

# A History of

# (UN)NATURAL DISASTERS



## Course Description

In "A History of (Un)natural Disasters," we will use natural disasters as a tool to critically evaluate the significance of catastrophic events in global history; to interpret them through the lens of social, environmental, and economic justice; and importantly, use disasters to explore the relationship between "natural" and cultural change.

Are coastal floods simply the result of storm surges? Can we reduce earthquake

Frank Conard, "Approaching Dust Storm," 1935-36

"Fire of Meireki," 1813

Willem Schellinks, "The Dike breach at the Saint Anthony Dike," 1651

disasters to seismic activity or pandemics to pathogens? Over the course of the semester, we will investigate the ways in which the disaster experience is informed and conditioned by society, culture, and environment.

Disasters are an ideal medium to explore "big" concepts like diversity and social justice. Historical perspectives provide necessary context to frame disasters as processes rather than simply "acts of God." Why (and how) is it that women, the poor, and minority groups have been disproportionately impacted by disasters? How are natural disasters linked to imperialism, capitalism, modern science, and the development of the third world? What level of complicity or responsibility do we all share in ongoing global disasters like climate change? In the context of this course, you will engage these critical issues on global and local terms, drawing perspective from the deep and recent past.

### Fit to Core & Mission

There is no such thing as a natural disaster. They do not develop out of unpredictable, chance collision between unlucky people and an unforgiving environment. "Natural" disasters are as much the product of human vulnerabilities as they are environmental hazards. The degree of vulnerability to disaster is highly dependent on a variety of social and cultural conditions.

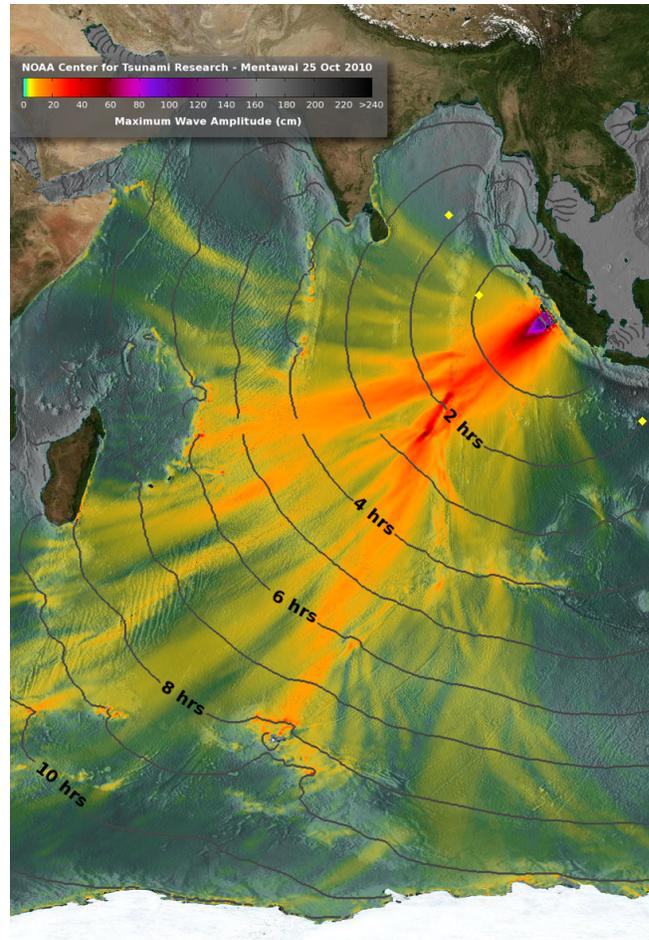
If disasters are not simply "acts of God," what are some of the methods we can use to explore them? How can disasters better

**"to see disasters as being natural is about as useful as a doctor signing a death certificate with the explanation of 'natural causes'"**

- TERRY CANNON

inform us about the critical issues of diversity and social justice? History offers a useful set of tools to untangle the social, cultural, and environmental forces that promote catastrophe. All vulnerabilities are grounded in long-standing relationships of power, identity, and access to information. Disasters, as a

result, uncover buried social inequalities and force us to contend with issues of equality and responsibility.



Maximum Wave Amplitude - 2010 Indian Ocean Tsunami, NOAA Center for Tsunami Research

## FALL 2018

AUG 22- DEC 15

Time/Day

8:00-9:15 AM

Office

DH 220

Office Hours

MW 2-4pm & By Appointment

Email:

adamsundberg@creighton.edu

## WEATHER CANCELLATION:

In the event that inclement weather forces the university to close, the course schedule will be adapted at the discretion of the instructor. All changes to the syllabus (and notice of class cancellations) will come via BlueLine.

## ATTENDANCE/TARDINESS:

Daily, timely attendance is required and is factored into your participation grade. Student will receive one absence during the semester free. After of penalty (for any reason). Afterwards, I will deduct 2% from participation for every subsequent day missed. Frequent tardiness will affect participation at the discretion of the professor.

## LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignments will be deducted 1/2 of a letter grade for each 24-hour period they are late. Late arrivals in class will be offered no chance to make up the weekly quiz.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

*By the end of the course, students should be able to:*

- *Identify key social, environmental, and cultural determinants of disaster*
- *Research and evaluate the origins of disaster vulnerability, particularly as they relate to issues of diversity and power, and how perspectives have changed over time.*
- *Engage the concept of “human dignity” and ethical considerations involved in disaster interpretation and response*
- *Contribute original research to an interdisciplinary digital “atlas” of historical disasters*
- *Relate issues of historical disasters to contemporary catastrophes, personal responsibility, justice, and human dignity.*
- *Present research in a clear, concise, and engaging presentation*

\*For a complete list of Magis Core objectives, see pg. 9\*



Master of the St. Elizabeth's Panels, The Saint Elizabeths Days Floods of 1421, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

## GRADING/ASSIGNMENTS:

Your grade will be determined based on your performance during in-class participation, presentations, a midterm essay, and a final research project. A total of 1375 points are possible in this course, distributed as follows:

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Final Project (“Digital Atlas”) - Total 625 pts | Weekly Quizzes - 80 pts        |
| - Project Proposal (50 pts)                     | Omeka Assignment - 20 pts      |
| - Bibliography (50 pts)                         | First Semester Speech - 50 pts |
| - Group Meeting (25 pts)                        | Midterm - 300                  |
| - First draft of narrative (100 pts)            | Participation – 300 pts        |
| - Final Product (200 pts)                       |                                |
| - Project Presentation – 200 pts                |                                |

## Grading Scale:

- A: 90-100
- B+: 85-89
- B: 80-84
- C+: 75-79
- C: 70-74
- D: 60-69
- F: 59 and below

### Final Atlas Project

The final project for this course uses original student research on disasters to build a digital atlas. To be completed in pairs, your project must use primary and secondary sources, incorporate imagery, and use effective written and oral communication. These will be embedded into a Neatline project. You must address the following issues discussed in class:

1. Narrative of the disaster
2. Adaptation, interpretation, and/or resilience
3. Differential vulnerability
4. Human dignity

### Project Presentation

You will be expected to present your group project at the end of the semester in two formats. 1. In the final weeks of class, groups will present their collective work in person. Each individual's contribution must be at least 7 minutes. 2. One week prior, *you* will record your portion of the presentation individually. Both presentations will demonstrate the oral communication skills learned in COM 101.

### Participation

Education demands your active involvement; therefore participation is a requirement in this course. A sizable percentage of the final grade will depend on the frequency and quality of your comments. Frequent tardiness will also warrant a reduced participation grade. Quality comments require reading the material and formulating ideas and opinions before you arrive at class.

### Style and Formatting

All written work should be clear, convincing, and following the assigned style guidelines. If required, it should have a well-defined thesis, intro, and conclusion backed up with substantive and well-documented citations. Any citations are required to be in the Chicago Style with footnotes.

*All written work should follow the following format:*

Times New Roman font; 12 point; double spacing; 1” margins; paginated. Print double-sided if possible. The title should clearly and creatively evoke the topic and subject of your

### Midterm

The midterm will consist of two take home essays that address issues of service, social justice, and human dignity in the context of disaster, viewed through 1. a Jesuit lens 2. personal experience 3. disciplinary perspectives.

### Short Speeches

In conjunction with COM 101, you will be expected to complete 1 speech in the first half of the semester. This will be maximum 3 minutes and cover natural disasters in the news.

## PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. This includes plagiarism. Do not attempt to use others works without proper citation. Acknowledge source material for all of your work. For more information on what constitutes academic dishonesty, see:

[https://www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/curriculum/CCAS\\_Academic\\_Honesty\\_Policy\\_.pdf](https://www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/curriculum/CCAS_Academic_Honesty_Policy_.pdf)

In the event of plagiarism, the student will receive zero points for the assignment.

## DISABILITIES:

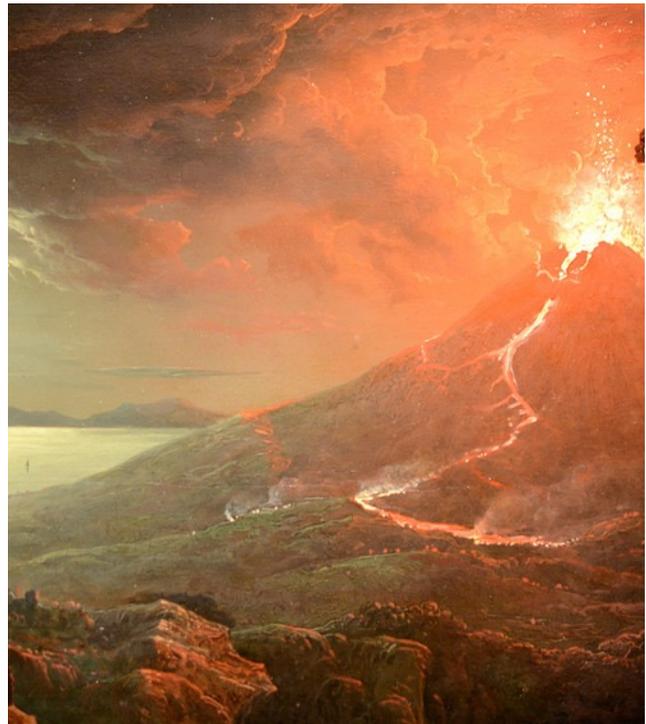
If you have a disability for which you need an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Accommodations located in the Old Gym, Room 408 (402-280-2166) as early as possible in the semester.

## WRITING/PRESENTATION HELP:

Writing and speaking are skills that requires practice and guidance. A significant part of this class will focus on both. Peer-review is encouraged as long as the authors create products that are demonstrably their own work. (see plagiarism and academic misconduct above). Also, feel free to stop by my office hours if you would like help. The Creighton Writing Center is a good option for writing assistance. See: <https://www.creighton.edu/ccas/english/writingcenter/> You can schedule appointments at the Writing Center in Creighton Hall 136. The Communication center helps assist student developing presentations. Make an appointment through Bluepoint: <https://www.creighton.edu/bluepoint/>



Gene Blevins, Los Angeles County fire helicopter makes a night drop while battling the so-called Fish Fire, 2016



Sebastian Pether, The Eruption of Vesuvius, 1825

# CALENDAR

\*\*\*All readings must be completed before arriving to class the day they are assigned.\*\*\*

## Part I. Disasters & History

What are disasters and what makes a disaster natural? How has the study of disasters changed over time?

### Week 1 – Disasters & History

Wed (Aug 22)

Syllabus - Introduction

### Week 2 – What is a “Natural” Disaster?

Mon (Aug 27) -

Spreadsheet to select date/time for short speech goes live (Tues @ 8am)

Wed (Aug 29) – Discussion

(S) Ted Steinberg, "What is a natural disaster?" *Literature and Medicine* 15: 1. (1996), p. 33-47

### Week 3 – Orientation to Omeka/Neatline

Mon (Sep 3) - **NO CLASS - LABOR DAY**

Wed (Sep 5) - Introduction to Omeka/Neatline

**Omeka Practicum Assignment due by the end of Friday Sep 7**

## Part II. Vulnerability

Who or what is responsible for disasters? What is “differential vulnerability” and what makes some people more vulnerable than others? How has race, gender, and class affected exposure to natural hazards? How have issues of humanitarian support, human dignity, and ethics affected our understanding of disasters over time?

### Week 4 – EARTHQUAKES

Mon (Sep 10) - Lecture

Wed (Sep 12) - *Colonialism and Secular Thinking in Lima (1746) and Lisbon (1755)*

(S) Russell Dynes, "The Dialogue between Voltaire and Rousseau on the Lisbon Earthquake: The Emergence of a Social Scientific View," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* (2000)

### Week 5 – EARTHQUAKES

Mon (Sep 17) - Lecture

#### Stage 1 - Project Proposal due

Wed (Sep 19) - Media and Recovery in Tokyo (1923) and Haiti (2010)



(S) Murali Balaji, "Racializing Pity: The Haiti Earthquake and the Plight of "Others," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2011)

### **Week 6 – HURRICANES**

Mon (Sep 24) - Lecture

Wed (Sep 26) - *Differential Vulnerability and the State in Cuba (1967) and the United States (Katrina), 2002*

(S) "After the Flood," *This American Life* <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/296/after-the-flood>

(S) August Nimitz, "Natural vs Social Phenomena: Cuba and the Lessons of Katrina," *The Black Scholar* (2006)

### **Week 7 – DISASTER CAPITALISM**

Mon (Oct 1) - *Indian Ocean (2004) and Puerto Rico (2017)*

(S) Naomi Klein, *The Battle for Paradise*, pgs. 43-65.

Wed (Oct 3) - **Guest Speaker** - John Mitchell (Health Sciences Librarian) - research methods

## **MIDTERM DUE**

### **Part III. - Adaptation**

How has western science interpreted disaster and how has that changed over time? How has science been a tool for state management, colonialism, and the "control of nature?" What connections can we make between premodern and modern conceptions of disaster?

### **Week 8 – DROUGHT, FAMINE, & ENTITLEMENT**

Mon (Oct 8) - Lecture

Wed (Oct 10) - *Entitlement in British India (1896-1901)*

(S) Naresh Chandra Sourabh and Timo Myllyntaus. "Famines in Late Nineteenth-Century India: Politics, Culture, and Environmental Justice." *Environment & Society Portal, Virtual Exhibitions 2015*, no. 2. Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/6812>

### **Stage 2 - Annotated Bibliography Due**

Oct 14-21 – **NO CLASS - FALL BREAK**

### **Week 9 – RIVER FLOODING**

Mon (Oct 22) - *The United States, 1923*

Wed (Oct 24) - *The Technocratic Paradigm and Normal Accidents in the US (1923) and the Netherlands (1953)*

(S) Michael Kimmelman, "The Dutch Have Solutions to Rising Seas. The World is Watching," *New York Times* (2017)

### **Week 10 – FIRE**

Mon (Oct 29) - Lecture

Wed (Oct 31) - *Scientific Management of Rural and Urban Fires in the US West*

(S) Mike Davis, "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn," *Environmental History Review* (1995)

Sign up sheet for final presentations live **Friday Nov 2 @ 8am.**

## Stage 3 - Group Meeting Due

### Part IV - Resilience

How have ideas of "risk" and disaster shaped modernity? What aspects of disaster interpretation and response are unique to the modern period? How do natural disasters influence you?

#### Week 11 – Cultures of Disaster

Mon (Nov 5) - Lecture

Wed (Nov 7) - Disasters in the Philippines

(S) Greg Bankoff, "Cultures of Coping: Adaptation to Hazard and Living with Disaster in the Philippines," *Philippine Sociological Review* (2003)

#### Week 12 - Community Solidarity & Human Dignity

Mon (Nov 12) - Lecture - San Francisco (1906)

Wed (Nov 14) - Work Day

## Stage 4 - Draft Essay due

#### Week 13 – Climate Resilience and Climate Justice

Mon (Nov 19) - Sea Level Rise (Maldives)

(S) The Island President -watch via Kanopy in class through Creighton Library website

**Submit recorded individual presentations to COM 101 by Friday**

Wed (Nov 21) - **NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING BREAK**

#### Week 14 – Work/presentations week

Mon (Nov 26) - Work Day (in class)

Wed (Nov 28) - Presentations - Groups 1, 2

#### Week 15 – Class Presentations

Mon (Dec 3) - Groups 3, 4

Wed (Dec 5) - Groups 5, 6

#### Week 16 - FINALS WEEK - Class Presentations

Date/Time TBD - see Finals Schedule Online - Groups 7, 8, 9

## Stage 5 - Final Project Due



## **Magis Core Learning Objectives:**

- *Students will identify their own social locations and analyze a controversial issue by articulating their own values and perspectives and those of an unfamiliar community.*
- *Students will evaluate and critique ideologies of social differentiation and the way systems of relative power and privilege are (or have been) reinforced.*
- *Students will develop the basic skills of information literacy, including searching for information, critically evaluating information from sources, and appropriately using and citing information.*
- *Students will demonstrate self-knowledge, including knowledge of their own biases and perspectives, and be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of varying points of view.*
- *Students will use technology effectively for research, analysis, communication, and collaborative work.*
- *Students will explain the concepts of “service” and “social justice” as they are understood within the Catholic and Jesuit traditions.*
- *Students will explain how one or more disciplines identify social ideals and analyze actual societal conditions in terms of social justice.*
- *Students will describe the range and types of human identities and cultures in contemporary or historical terms and identify what constitutes “difference” (or what has constituted “difference”) within the United States and throughout the global community.*
- *Students will state the meaning of “human dignity” as articulated within the Catholic, Jesuit, and other intellectual traditions and how “human dignity” is influenced by systems of social differentiation and by relative power and privilege.*