

Gregory Cushman
Seminar on the History of Disasters/Topics in Cultural Geography
Spring 2004
University of Kansas
Topics: World, Natural Disasters, Graduate

Instructor: **Gregory T. Cushman**
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Note: **I prefer to communicate in person or by phone.**

Course overview: Are disasters primarily forces beyond our control, or are they 'normal accidents' caused by our inability to adapt to our environment and control our technological systems?

This research seminar for graduate students and qualified undergraduates will begin with a theoretical discussion of 'natural hazards' and technological 'accidents.' It will then move to a handful of historical case studies from around the globe. Students will also be given a number of specific training assignments during the first half of the semester.

The second half of the course will be devoted to the development and presentation of original research on specific historical disasters and to develop clear scholarly writing.

This course will develop basic professional skills needed a) to do independent historical research based on primary source documents, b) to communicate these findings to others both orally and in writing, c) to sharpen critical abilities in evaluating others' scholarship.

Undergraduate students will be required to write a 15-20 page research paper (4,500-5,000 words). Graduate students will be required to write an article-length research paper (20-30 pages, up to 8,000 words) of publishable quality.

This course will be run as an **interactive seminar** centered on class discussion. Students are expected to do outside reading and research and share their findings with the class.

Required texts:

Burton, Ian, Robert W. Kates, and Gilbert F. White. *The Environment as Hazard*, 2d ed. New York: Guilford Press, 1993. 290 pp. ISBN 0898621593.
Perrow, Charles. *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies*. 2d ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. 451 pp. ISBN 0691004129.

Steinberg, Ted. *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 294 pp. ISBN 0195165454.
Davis, Mike. "The Great Drought, 1876-1878." Pt. 1 of *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*. New York: Verso, 2001. 464 pp. ISBN 1859843824.
The Chicago Manual of Style. 15th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. ISBN (required for grad students, optional for undergrads).
Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th ed. Revised by John Grossman and Alice Bennett. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. 308 pp. ISBN 0226816273. (recommended for undergrads).

The instructor will also assign other article-length readings. Including:
Chester, "The 1755 Lisbon Earthquake" (2001)
Oliver-Smith, "Here There Is Life: The Social and Cultural Dynamics of Successful Resistance to Resettlement in Postdisaster Peru" (1982)
Waller, "Emutai: Crisis and Response in Maasailand, 1883-1902" (1988)
Kelton, "Avoiding the Smallpox Spirits: Colonial Epidemics and Southeastern Indian Survival" (2004)
Hewitt, "When the Great Planes Came and Made Ashes of Our City" (1994)
Rajan, "Toward a Metaphysic of Environmental Violence: The Case of the Bhopal Gas Disaster" (2001)
Collins and Pinch, "The Naked Launch: Assigning Blame for the *Challenger* Explosion" (1998)
Hollings, "Gojira mon amour" (1998)

Films (in class): *Asteroids: Deadly Impact* (U.S., 1997) or *Catastrophe!: How the World Changed* (U.S., 2000); *Gojira* (Japan 1954); *The River* (U.S., 1936).

Evaluation standards: Overall letter grades are based on grades received on assignments weighted as follows: in-class presentation 10%, research paper draft 30%, final paper 50%, attendance/class participation/other assignments 10%. Final grades are calculated based on percent of total points possible: for undergraduates, 88-100% = A, 73-87% = B, 56-72% = C, 50-55% = D, 0-49% = F; for graduate students, 80%-100% = A, 60-79%

= B, 50-59% = C, 0-49% = F. The instructor typically grades assignments on a ten-point scale.

In-class presentation: Every student is required to give a 10 minute oral presentation of their project during the course of the semester. In addition, each seminar member will also be assigned to criticize in detail one paper for technique and style and another for theory and method and make a brief presentation. Everyone will be expected to participate in evaluative discussions of each work presented.

Written assignment: Students should use 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and double space. Organize each essay to defend a central argument, expressed in a succinct thesis statement. The instructor will provide more detailed guidelines later in the semester. **All seminar members should be supplied with a copy of the draft. Submit final papers IN DUPLICATE on the date indicated.**

The KU Writing Center (4017 Wescoe, open Sun.-Thur.) provides trained peer consultants to help you brainstorm, draft, or edit your writing. It also operates satellite “Writers’ Roosts” at the Watson Library and other locations around campus, and it also provides consultations by phone, e-mail, and instant messenger. See their website <http://www.writing.ku.edu/> for hours, links to on-line writing guides, and other information. See especially the links under “Avoiding Plagiarism.” Do not hesitate to approach other professors on campus who may possess expertise in your area of interest.

Policy on academic dishonesty: Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student, or the attempt to commit such an act. Students are expected to adhere to official university policy prohibiting academic dishonesty. Students are encouraged to discuss projects with each other, but are expected to contribute their own, original work.

Attendance and class schedule: Regular attendance is required. Poor attendance will result in a penalty. **All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date.** The course outline indicates approximate dates when we will discuss topics. Students are expected to complete reading assignments **before** coming to class on the weeks indicated. The instructor reserves the right to change this schedule. Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities.

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Seminar on the History of Disasters/Topics in Cultural Geography

Syllabus--HIST 696/GEOG 771—Spring 2004—Thur
4:10-7:00pm—3002 Wescoe

Week	Day	Date	Topic
1	Th	01/29	Orientation Interpreting 1° and 2° sources Film: <i>Asteroids or Catastrophe!</i>
2	Th	02/05	Interpreting natural disasters
3	Th	02/12	Interpreting “normal accidents”
4	Th	02/19	(Un)natural disaster in the United States
5	Th	02/26	NO CLASS —meetings with instructor
6	Th	03/04	Climate and weather disasters Short film: <i>The River</i> (1934)
7	Th	03/11	Seismic disasters and disease Presentation on the 1811-12 New Madrid quakes physical & documentary evidence/human and environmental legacies
8	Th	03/18	Techno-disasters Film: <i>Gojira</i> (1954)
9	Th	03/25	NO CLASS—Spring Break
Week	Day	Date	Assignment due
10	Th	04/01	Brief class meeting—(ASEH) Group I drafts due—provide 21 copies
11	Th	04/08	Group I--Grad student presentation/discussion Group II drafts due—provide 21 copies
12	Th	04/15	Group II--Grad student presentation/discussion Group III drafts due—provide 21 copies

13	Th	04/22	Group III--Undergrad student presentation/discussion Group IV drafts due—provide 21 copies	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
14	Th	04/29	Group IV--Undergrad student presentation/discussion	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
15	Th	04/06	NO CLASS —meetings with instructor	Your time:
16	Th	04/13	Wrap-up and evaluations GRAD STUDENT FINAL PAPERS DUE	
	M	05/17	UNDERGRAD FINAL PAPERS DUE, by 9am, at 2001 Wescoe	ABOVE SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Notes: