I. Course Goals

The early years of the twenty-first century have been rife with catastrophes both technological and ostensibly "natural," from Hurricanes Sandy, Katrina and Ike to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, from Japan to Haiti. This course examines sociological perspectives through which researchers in the social sciences have tried to make sense of them, as well as attempts to describe broader trends in contemporary Western industrial societies' strategies for managing, calculating, and when possible forestalling risk and disaster.

The course is divided into roughly three units. The first focuses on the history of disaster response and policy in the U.S. over the course of the twentieth century, a period in which the subfield of the sociology of disaster came into being as part of the broader civil defense efforts engendered by WWII and the Cold War. This portion of the course draws from the sociology of disaster and examines the ways in which social structures shape the seeming chaos of disaster, such that it is a sociological truism that "there is no such thing as a 'natural' disaster."

In the second unit, we examine continental theories of risk and modernity that argue that industrial societies are in the midst of a historically unprecedented shift towards what they describe as a "risk society" in the midst of "reflexive modernity". We then focus on research in American sociology into the organizations through which risk is created and managed, and use as a case study the British Petroleum Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

In the third and final unit, we consider the place of risk and disaster in American culture more broadly and then focus in on the nation, then the city, and finally Los Angeles as a paradigmatic city vis à vis risk and disaster. We will examine the popular culture of disaster, and the unique role the city plays as subject and site of production, as well as the city's efforts at risk mitigation, forestalling disaster, and preparing for "the big one". We finish with a brief look at the Northridge earthquake and the research conducted in its aftermath.

Sociology 480: The Sociology of Risk & Disaster
II. Materials & Assignments

Required Texts and Readings
The following texts are required and may be purchased in the University Bookstore, or else from online retailers and local bookstores.


Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Participation: 10%
Reading Response Memos: 20%
Midterm: 20%
Final: 25%
Research Paper: 25% (including proposals, etc)

III. Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

NOTE: Readings marked with a * are available on the course website or electronically via HOMER.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Wk.</th>
<th>Topic &amp; Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to the course</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Jan. 15</td>
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<td>Jan. 17 Defining &quot;disaster&quot;</td>
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<td>Excerpts from Quarantelli et al, <em>What Is a Disaster</em>?*</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Trauma: Individual, Social &amp; Cultural</td>
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<td>Jan. 22</td>
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<td>Scott Knowles, &quot;Ten to Twenty Million Killed, Tops&quot;, excerpt from <em>The Disaster Experts</em></td>
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Jan. 29  U.S. disaster policy over the course of the 20th Century: Neoliberalism & Disaster Relief
   - Ted Steinberg, "Who Pays?", excerpt from Act of God*

Jan. 31  Hurricane Katrina, 2005
   - Intro, Chapters 1-2, The Sociology of Katrina

Feb. 5  Katrina: "Disaster myths," frames, and the media
   Stratification and disaster
   - Chapter 3-4, The Sociology of Katrina

Feb. 7  Katrina: Stratification & Disaster
   - Chapter 5, The Sociology of Katrina

Feb. 12: NO CLASS

Feb. 14: Katrina: Cultures of Control
   - Andrew Lakoff, “Preparing for the Next Emergency”*
   - Lee Miller, “Controlling Disasters: Recognizing Latent Goals in Katrina's Aftermath.” Disasters 36(1).*

Feb. 19  Grand theories: The Risk Society
   - Ulrich Beck, selections from World at Risk and Risk Society*
   - Reading Response Memo #1 due

Feb. 21  Grand theories: Reflexive Modernity
   - Anthony Giddens, "Fate, Risk, and Security" from Modernity and Self Identity*

Feb. 26  Local knowledge, Expertise, and Trust
   - Brian Wynn, “May the Sheep Safely Graze? A reflexive view of the expert-lay knowledge divide”. *

Feb. 28  Normal Accidents & Organizational Mistakes
   - Charles Perrow, excerpt from Normal Accidents.
   - Diane Vaughan, "The Dark Side of Organizations: Mistakes, Misconduct, and Disaster".

Mar. 5  Technological Disaster: The Deepwater Horizon & the BP Oil Spill
Freudenburg and Gamling, Blowout in the Gulf

Mar. 7  The Deepwater Horizon & the BP Oil Spill
Freudenburg and Gamling, Blowout in the Gulf
9  
Mar. 12  The Deepwater Horizon
Freudenburg and Gamling, *Blowout in the Gulf*,
Raffi Khatchadourian,”The Gulf War: Were there any heroes in the BP oil
disaster?” - New Yorker Magazine, Mar 14, 2011

Mar. 14  MIDTERM

March 19 & 21: Spring Break

10  
Mar. 26  Disaster & Society: A Culture of Fear?
- Wuthnow, *Be Very Afraid*, Intro, Ch. 1-3

Mar. 28  American Cultures of Risk: Pandemics & Environmental Disaster
- Wuthnow, *Be Very Afraid*, Ch. 6 &7

11  
Apr. 2  American Cultures of Risk: The Institutionalization of Peril
- Wuthnow, *Be Very Afraid*, Ch. 8&9

Apr. 4  Disaster Capitalism & Creative destruction
- Kevin Rozario “Making Progress: Disaster Narratives and the Art
of Optimism in Modern America.”*

12  
Apr. 9  Disaster Response as a Civic Ritual
- Brady Potts, “The Bureaucratization of Civic Rituals of Disaster
Response”
- Jeffrey Jackson, excerpts from *Paris Under Water*
- Reading Response Memo #2 due

Apr. 11  Disaster & the California Dream
- Philip Fradkin, excerpts from *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms
of 1906*#

13  
Apr. 16  Los Angeles & the Saint Francis Dam Disaster, 1928
- Brady Potts, “An Object’s Failure? William Mulholland, Civic Engineering,
and the St. Francis Dam Disaster”

Apr. 18  Los Angeles: Flooding and Flood Control
- Jared Orsi, “A More Effective Scouring Agent: The New Year’s Eve Debris
Flood and the Collapse of Local Flood Control, 1930-1934”, excerpt from
*Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles*

14  
Apr. 23  Los Angeles Earthquakes: Long Beach & Coalinga
- selected readings: NCIEE, USGS, Southern California Earthquake Center

Apr. 25  Los Angeles Earthquakes: Northridge
- Bolin and Stanford, excerpts from *The Northridge Earthquake: Vulnerability and Disaster*.

**15 Apr. 30 Los Angeles and the Popular Culture of Disaster**
- Stephen Couch “The Cultural Scene of Disasters: Conceptualizing the Field of Disasters and Popular Culture”.*
- Bahk & Neuwerth, “Impact of Movie Depictions of Volcanic Disaster on Risk Perception and Judgments”.*

**May 2 Course Review & Wrap Up; FINAL PAPER DUE.**
- Readings TBA

**FINAL EXAM:** Wed. May 15, 2-4 p.m.

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**IV. Course Policies**

**Due Dates**
Overdue assignments lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day that they are late, exempting truly exceptional circumstances. However, if you know that you are going to have difficulties meeting the deadline for an assigned work it is better to request an extension (well) ahead of time than turn the assignment in late.

**In Class**
Please bring the week’s readings and course material with you to class. We often refer to specific passages in the reading in the course of discussion, and you will get more out of the discussion if you can follow along.

Also, we’ll be discussing a lot of controversial and often contentious topics. Let’s keep debate spirited, but civil. This means avoiding "straw man“ arguments, ad hominem attacks, and maintaining a sense of decorum and collegiality even when discussing hotbutton topics.

**Written Assignments**

All material must be submitted via Blackboard. We require this to insure the following: first, that you have a time-stamped record of having turned your assignments in. Second, the use of Turnitin protects both your intellectual property and the intellectual property of others, as per the following statement on USC and Academic Integrity:

USC is committed to the general principles of academic honesty that include and incorporate the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using
another's work as one's own. By taking this course, students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. All submitted work for this course may be subject to an originality review as performed by Turnitin technologies (http://www.turnitin.com) to find textual similarities with other Internet content or previously submitted student work. Students of this course retain the copyright of their own original work, and Turnitin is not permitted to use student-submitted work for any other purpose than (a) performing an originality review of the work, and (b) including that work in the database against which it checks other student-submitted work.

For more on issues of proper academic conduct, see: http://tinyurl.com/uscguides. Or, if during the course of the semester you have any questions about appropriate citations or proper academic conduct, please come talk to me.

While I will be more than happy to answer specific questions regarding the longer assignments or to discuss your drafts or outlines, I will not read through an entire draft before it is due.

Finally, requests for grade changes after an assignment is evaluated must be submitted in writing, outlining the reasons why you think that a grade was unwarranted. While I will consider requests for grade changes, I should admit that that is unlikely to happen, as I take great care in grading consistently and fairly. That said, I am always happy to explain my evaluations if my written comments are unclear.

(If, however, I've made an adding error in totaling up points, you can just email me a quick note and bring the graded copy to the next class meeting.)

For students worried about their grades, the best pieces of advice I can give are to keep up with the reading and to read the instructions for graded material very carefully. Many otherwise excellent students let the reading pile up around mid-semester and pay for it later, and many otherwise excellent assignments lose points for failing to address the entire prompt or question. Also, consider making use of the USC Writing Center - it's a fantastic resource for students.

Office Hours
You are encouraged to come to office hours for help with your course work, or just to discuss the material if something strikes you as particularly interesting or troublesome. If you cannot make the scheduled hours please email me and I will try to set up an appointment with you. However, if we are meeting outside of normal office hours please let me know in your request for an appointment the specific issue you want to discuss, as doing so will allow us to make the best use of our time.

During office hours, on the other hand, you can just drop by without making arrangements beforehand. (If you do stop by during office hours and I am not in my office, check the door; odds are I’ve left a note explaining that I’ve just run down the hall for coffee and will be back in a minute or two.) I cannot stress enough the benefits of making use of my office hours. It gives me a chance to get to know you better, and it gives you an opportunity to work through the concepts and materials of the course in a one-on-one setting.
Email
I check my email regularly, but you need to allow two days for me to respond to your email (I check it less frequently on the weekends). Often, I will respond more quickly, but this does mean that if you have questions about an upcoming assignment and/or exam it will be in your best interest to get those to me sooner rather than later. If you email me at midnight the night before you may not get a response from me before the assignment is due or it is time to sit for the exam; I might not even see it beforehand.

Academic Accommodations
Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. Monday through Friday. Their phone number is (213)740-0776.

Attendance
Our time is limited and valuable. Excessive absences are damaging to your performance in the class in at least two ways. Borrowed notes or downloaded powerpoint slides are never a substitute for attending a lecture or participating in a seminar or discussion group if your aim is depth of understanding of the material. Your fellow students' comments and questions are often insightful and illuminating, and insofar as learning is a collective activity, you can only benefit from participating fully. If you are to get the most out of the material (and of the credit hours you are likely paying quite a bit for) it is essential that you not only attend class regularly, but arrive well-prepared and ready to fully participate. If you have language difficulties or difficulties with public speaking please let me know and we will find another way for you to participate - I am happy to do so.

The other, more direct, way that participation affects your performance in the class is that a certain percentage of your grade is based on in-class participation. Chronic unexcused (not university approved) absences over the course of the semester will negatively impact your participation grade.