  
22. Three Mile Island Nuclear Accident (1979)  
26. 9/11 Terrorist Attacks (2001)  
27. Oklahoma City Bombing (1995)  

Below is a list of groups and issues that we will be discussing in this class, and that you may consider focusing on for your project. You will want to make sure that there are media reports available on the particular issue that you want to examine in the disaster that you have chosen.

1. Women  
2. Men  
3. Children and Youth  
4. The Elderly  
5. Low-Income Populations  
6. Persons with Mental or Physical Disabilities  
7. Immigrants or Non-Native Speaking Populations  
8. Racial/Ethnic Minorities  
9. Religious Minorities  
10. Pets/Companion Animals  
11. Warnings and Risk Communication  
12. Evacuation Issues  
13. Shelter and Housing Issues  
14. Displacement  
15. Long-Term Recovery  
16. Memorials  
17. Mental Health Issues  
18. Blame
10. Tourists and other Transient Populations  
11. Emergency Relief Workers  
12. Volunteers  
22. Looting  
23. Domestic Violence  
24. Policy Change  

**Workday Assignments (50 points):** In order to help further your understanding of the social consequences of the disaster situation that you have chosen to study, and to keep you moving forward with the content analysis essay project, you will complete four short “workday assignments” throughout the semester (4 assignments x 10 points = 40 points). Please see below for the due date and a detailed description of each assignment.

**A. Workday Assignment #1 (12.5 points):** You must select the disaster you will be researching as well as the particular population or social consequence that you will be examining for your content analysis essay by Thursday, January 29. On that day you will hand in a typed paragraph indicating the disaster you have chosen and the social aspect you plan to explore (see the lists above to help you with this decision). You should also briefly explain why you are interested in studying this particular event and topic. Read all of the requirements for this project carefully before making up your mind.

**B. Workday Assignment #2 (12.5 points):** For this assignment, you must gather information that describes the scale, scope, and magnitude of the disaster event that you chose to study. On Thursday, February 26, you will submit a typed summary of your findings. At minimum, you must include information on: 1) when the disaster happened; 2) where it happened; 3) how many people it affected; 4) how many people died; 5) an estimate of the economic consequences; and 6) a reference list (websites and newspaper accounts are fine, just make sure and verify the information for accuracy). In order to receive credit for this assignment, you must attend the entire class session on the day the assignment is due.

**C. Workday Assignment #3 (12.5 points):** As part of your content analysis essay, you will gather and analyze 20 newspaper articles that deal with the specific disaster and social consequence that you are studying. On Thursday, March 26, you must bring to class hard copy printouts of the 20 newspaper articles that you have collected. In order to receive credit for this assignment, you must attend the entire class session on the day the assignment is due.

**D. Workday Assignment #4 (12.5 points):** As part of your content analysis essay, you will summarize and integrate at least 5 scholarly research articles that deal with the social consequence that you are exploring. On Thursday, April 9, you must submit to me a typed bibliography of the 5 scholarly sources that you will be reviewing in your final essay. These must be outside sources (i.e., not from the required class reading list), and they should be peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, books, or government reports – not websites or media articles. In order to receive credit for this assignment, you must attend the entire class session on the day the assignment is due.

**Presentation (40 points):** I believe it is important that students not only learn to analyze and synthesize knowledge in written form, but that they also should attain the skills necessary to verbally present their thoughts and ideas. Therefore, each student will prepare a brief
presentation of the main findings from your research on the disaster event you have been exploring in-depth throughout the semester. Detailed guidelines and grading criteria for this activity will be distributed and discussed in class. The presentations will be held on April 28, 30 and May 5 and 7th. Your attendance is required on each of these days.

**Exams and Grading Plan:** The exams will cover the assigned readings AND the material discussed in class. Although much of the class lectures will refer to the texts, new material will also be introduced. You are expected to read and study independently. Information discussed in class, as well as that contained in the assigned readings, even if they are not reviewed in class, may appear on exams.

Make-up exams will be given only if arranged with the professor PRIOR to the day of the scheduled exam to be missed and ONLY if the reason for the absence is deemed valid by the professor. **Documentation for absences must be provided** to make-up assignments, quizzes or exams.

**Final grades** will be calculated as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Points Possible</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam #1</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam #2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Analysis Essay</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workday Assignments</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40</td>
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**Total Points Possible** 400

**Grading Scale:**
A = 400-360  
B = 359-320  
C = 319-280  
D = 279-240  
F = 239-Below

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Cheating on an exam, quiz and/or assignment (plagiarism) is an act of dishonesty. Students who cheat or plagiarize will automatically receive the grade of zero (0) for the exam, quiz or assignment in question. Students who cheat more than once will receive an automatic F in the class. **See Student Syllabus Guidelines** [http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/](http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/)

**Americans with Disabilities Policy:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should visit with the Office of Services
for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center and then meet with the instructor so that appropriate accommodations may be made. **This meeting should take place within the first two weeks of the semester.** See Student Syllabus Guidelines [http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/](http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/)

**Student Absences on Religious Holy Days:** Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. See Student Syllabus Guidelines [http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/](http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/)

**Visitors in the Classroom:** Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor if arranged prior to the class session. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar’s Office. See Student Syllabus Guidelines [http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/](http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/)

**Instructor Evaluations:** Student will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester. This feedback is important. It is used by professors to improve their teaching. Please participate in the evaluation process.

**Assignments:** Work for this class will consist of reading the texts, attending class, taking notes, participating in class discussions, studying the texts and class notes for the exams, attending and working during the workdays, writing the final content analysis essay and presenting it in class.

**Required Supplies:** You must have access to Blackboard for this course. The syllabus, class notes, assignments and announcements will be posted on Blackboard. You are expected to check Blackboard regularly and frequently for announcements and course materials.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Week 1 – History of Disaster Research**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 13</td>
<td>Syllabus</td>
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**Week 2 – Sociology and the Study of Disasters**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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</table>
### Week 3 – Myths, Realities, and Cultural Representations of Disasters


### Workday Assignment #1 – Content Analysis Essay Topic Due

### Week 4 – Community Impacts of Disasters


**February 5** Erikson (pp. 11-23; 99-157)

### Week 5 – Community Impacts of Disasters

**February 10** Erikson (pp. 203-225; 226-242)


### Week 6 – Theories of Social Vulnerability

**February 17** **Exam #1**


### Week 7 – Disasters, Race, and Social Class

**February 24** Dyson (pp. 1-33)

**February 26** Bolin, Bob. 2006. “Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Disaster Vulnerability.” Pp. 113-

**Workday Assignment #2 – Disaster Information Due**

**Week 8 – Disasters, Race, and Social Class**
March 3  Dyson (pp. 55-86)
March 5  Dyson (pp. 141-177; 203-212)

**Week 9 – Spring Break**
No classes.

**Week 10 – Gender and Disasters**
March 17  Fothergill (pp. 1-52; 53-104)
March 19  Fothergill (pp. 105-135; 157-172)

**Week 11 – Children and Disasters**
March 26  **Workday Assignment #3 – 20 Newspaper Articles Due**

**Week 12 – Elderly and Disasters**
March 31  Klinenberg (pp. 1-36; 37-78)
April 2   Klinenberg (79-128; 225-242)

**Week 13 – Consequences of Post-Disaster Relocation and Prospects for Recovery**

**Workday Assignment #4 – 5 Research Articles Due**
Week 14 – Disasters, Language Barriers, and Disabilities


April 16  Exam #2

Week 15 – Disasters and Social Change

April 23  No readings

Week 16 – Class Presentations
April 28  Presentations
April 30  Presentations

Week 17 - Class Presentations
May 5  Presentations
May 7  Presentations

 Finals Week
 May 12-15  Content Analysis Essay Due by 12:00 noon on May 12.

Classroom Rules of Conduct: Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning.

1) Students are to treat faculty, guest speakers and other students with respect.
2) Please do not talk while the professor, or another classmate, is speaking. Points will be deducted from your grade if the professor has to repeatedly remind you not to talk while others are talking as this is disruptive and disrespectful.
3) Students must turn off cell phones while in the classroom. Note: If your phone is visible during class you will be docked two points from your next exam. Points will be deducted each time your phone is visible in the classroom. This is to avoid the
temptation to read or send text messages during class. Under NO circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. This will result in a grade of 0 for the exam.

4) I-Pods and MP3 players should be turned off and put away during class.

5) Computers may be used to take notes only. If you plan to use a computer in class, you must sit in the rows assigned for computer use.

6) Please no tobacco products in the classroom.

7) Students may record lectures with the professor’s approval provided they do not disturb other students in the process. See Student Syllabus Guidelines [http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/](http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/)

THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.