Instructor: Dr. Laura Siebeneck  
Office Location: Chilton 122 H
Semester: Fall 2016  
Course Location: Sage 355
Course Schedule: M 10:00-12:50 PM  
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Office Hours: M 1:15-3:00 PM, Tuesday 10-12:15, or by appointment
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Teaching Assistant: Ms. Britt-Janet Kuenanz  
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Course Description
This course examines hazards and disasters as they are portrayed in film and various media. The emphasis is on understanding how the portrayals of disasters often depart from scientific understanding, and also on evaluating how the depiction of disasters in various media can shape both public and official awareness of the causes of, management of, and recovery from disaster. What do we learn about the phases of emergency management from popular portrayals of disaster? What is accurate in terms of the portrayal of the hazard and what is sensationalized? What do we learn about how emergency managers respond in times of hazard? How has recent technology changed the ways information is shared during an event? This course will address these questions and place particular emphasis on the myths commonly portrayed in these films and ways these myths can be overcome in the real world.

Course Objectives
The course will prepare students to
1. Understand the portrayal of disaster in film and the mass media as sociological and popular culture phenomena;
2. Analyze the portrayal of disaster themes such as emergency management activities or collective behavior with respect to current scientific understanding;
3. Recognize how the persistence of disaster myths (e.g., panic) actually affects people’s perceptions and ultimately decisions in times of crisis.
4. Examine the influence of newer social media technologies in the communication of risk and hazards.
5. Develop creative thinking and teamwork skills that will help them identify solutions to the complex problems they may experience while in the emergency management field.

Course Text
There is no required textbook for the course. However, the weekly readings will be available via Blackboard. Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to the corresponding topic’s class period. In other words, come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Taking notes on the readings will help you contribute to thoughtful and meaningful discussion during class.
Grading Scale
A: ≥90%  B: 89-80%  C: 79-70%  D: 69-60%  F <60%

Grading
5%  Attendance (5%)
5%  Assignment 1
15%  Quizzes (7 quizzes worth 2.5% each)
25%  “Real World vs. Reel World” Paper
30%  Final Project
20%  Final Exam
Total: 100

Attendance
Attendance will be assessed at least once every class session. Students are expected to arrive at
class on time and to stay the entire class. This class meets only once a week and students should
be aware that a significant number of absences will make it difficult to pass the course. Students
will be allowed 2 absences before their overall grade will be lowered 1 point for each additional
absence (e.g. from 5 to 4), up to a total of 5 points. Therefore, there are no excused absences.
However, this rule may be waived in extreme and documented circumstances, (e.g. serious
illness, death in the family, injury, etc.). In these special cases please contact me so I can work
with you. Students will also be penalized for arriving late to class or leaving early. Each tardy
or leaving early occurrence will result in a .5 point deduction from the attendance grade.
If you have to miss class or arrive late/leave early for any reason, please arrange to get notes
from a fellow classmate. All material covered in class is important.

Missing a Video
I understand that sometimes things come up and you may miss a class. If you miss a film, you
have several options for viewing it. First, you should check with the UNT Media Library to see
if they have the film available for you to view. If they do not have the film, you may request to
borrow my copy of the film. Any student viewing my copy of the film must schedule a time to
borrow the movie; they must view it in the UNT Media Library, and return it promptly to my
office. Students who do not return the film when promised will be subjected to a 2% deduction
from their final course grade.

Assignment 1
In order to prepare students for their final projects and facilitate group work, students will
complete a short assignment aimed to assist in “brainstorming” ideas for the final project.
Students will be required to write out some of the ideas they have for the final project, using a
worksheet to guide this assignment. This assignment will be due October 10th and is worth 5%
of your final grade. Copies of the worksheet will be posted on Blackboard by the last week of
September.

“Real World vs. Reel World” Paper
A significant portion of your grade (25%) will be completing a short research paper pertaining to
one of the key issues covered in class. This paper will provide you the opportunity to link the
scholarly literature covered in class with a film / several films viewed during the semester. The
essay prompts will be provided in class and will be posted on Blackboard.

Each paper should be 4-6 pages in length in 12-point Time New Roman with 1-inch margins. All papers should be double spaced and the pages should be numbered. References should be included (and do not count as part of the paper length).

Careful consideration of the films or other scholarly sources is essential. You must cite a minimum 2 articles covered in class and 3 additional outside sources, which can include journal articles, book chapters, books, periodicals, magazines, etc. Papers will be graded based on the presentation of well-considered observations and interpretations, and on elements of good composition such as grammar and spelling. You will be graded on the content of the paper (70%), format and length (15%), and your ability to bridge ideas, concepts, and terminology presented in lecture and the readings (15%). Papers must be either stapled or paper-clipped otherwise they will not be accepted. E-mailed write-ups will not be accepted. Any assignment turned in after I have collected the papers will be subjected to a 3% penalty. Late assignments will be accepted up to 1 week after the original due date, however they will be penalized at 5% per day including weekends. **This paper will be due in class November 14th.**

**Weekly Quizzes**
Throughout the semester, 10 quizzes will be given at random to ensure you are keeping up with the readings and class discussions. Each quiz will be worth 2.5% of your final grade. I will only count your 7 highest scores, thus dropping the 3 lowest scores. Because of this, no make-up quizzes will be allowed. Additionally, these quizzes will be open notes, however the use of internet will not be allowed during this time (e.g. googling the answer, communicating via text Facebook, etc.).

**Group Project**
Students will assemble into groups and prepare a proposal for a disaster movie that will be both entertaining AND scientifically valid. Each group will have between 4-5 students. Students will present the proposal to the class and possibly invited faculty. This project is worth 30% of your grade. More detailed instructions about this project are included at the end of your syllabus.

**Exam**
To encourage you to keep up with the readings and films and synthesize the topics covered in this course, a comprehensive final exam will be given at the end of the semester. This exam will consist of a combination of true/false, multiple-choice, short answer, and short essay questions covering the concepts presented in class, in the readings, and in the films. This exam is worth 20% of your final grade. Exam make-ups will be limited to special circumstances and with prior notification only. Any exceptions will require documentation and proof regarding the reason for the absence.

**Cheating and Plagiarism**
As future emergency management officials, it is imperative to maintain the upmost level of integrity and honesty. Your actions are not only a reflection of your character, but the reputation of this program and university. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. The UNT
definition and policy on cheating and plagiarism is found at the end of the syllabus. Plagiarism.Org, expands this definition to include:

- Turning in someone else’s work as your own
- Copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- Failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- Giving incorrect information about the source of the quotation
- Changing words by copying the sentence structure
- Copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of the work, whether you give it credit or not (i.e. copying and pasting from a variety of sources and calling it your own, even if you use citations.)

At a minimum, any student caught cheating or plagiarizing on any assignment or exam will receive a zero on the assignment. The instructor also reserves the right to assign the student an automatic F in the course. All instances of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the Department and University for further disciplinary action. Please, if you have any questions about whether you are citing sources correctly or if you are unsure whether you are plagiarizing or not, come see me before you hand in the assignment. I am more than happy to help.

E-Mail
Students are welcome – and encouraged – to contact me using e-mail if they have any questions or would like make an appointment to see me outside of scheduled office hours. I generally respond to e-mails within 24 hours of receiving them, however, I may take more time to reply during weekends or holidays.

All students are REQUIRED to have a UNT e-mail address. All e-mailed notifications pertaining to this class will be sent through those channels. In other words, if you do not have an account set up at UNT, you may miss out on important information. It is the responsibility of the student to have this account set up. Students are expected to maintain a high level of professionalism when writing e-mails. E-mails should include a proper salutation, use complete sentences, and conclude with the sender’s signature. Also please indicate what class and section you are in. E-mails should not resemble a text message (i.e. C U L8 R). Students are training to be emergency management professionals who will one day represent UNT and the EADP program. Any e-mails that are informal or unprofessional will not receive a response.

Student Behavior
All students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. Students are expected to be respectful to the instructor, fellow classmates, and guest speakers. Any behavior that is disruptive or disrespectful – including but not limited to – talking when the instructor or fellow classmate is speaking, rudeness, listening to your i-pod, surfing the internet, checking Facebook, texting, talking on your cell phone, sleeping, etc. –will not be tolerated and the student will be asked to correct the behavior and/or asked leave the class. Additionally, no tobacco use of any form is permitted in class. We all need to contribute to a safe and open environment where everyone is able to participate in classroom discussion and activities. Repeated offenses will result in a meeting with our program director and/or reporting to the College and University.
Final Project

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to allow students to apply the cinematic and scientific material they have learned in this course to accomplish three objectives: (1) gain experience working in a team setting, (2) manage a project, and (3) demonstrate and enhance the creative skills necessary for working with public information and outreach programs in the field of emergency management.

**Project Overview:** Imagine that you are writers/directors and you are trying to sell your new disaster film idea to a studio. You will select an appropriate disaster; outline a plot; emphasize its cinematic and scientific value (providing evidence for why you think this combination works); provide examples of engaging dialogue; and include other elements that you feel will make a persuasive case for making your film. The project culminates with students “pitching” their ideas to an audience and producers.

**Project Grade Breakdown**
Portfolio Content – 70%
Final Presentation – 20%
Peer Review – 10%

**Portfolio Content**
Each group will be required to turn in a portfolio containing all project materials. Your portfolio must contain the following elements in this specific order:

1) Film Poster containing the names of all group members and title of the film. You may include a marketing tagline if desired.

2) Synopsis of the Plot - in a paragraph or two, briefly summarize the plot of the film.

3) Marketing taglines – you must include three creative marketing taglines that will be used to advertise your film.

4) Cast page - who will star in your film? Why did you select this cast?

5) Theme song/songs - each group will select a theme song for your film. Next, provide a paragraph describing why your group chose this song.

6) Outline the Plot - this section includes several components:
   a. Character backgrounds - describe all important characters in your film. What is their background/backstory. What role do they play in this movie?

   b. Setting - where does your film take place? Why did your group select this setting? Describe the location of this setting and any other information that you feel is important about the chosen location.
c. Disaster - describe the disaster. Why does it happen? What impact does it have on people and places? Describe the scope and magnitude of the event. Included in this section, please discuss what is accurate about your portrayal of the disaster and what measures, if any, were taken to alter the “ordinary” behavior of the disaster.

d. Plot - describe the progression of the film highlighting the various scenes you have created. You may do this in several different ways such as creating an illustrated story board, summarizing the different scenes in paragraph format, using a combination of these two techniques, etc. If you have any other ideas about how you want to approach presenting the plot, feel free to run your ideas by me.

7) Provide 1-2 pages of samples of engaging dialogue.

8) Discuss any special effects that you plan to use when filming your movie.

9) Discuss the film genre:
   a. What makes your film a disaster film? When answering this question, keep in mind the disaster film characteristics covered in class. In particular, be sure to note any myths you inject into your film. Justify why you did this.
   b. What is the scientific value of the film? In other words, what is it about the material presented that is scientifically correct?
   c. Why do you think your film is entertaining?

10) A copy of the PowerPoint presentation and/or trailer used for your class presentation.

11) Notes - each student must hand in any notes taken in class pertaining to the class project. Be sure to include information about any meetings your group has, drafts of plots, brainstorming sessions, etc. Include any dates that work was done.

Presentation
Each team will pitch their idea to the class on either December 5th or December 10th. These presentations should be between 15-20 minutes (depending on the number of groups this may change). Student will be required to use PowerPoint and/or Windows Media (or alternative) to show the class the final product of their projects. It is recommended that the presentations follow the format required for the portfolio, however changes may be made with consultation with the instructor. Groups will be graded on how well they present their film (is it entertaining, loud clear voices, all group members participate, etc.), quality of slides (is it readable, do animations and sound work), and staying within the time limits.
Peer Review
Student will have the opportunity to evaluate the members of their team. On the day of the first project presentations (December 5), students will receive an evaluation sheet from the instructor. These will be filled out during class time and turned in upon completion. All responses will remain completely anonymous and evaluations will be shredded after I have figured the evaluations into the final project grades. 10% of your final grade will be based on 1) filling out the evaluation and 2) how your peers evaluate you. Students whom group member identify as “free-loading” will be subject to a project grade reduction greater than 10% if it is found that a student did not contribute their fair share of the work. Remember, you will turn in all additional work about your project meetings (i.e. who attended meetings, who did what work, etc.) at the end of the portfolio, so keep organized and make sure you participate.

Note on Project Groups
On October 3, student will form project groups during class. Each group is required to provide the instructor with a list of group members. Groups need to include 4-5 students. I reserve the right to change/modify the groups as needed.

Working in Class
At different times during the semester, students will be given time to work in class on their projects. This provides students with an opportunity to conveniently meet with their group members and make progress on their assignment. This time does not mean that you may leave early. Remember, sometimes attendance is taken twice. If leaving early becomes an issue, then less time will be provided to work on the projects in-class.

Consultation with the Instructor
Students are highly encouraged to keep me informed about the progress of their projects as well as any questions you may have. If you have any questions or need help, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Important Project Dates:

October 3 – Finalize project teams.

October 10 – Turn in initial outline ideas worksheet (to be completed individually).

November 28 - Project work day – you will have all class to work on the project

December 5 - Project portfolios due. First set of groups present.

December 10 (Saturday 8am – 10 am) – Second set of group projects present.