

SOC 389 Spec. Tops in Sociology
Disaster and Society
Spring 2022

Bin Xu
Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
Email: bin.xu@emory.edu
Office: 211 Tarbutton Hall
Office Hours: virtual meeting by appointment

The instructor reserves the right to modify, change, reschedule any parts of the lecture, assignments etc.

This course focuses on an unfortunately timely topic, disaster. Instead of viewing disasters as “natural” phenomena, this course aims to gain a deeper and broader understanding of the social aspect of disasters, especially the nuances, variations, and paradoxes in the social processes involved in disasters. To achieve this goal, this course discusses six major topics: 1) social responses to disasters in the emergency stage; 2) the roles of organizations and governments; 3) vulnerability of people with various social characteristics, including class, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and so on; 4) resilience of communities and individuals; 5) disaster and culture; 6) globalization and disasters, including famine and humanitarianism and the climate change. The readings and discussions include cases not only in Europe and America but also non-Western places, where communities and people are particularly prone to various kinds of disasters. The course is mostly taking a sociological perspective but also draws on various insights from other disciplines, including anthropology, political science, history, etc.

The major pedagogical methods include lecturing, in-class discussion, film screening, and guest speaking. The instructor’s lectures provide a concise outline of the major points of the readings, introduce background for every topic, and discuss some updates on the topic. The lectures will NOT repeat everything in the readings, but students are expected to read the materials carefully and come to class with thoughts and questions. In each section, students need to write an “Analysis Essay” to use the theories and methods learned in the section to analyze an additional reading or documentary. We will spend a class meeting discussing the analysis. The final paper will be focused on the ongoing COVID-19 disaster, a catastrophe for the world but also an opportunity for us to learn about disaster’s social aspect so that we respond better for the next major disaster. One or two guest speakers will be invited to speak in class and have conversations with students.

My Teaching Philosophy

In addition to conventional expectations on participation, punctuality, diligence, and so on, there is one principle I want to emphasize: **Reading is essential to education.** If you intend to take this class by playing some “non-reading tricks” (attending class, hearing lecture and other students’ discussions, and drawing what you hear to say a few random words to “participate”),

this course is not for you. If you are busy in extra-curricular activities in order to put things on your resume but pay significantly less attention to class reading, please read the following article by Professor Bill Hurst at Northwestern and rethink about what is important for you: “End the Extracurricular Arms Race” (<http://goo.gl/KBPzvx>).

Textbook and Readings

In the reading schedule, I will indicate the form of each reading.

Textbook: Tierney, Kathleen J. 2019. *Disasters: a sociological approach*. Medford, MA: Polity Press. The textbook can be purchased at Barnes & Noble campus store. It is also available for 2-hour loan at the course reserve.

Journal articles MUST BE downloaded from the library’s website. I’ll explain why I do not upload PDFs of journal articles to Canvas.

E-book: Many of the readings are in the format of e-book, which can be accessed (for download or online reading) through Emory Library.

Scanned Readings: Some readings are not available in electronic formats and will be scanned uploaded to Canvas.

Requirements

Attendance

Attendance is required. The instructor/TA 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. Total points for attendance are 10. 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.

Analysis Essays

In each section, students need to write an analysis essay to discuss a new reading or a new documentary by applying the knowledge learned in this section. After submitting the essay, the class will discuss the reading or documentary. There will be six essays, and each essay is worth 5 points. Instructions will be given.

Midterm

There will be a **take-home** midterm. Students will be given a list of readings of a particular disaster and be asked to address one aspect of the disaster, for example, emergency response or organizations’ roles. The midterm is worth 20 points.

Final Paper

The final paper will be focused on the ongoing COVID crisis. Each student should choose one aspect, which corresponds to a section of this class, and collect the data and analyze. We will talk about data and research methods in class. The process of writing the final paper will be divided into several steps, each of which is worth some points. For each of the steps before the final submission, I will give the student a temporary grade and feedback on how to revise. The student can revise the assignment and resubmit to get full grades.

1. A brief essay to discuss the topic of your final paper (5 points)
2. A literature review (10 points)
3. A research design for data and methods (10 points)

4. Final paper submission (15 points)

Academic Integrity

Students who are admitted to Emory College of Arts and Sciences agree to abide by the provisions of the Honor Code: <http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policies-regulations/honor-code.html>

Access and Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and have anticipated barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, or presume having a disability (e.g. mental health, attention, learning, vision, hearing, physical or systemic), and are in need of accommodations for this semester, we encourage you to contact the Office of Access, Disability Services, and Resources (ADSR) to learn more about the registration process and steps for requesting accommodations. If you are a student that is currently registered with ADSR and have not received a copy of your accommodation notification letter within the first week of class, please notify ADSR immediately. Students who have accommodations in place are encouraged to coordinate sometime with your professor, during the first week of the semester, to communicate your specific needs for the course as it relates to your approved accommodations. All discussions with ADSR and faculty concerning the nature of your disability remain confidential. For additional information regarding ADSR, please visit the website: equity.emory.edu/access.

Peer Tutoring Writing Support

Tutors in the Emory Writing Center and the ESL Program are available to support Emory College students as they work on any type of writing assignment, at any stage of the composing process. Tutors can assist with a range of projects, from traditional papers and presentations to websites and other multimedia projects. Writing Center and ESL tutors take a similar approach as they work with students on concerns including idea development, structure, use of sources, grammar, and word choice. They do not proofread for students. Instead, they discuss strategies and resources students can use as they write, revise, and edit their own work. Students who are currently enrolled in an ESL-supported section of English 101, English 123, or English 221 or who plan to take one of those courses next semester should see ESL tutors, as they are specifically trained to support students in ESL Program courses. To learn more about ESL tutoring or to make an appointment, go to tinyurl.com/eslemory. All other students in the college should see Writing Center tutors who are trained to work with this broader population. Learn more and make an appointment at writingcenter.emory.edu. Please review tutoring policies before your visit.

Grades

Requirements	Grades
Attendance	10
Analysis Essays (6)	30 (5 each)
Midterm	20
Final Paper	40
Total	100

Reading and Class Schedule

Reading and Class Schedule

#	Date	Topic	Reading	Activities
1	Jan 12	Introduction	No	
2	Jan 19	What Is Disaster?	(E-book) Ronald W. Perry. Defining Disaster: An Evolving Concept. In Rodríguez, Havidán, William Donner, and Joseph E. Trainor, eds. 2018. <i>Handbook of Disaster Research</i> . Switzerland: Springer.	
3	Jan 24	Emergency Response I: The myth and reality of disaster panic	(Article) Panic: myth or reality?: Quarantelli, E. L. 1954. "The Nature and Conditions of Panic." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 60 (3):267-275.	
4	Jan 26	Emergency Response II: the "good news" about disaster emergency	(E-book) Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 2019. "The Brotherhood of Pain: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives on Post-Disaster Solidarity." In <i>The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective</i> , edited by Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susannah M. Hoffman, 156-172. New York: Routledge	
5	Jan 31	Emergency Response III: the "bad news" about disaster emergency	(Article) Tierney, Kathleen J., Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski. 2006. "Metaphors Matter: Disaster Myths, Media Frames, and Their Consequences in Hurricane Katrina." <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 604 (1):57-81.	
6	Feb 2	Emergency Response IV:	(E-book) Xu, Bin. 2017. <i>The Politics of Compassion: The Sichuan Earthquake and Civic Engagement in China</i> . Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Chapter 1	Analysis Essay due 6 pm the day before this class In-class discussion
7	Feb 7	Organization and the State I: Disaster as normal part of modern organizations	(E-book) Perrow, Charles. 1984. <i>Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies</i> . New York: Basic Books. (Chapter TBD)	
8	Feb 9	Organization and the State II: How organizations produce disasters	(E-book) Vaughan, Diane. 1996. <i>The Challenger launch decision: risky technology, culture, and deviance at NASA</i> . The University of Chicago Press. (Chapter TBD)	
9	Feb 14	Organization and the State III	(Scanned) Clarke, Lee Ben. 1999. <i>Mission improbable: using fantasy documents to tame disaster</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.	
10	Feb 16	Organization and the State IV: Politics and the State	(E-book) Sandra K. Schneider. Governmental Response to Disasters: Key Attributes, Expectations, and Implications. In <i>Handbook of Disaster Research</i> . Chapter 26	
11	Feb 21	Organization and the State V: Discussion	Spike Lee's documentary. <i>When the Levees Broke</i> . (available through Kanopy, with Emory Library) (Episode TBD)	Analysis Essay due 6 pm the day before this class In-class discussion
12	Feb 23	Vulnerability I: Introduction	Textbook Chapter 6	
13	Feb 28	Vulnerability II: Vulnerability and intersectionality	(Scanned) Eric Klinenberg. <i>Heat Wave</i> . Chapter 2. Race, Place, and Vulnerability: Urban Neighborhoods and the Ecology of Support	
14	Mar 2	Vulnerability III: gender and disaster vulnerability	(Article) Sadequr Rahman. Climate Change, Disaster and Gender Vulnerability: A Study on Two Divisions of Bangladesh. <i>American Journal of Human Ecology</i> . Vol. 2, No. 2, 2013, 72-82	
15	Mar 14	Vulnerability IV: discussion	(Scanned) Klinenberg. <i>Heat Wave</i> . Chapter 1. Dying Alone: The Social Production of Isolation.	Analysis Essay due 6 pm the day before this class In-class discussion

16	Mar 16	Guest speaking (TBD)	Reading TBD	
17	Mar 21	Resilience I: Introduction	Textbook Chapter 7	A brief essay to discuss the topic of your final paper (5 points)
18	Mar 23	Resilience II: Social capital and resilience	(Article) Daniel Aldrich. The power of people: social capital's role in recovery from the 1995 Kobe earthquake. <i>Natural Hazards</i> (2011) 56:595-611	
19	Mar 28	Resilience III: Discussion	(Scanned) Rebeca Solnit. <i>A Paradise Built in Hell</i> .	Analysis Essay due 6 pm the day before this class In-class discussion
20	Mar 30	Disaster and Culture I: Risk and perceptions	(E-book) Cerulo, Karen. 2006. <i>Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter TBD	
21	Apr 4	Disaster and Culture II: interpretation and framing of disasters	(Article) McCormick, Lisa. 2020. "Marking time in lockdown: heroization and ritualization in the UK during the coronavirus pandemic." <i>American Journal of Cultural Sociology</i> 8 (3):324-351.	A literature review (10 points)
22	Apr 6	Disaster and Culture III: Cultural trauma and communitas	(Scanned) Eyerman, Ron. 2015. <i>Is This America?: Katrina as Cultural Trauma</i> . Austin, TX: University of Texas Press	
23	Apr 11	Disaster and Culture IV: Commemoration	(Article) Xu, Bin. 2018. "Commemorating a difficult disaster: Naturalizing and denaturalizing the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in China." <i>Memory Studies</i> 11 (4):483-497.	A research design for data and methods (10 points)
24	Apr 13	Disaster and Culture V: Discussion	(Scanned) Clarke, Lee. 2006. <i>Worst cases: terror and catastrophe in the popular imagination</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press	Analysis Essay due 6 pm the day before this class In-class discussion
25	Apr 18	Global and Transnational Disasters I: famine and humanitarianism	(scanned) De Waal, Alexander. 1997. <i>Famine crimes: politics & the disaster relief industry in Africa, African issues</i> . London: Indiana University Press, Bloomington.	
26	Apr 20	Global and Transnational Disasters II: climate change	(e-book) Climate Change and Disasters: Katherine Hore, Ilan Kelman, Jessica Mercer and JC Gaillard. Chapter 8 in <i>Handbook of Disaster Research</i> .	
27	Apr 25	Global and Transnational Disasters III: Discussions	The Quake (A PBS documentary about the Haiti earthquake in 2010. Access: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/haiti/)	Analysis Essay due 6 pm the day before this class In-class discussion