Disasters are not purely natural but mostly social.

This course provides an introduction to social research and discourses on how disasters as extreme situations highlight, dramatize, and change social structures and processes. In the course, we will discuss the following topics:

How do communities respond to a disaster? How does the disaster influence structures, interactions, and subjective perceptions among community members?

Does a disaster equally affect everyone? How do factors of social inequality, including race, ethnicity, class, and gender, make people vulnerable to impacts of disasters?

How do organizations respond to disasters? Why do they fail?

How does a disaster become a political event? What are the political implications of public policies pertaining to disaster management?

How do people perceive and respond to potential risks of disasters?

What factors influence our cultural representations of disasters?

Do disasters “bring out the best in humans” or turn people into “wolves against wolves?”

How are disasters related to global issues, such as expansion of neo-liberalism and environmental problems?

Readings and lectures provide an overview of basic concepts, approaches, issues, and theories in sociology of disasters. Students will participate in class discussions, gain first-hand experience
of interviewing locals about Hurricane Andrew, watch films about disasters, and write a paper about a disaster that they choose.

Learning Outcome

1. Understand basic concepts and theories in sociology of disasters.
2. Critically think about prevailing media portrayals of disasters.
3. Gain in-depth knowledge of one massive disaster and conduct research on it.

Course Requirements

Principles of Course Requirements

1. The ultimate purpose of education is not to get grades and degrees but to learn insightful and useful things.
2. You should NOT unrealistically expect to get an easy grade by making minimum effort. If you do think so or will evaluate the course by its “easiness,” you might want to think twice before making a decision of enrollment.
3. Your efforts of enriching your knowledge and improving your writing will be rewarded.

First, keep and read the syllabus!

Too often students do not read their syllabus after the first session of class. When you have any questions about requirements and other administrative things, please first check the syllabus. In most cases, your issues will be solved; if not, ask the instructor for help.

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is required. The instructor will take attendance in the beginning/end of each class. Students who participate in University-sanctioned events, or have illness, or have emergency must inform the instructor in advance with appropriate verification documents. They also must make up any work they missed. Students who miss two (2) classes without reasons will only get 5 (out of 10) for attendance credit. Students who miss four (4) classes will not get any attendance credit.

Also, participation in class discussion is essential to this course and will be evaluated.

Reading

Read required readings carefully and be prepared for discussion in class. In order to get most from the readings, the students will be tested on the reading content in 5 (five) unannounced quizzes.

Midterm

We will have an in-class, open-book midterm exam. The exam will test students’ understanding of major issues and theories in the first half of the course. The students can bring any materials to the class to take the exam, but the assumption that an open-book exam is easier is certainly not true. The questions, which most likely are essay questions, will cover
broader content and need deep understanding. Careful preparation for the exam will help students get familiar with the materials and grasp the essence.

**Interview**

When we discuss social inequality and disasters, every student need to interview **one person** who experienced Hurricane Andrew. **This person must belong to an ethnic minority group, or be a member of less privileged social class, or be an immigrant, or be a woman.** The purpose of this interview is to have first-hand narratives about race, gender, ethnicity, and class issues in the situation of disasters.

The interview should last 1 hour to 2 hours. Students need to transcribe the most important part of the interview and later share their findings in class, addressing how social inequality is intertwined with disasters in Hurricane Andrew.

An interview outline and an instruction will be distributed in advance.

**Final Paper**

For the final paper, you need to choose **ONE** massive disaster and address **any ONE** of the social aspects of the disaster we discuss in the class. (We cover community, social inequality, organization, politics, perceptions, and culture.) Here are some examples of the final paper topics:

- Politics of SARS Epidemic in China
- Community Response to Southern California Wildfires in 2007
- Civil Society and Mexico City Earthquake in 1985

The final paper should include the following content:

1. An introduction that states the theme of the paper and your argument.
2. A brief profile of the disaster: including casualty, environment/physical impacts, and important social and political effects.
3. An empirical analysis of the theme to support your central argument: for example, how civil society organizations respond to the Mexico City earthquake in 1985.
4. Conclusion: restate your argument and its implications.

To write this paper, you need to collect the following data:

1. Press reports from major newspapers.
2. Primary data: statistics, government documents from disaster response agencies
3. Academic studies (articles and books) about the topic.

**A 75% done draft of the paper will be presented in the last week of the course.** The presentation can provide you with a good opportunity to have feedback from your peers and the instructor and improve quality of the paper in the final exam week.

Other requirements about the paper:

1. **Do not choose the disasters we heavily discussed in the course**, including Hurricane Andrew, Hurricane Katrina, the Sichuan earthquake, the Yungay earthquake, and others.
2. The length should be **at least 20 double-spaced pages**.
3. Please follow **Chicago Style**: (author-date version, [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html))
4. The deadline of the final paper: **5pm, American Eastern Time, April 27, 2012 (via email). No later submission will be accepted.**

5. Grading criteria (raw score 100):
   1) **90**: paper that earns a 90 (A) is truly exceptional. It is grammatically flawless; there are no spelling errors. There is a thesis paragraph that provides a road map for the rest of the paper, which ends with a meaningful conclusion. Statements are supported by evidence, which is judiciously assembled to make a case. The writing is clear and concise; the analysis is sophisticated and thoughtful. The argument is logically developed and well organized. Complexities are recognized and addressed. Supporting sources are smoothly integrated into the body of the text. There is mature sentence variety and paragraph development.
   2) **80**: papers represent strong, solid work. They are well organized, comprehensive, and clear, with few grammatical errors. Complexities are recognized; supporting evidence is provided. Supporting work is incorporated, but not always paraphrased. There may be an over-reliance on quotes and secondary resources. There is adequate sentence variety and paragraph development.
   3) **60–70** papers meet the minimum requirements, low Cs barely do. They are often poorly organized, which prevents a clear argument. They can fail to acknowledge more than one approach and do not harness all the available evidence. They have many grammatical and spelling errors and provide only passing reference to supporting work. They are weakened by a lack of clear purpose, thesis or conclusion. There are organizational and argumentative weaknesses.
   4) Less than 60 papers fail to make an argument, or do so in such a confusing, disorganized way that the meaning is lost on the readers. They are replete with errors. The arguments provided are often contradictory. There is usually only superficial discussion of the issues.
   5) Not following the Chicago Style: -10
   6) Not proofread: a significant number of grammatical and spelling errors: -10
   7) Involvement in plagiarism: Will receive the punishments defined in corresponding University policies.

**Grades**

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<th>Requirement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Midterm</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Paper Presentation</td>
<td>5</td>
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**Extra credit opportunity**

You can choose from ONE of the two options to get 5 extra credits.

1. The Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies invites Professor Michelle Gamburd, whose book chapter we will read, to give a talk in early March. The students who attend the talk and write a short response essay afterwards will get **5 extra credits**.

2. If you miss this talk due to schedule reasons, you can write a review of a disaster movie in light of what we learn in this course. The review should be at least 5 double-spaced page long. You will get **5 extra credits**.

**Policies and Rules**

1. Class attendance is mandatory.
2. All electronic devices with sound must be turned off. No phone conversation is allowed.
3. All deadlines must be strictly observed with only a few approved exceptions (illness, family emergencies, and University-sanctioned events). Students in those unusual situations must contact the instructor as soon as possible; written notes from doctors, university authorities, or other people responsible for the situation must be presented afterwards.
4. No incomplete is allowed unless there is a serious interruption NOT caused by students’ own negligence or scheduling problem.
5. It is students’ responsibility to make sure they understand the University policies pertaining to course registration, deadlines, and academic integrity.
6. Once submitted, end-of-semester grades (apart from incompletes) are final and can be changed only to correct an error or cases in which some part of the student’s work was unintentionally overlooked.

**Books**

Four books are available for purchase in the university bookstore:

Additional readings include book chapters and articles. Scanned copies of book chapters will be available on Moodle course website, but **articles must be downloaded from FIU library website**. The reasons for not providing articles on Moodle include: 1) to encourage students to utilize the library for their study and research; 2) to increase the usage of the library resources so that the library is able to obtain more resources based on the statistics of usage. We will
have a library use instruction session, but, before that, students should explore the library website to figure out how to download articles.

**Weekly Reading and Outline**

**Introduction to the Course (January 9, Monday)**
Introduction to the course: content, requirements, and pedagogy

**What is Disaster? (January 11, Wednesday)**
Ronald Perry. “What is a Disaster?” (in *Handbook of Disaster Research*)
Quarantelli et al. “A Heuristic Approach to Future Disasters and Crises” (in *Handbook of Disaster Research*)

**Major Topics in Sociology of Disasters (January 13, Friday)**

**January 16 (MLK Day, no class)**

**Methods of Sociological Studies of Disasters (January 18, Wednesday)**
Erikson. “Introduction” in *Everything In Its Path*.
Stallings. *Methods of Disaster Research*. Chapter 6 (Survey) and Chapter 7 (Qualitative research)

**January 20 Library research instruction (Instruction Place: GL 280)**

**Community and Disaster in General (January 23, Monday)**

**Community and Collective Trauma (January 25)**
Erikson. *Everything in Its Path*. Part One; Chapters on Individual Trauma and Collective Trauma

**Vulnerability of community (January 27)**

**Community: Hurricane Katrina (January 30)**
Sociology of Katrina (Chapter 7: community recovery)

**Community: Asian Tsunami (February 1)**
Local community: South Florida in Hurricane Andrew (February 3)
Documentary screening

General introduction to Social Inequality and Disaster (February 6)
Chapters on “Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Disaster Vulnerability” and “Gender and Disaster” in Handbook of Disaster Research

Social Inequality (February 8)
Heat Wave (Introduction and Chapter One “Dying Alone”)

Social Inequality: Hurricane Andrew (February 10)
Gender: Chapter 7 (gender)
Ethnicity and race: Chapter 9, 10, 11

Social Inequality: Hurricane Andrew Interview Reports (February 13&15)
Students report their interviews about social inequality issues in Hurricane Andrew.

Hurricane Katrina (February 17)
A documentary film screening and discussion

Social Inequality and Disaster in a Global Context (February 20)

General introduction to Organization and Disasters (February 22)
Chapter 17: Organizational adaptation in Handbook of Disaster Research
Tierney: Chapter 4: Organizational and Governmental Response to Disasters (online)

NGOs and Volunteering (February 24)

Organizational Failure (February 27)
Heat Wave: Chapter Three
Tierney and Bevc (Sociology of Katrina, Chapter 2)
Organizational Problems: Mission Improbable (February 29)
Chapter 1, 2, 3

Organizational Problems: Mission Improbable (March 2)
Chapter 4, 5, 6

Midterm Exam (March 5)

Introduction to Politics of Disasters (March 7)
Disaster Policy and Politics (Chapter 1: Disaster Management in the US; Chapter 3: historical trends in disaster management)

Politics of Disaster: Heat Wave (March 9)
Heat Wave Chapter 4

Politics of Disaster: Chernobyl Disaster (March 19)
Marples, David R. 1988. The social impact of the Chernobyl disaster. Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press. Chapter 1, 2, 3

Perception, Media, and Culture (2 weeks, 6 sessions)

Popular Culture and Disaster (March 21)
Fictional film screening and discussion

Debates about panics (March 23)

Risk perception: Worst Cases (March 26)
Chapter 1-3

Risk Perception: Worst Cases (March 28)
Chapter 4-6

Media and disasters (March 30)
Heat Wave Chapter Five
Global compassion and fatigue (April 2)
Compassion Fatigue, Chapter three

Post-disaster solidarity (April 4)
Hoffman chapter and Oliver-Smith chapter in Angry Earth;

New Challenges: Environmental and Mass Emergencies (4 sessions)

Environment, Economic Growth, and Disasters (April 6)
Freudenburg et al, Chapter 3-5

Environment, Economic Growth, and Disasters (April 9)
Freudenburg et al, Chapter 6-9

Terrorist attacks and other mass emergencies (April 11)
“Terrorism as disaster” in *Handbook of Disaster Research*.

Disaster capitalism (April 13)
The Shock Doctrine (introduction; Chapter 19 Blanking the beach; Chapter 20 Disaster Apartheid)

Paper Presentation (April 16-20)