HIST F434-F91

Maymester 2013
3 credits
No prerequisites
Monday through Friday
Gruening
Monday through Friday, 12:30-5:00

Professor: Diana Di Stefano
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North American Disasters

Course Description
Fires! Earthquakes! Ship Wrecks! This seminar will familiarize students with some of the major North American disasters of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. We will also open dialogue about how the past has shaped current understandings of catastrophe and how globalization has had an impact on disaster response. In this class we will explore representations of natural and human-caused disasters in history, fiction, film, media, and popular culture and how those images have changed over time. We will examine the personal, economic, political, and legal implications of disasters. We will also discuss how concepts of risk, responsibility, and blame have changed over time.

Course Goals
The four main goals of the course are to: furnish students with a narrative history of North American disasters, familiarize students with the theoretical approaches to studying disasters, expose students to important primary and secondary sources in the field, and give students practice in speaking and writing about history. Additionally students will have the opportunity to research, discuss, and write about disasters.

Student Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of this course students should be able to: analyze primary and secondary sources, understand important theoretical trends in the field, have a basic literacy/ability to discuss the history of North American disasters, apply critical thinking skills to the past, the ability to do original research, and write a thesis driven paper.
Course Materials

Notebook
You will need to buy a notebook dedicated to this class where you will write your journal responses

Books
2) Steven Biel, ed., American Disasters (NYU Press, 2001) # 0-8147-1346-7

Films
Films will be watched in class

Instructional Methods
Lectures, reading discussions, film analysis, and guest speakers will comprise the main instructional methods.

Course Policies
In order to create the best possible environment for learning, in the limited amount of time we have together, I have provided some guidelines for classroom etiquette: arrive on time, turn off cell phone ringers, refrain from texting or checking email, ask permission before bringing visitors to class, no sleeping in class, stay home if you are contagious, and come to class prepared. Beyond arriving in class ready to discuss readings, assignments, etc., please attend to personal needs before class (bathroom, drink of water, etc.). Disruptive students will be asked to leave class. Because we meet for 4.5 hours, we will take breaks as needed to allow people to attend to personal matters.

Support Services
The Writing Center is open during Summer Session; to check summer hours go to their website: http://http://www.uaf.edu/english/writing-center/ Writing Center, UAF
Disabilities Services
If you need to make arrangements with Disability Services please contact: Mary Matthews, Director of Disability Services: mcmatthews@alaska.edu; X5655

Evaluation and Assignments
There will be a possible 1000 points earned in the class.

A: 900-1000 (excellent work)
B: 800-899 (good work)
C: 700-799 (average work)
D: 600-699 (minimum effort apparent)
F: 0-599 (failure)

Attendance/Participation (200 points)
Your participation is vital to the class’s success. You should come to each class session prepared to pay attention to lectures and to discuss that day’s assignments. Each member of the class will be expected to contribute. The participation grade is based on 1) attendance 2) alertness/engagement 3) verbal participation. Ultimately, you are accountable for your own learning, but I find an attendance policy a concrete way to measure participation. Attendance will be taken each meeting – you will be allowed one absence– after that you will lose 50 points for each class you miss. This policy applies for absences due to illness, family matters, and athletics – please see me if special accommodations must be made.

Response Journal (300 points – 6 entries @ 50 points each)
You will write six journal entries over the course of Maymester. While you will have some in-class time to work on these you may need to finish entries as homework. Your journal is a place to reflect on the readings we’ve done, to comment on films, and to make connections with the ideas and information we’ve encountered. These can be somewhat informal, but I do expect you to put thought and energy into your entries (roughly 500-1000 words per entry).

Group Project/Presentations (300 points)
Each group (two to three students) will work on a research project on the disaster of its choosing (with my approval). The only restrictions are that it cannot be a disaster we’ve read about extensively in class. The project requires that evidence be drawn from at least 2 primary sources and 2 secondary sources (of a scholarly nature), and it should have a clear thesis/argument. The presentations, which will be the last day of class, should include a description of the disaster that
includes: consideration of when it happened, where it happened, causes, responses, casualties and other damage. The presentation should also consider long-term consequences, possible lessons, comparison to relevant disasters we’ve studied in class, as well as discussion of larger theoretical questions such as the role humans play in disasters, and so-called natural versus other types of disasters. Your presentation should include a discussion of your sources and each member of the group should share equal responsibility for the presentation. I encourage you to use audio-visual aids as appropriate. Each group will have approximately 30 minutes for its presentation and your grade will be based on meeting the criteria above – additionally you will be graded 50% on the group’s satisfaction of the project and 50% on individual contribution. You will have some class time to work on presentations but expect to do some of research/reading/planning as homework.

Final Exam (200 points)
Following presentations on the last day you will take a final exam. This is an essay style, open book exam where you will attack or defend the following statement from Steinberg: “…blaming . . . nature . . . for calamity has become a tool used to advance various political interests in society.” (p. xii). Using at least three historical examples (not from Steinberg) compose a thesis driven paper that supports your position and demonstrates your knowledge of disaster history, historiography, and the ability to apply critical thinking skills to the study of the past. Your paper should be between 6 and 10 pages (double-spaced) and cite all appropriate sources following the guidelines in the Chicago Manual of Style. Please email to professor: dldistefano@alaska.edu by noon on Saturday, May 25.

Tentative Course Calendar

Week One

Monday, May 13
Introduction to the Course
Lecture: The Anatomy of Disaster
Break Out: Read Steinberg (Preface and Introduction, pp. xi-xxiii) and Rozario (Introduction, pp. 1-29)
Film: The Donner Party (2000)

Tuesday, May 14 – Starvation
Read: American Disasters, Taylor, “The Hungry Year”
Lecture: Cannibalism in American Culture
Break Out: Disaster Projects – Topic and Sources
Film: *Alive!* (1993)
Journal Response One

**Wednesday, May 15 – Shipwrecks**
Film: *Titanic* (1997)
Journal Response Two

**Thursday, May 16 – Earthquakes and Fires**
Read: Steinberg, *Acts of God*, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-24); Rozario, Chapter 1, Interlude, Chapter 2 (pp. 31-100)
Lecture: Liability Law in Industrializing America
Break Out: Work on Disaster Projects
Film: *The Triangle Fire* (2011)
Journal Response Three

**Friday, May 17 – Volcanoes**
Read: *American Disasters*, Hones “Distant Disasters”
Guest Speaker: Mike West
Break Out: Work on Disaster Projects
Film: *Dante’s Peak* (1997)
Turn-in Response Journal

**Week Two**

**Monday, May 20 – Exxon Valdez and Pandemics**
Read: *American Disasters*, Gill, “The Day the Water Died,” and Birkland “The Exxon Valdez”
Lecture: Diseases, Epidemics, and Pandemics
Film: *The Age of AIDS*
Journal Response Four

**Tuesday, May 21 – Hurricanes**
Read: Rozario, Epilogue; *American Disasters*, Mulcahy, “A Tempestuous Spirit,” and Bixel, “It Must Be Made Safe”
Film: *When the Levees Broke* (2006)
Journal Response Five
**Wednesday, May 22 – Federalizing Risk**
Read: Steinberg, *Acts of God* (Chapter 3, 4, 5), pp. 47-116; Rozario, Chapter 4 (pp. 135-174)
Guest Speaker: TBA
Break Out: Work on Disaster Projects
Journal Response Six

**Thursday, May 23 – Disaster, Ethics, and Apocalyptic Forecasts**
Read: Rozario, Chapter 5 (pp. 175-208)
Guest Speaker: Alex Hirsch
Film: *The Road*
Turn-In Response Journal

**Friday, May 24 – Disaster Presentations**
Disaster Project Presentations
**Final Exam**