

University of Toronto Mississauga – Sociology
 SOC444H5F
 The Sociology of Disasters
 Mondays 1:00 – 3:00 PM, IB350

Instructor: Professor Steve G. Hoffman
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 Office hours: Mondays, 11:00 AM – 12:50 PM
 Blackboard/Course web site: Portal

Course Description

The modern world leans heavily on the assumption that organizations run smoothly. But often they do not and sometimes the consequences are disastrous. Consider the global financial crisis of 2008, the nuclear reactor meltdown in Fukushima, Japan, or the wildfires at Fort McMurray. When organizations fail, many can suffer and much can be lost.

What is a disaster? How and why do they occur? What are their social, economic, and community consequences? What can we do to minimize their repercussions? As we grapple with these questions, we will also pursue topics that turn out to be central not just to understanding disasters but also for our sociological understanding of modern societies more generally. This will include coverage of broad themes like the historical process of rationalization and the perils of its excess, problems related to high risk endeavors and technologies, dilemmas of organizational identity, culture, and misconduct, and the dynamics of community and isolation. As we explore these issues, our cases take us through corporate boardrooms, NASA headquarters, rural communities along the Red River in Manitoba, and more. These cases enable us to confront many of the most entrenched social problems of our times, such as corruption, coercion, and the injustices rooted in racialization, gender, class, and other inequalities.

Prerequisites, Exclusions, CSL Group

Priority is given to certain groups of students to enrol first and then the course becomes available to other UTM students on July 29, 2016. August 12, 2016 is the first day UTM students can add St. George courses, and St. George students can add UTM courses.

The following groups of students are given priority access:

- ERMAJ0727: MA CRIMINOLOGY & SOCIO-LEGAL
- ERMAJ1013: MA SOCIOLOGY
- ERSPE0727: SP CRIMINOLOGY & SOCIO-LEGAL
- ERSPE1013: SP SOCIOLOGY
- UTM Students

Accepted as Group B for CLS programs

Class/Seminar Format

A typical class session will involve an interactive lecture with PowerPoints slides, collaborative discussion, occasional audio/visual material, and classroom exercises. Participation and active

listening are rewarded. I consider *attentive listening* a form of participation. Taking notes, making eye contact with the lecturer, and in general looking alert are ways to signal to me that you are engaged. If you look bored, distracted, or fall asleep, I can only assume you are not participating.

Your participation does not require you to be correct. Learning involves making mistakes. As economist Kenneth Boulding once said, “Nothing fails like success because we don't learn from it. We learn only from failure.” Unfortunately, too much of the educational system is oriented to memorization. Although recall is a key part of learning, it is a fairly superficial one. Rather than “learning all the facts,” in this class we will try to use facts to build up portable insights that help make sense of our social worlds. Building anew sometimes involves making mistakes along the way, but it forges critical thinking skills that will remain with you a lifetime.

Learning Outcomes

This course is focused on teaching important content by investigating numerous cases of large scale and high consequence disaster. However, you should also leave this course with a set of critical thinking skills that should remain useful to you long after your memory for the details of these cases fade. In that spirit, by the end of this course you should be able to understand key sociological and transdisciplinary theories about how and why disasters occur, how different forms of data can be brought to bear on these theories, the range of types of disasters that regularly occur, and the consequences of disasters for individuals, neighborhoods, communities, societies, and ecosystems. You will also learn about how we might prevent or mitigate disasters and their unintended consequences. In addition to honing your critical capacities for investigating disasters, you will develop an understanding for how and why formal organizations have become so central under modernity and why informal social organization remains such a critical and vital component of all modern societies. Finally, by working with peers in small groups you will learn critical skills of collaboration, consensus, and formal presentation of ideas.

Textbooks and Other Materials

Articles and book chapters are posted to Blackboard or available through the UTM Library. The assigned book is available for purchase at UTM Bookstore, <http://uoftbookstore.com>, located on the first floor of the Davis Building, 905-828-5272:

- Brunnsma, D. L., Overfelt, D., & Picou, J. S. 2010. *The Sociology of Katrina, Second Edition*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Evaluation Components and Grading Policies

Type	Description	Due	Weight
Class Participation	Engage with course content, class exercises, group discussions, and active listening.	Each class	4%
Reaction Cards	Short reactions to the day's class.	End of each class (excluding 9/12, 10/17, and 12/5).	6%
Memo 1: case study idea	Short description of your idea for a case study of disaster.	10/03, uploaded to Blackboard by 5 PM	5%
Test 1	Short answer and multiple choice exam covering course material from 9/12 to 10/3.	10/17, in class	20%
Memo 2: Outline for case study and annotated bibliography	Detailed outline for a case study of disaster and an annotated bibliography of scholarly references.	10/31, uploaded to Blackboard by 5 PM	15%
Group presentation	Small group presentation on Katrina.	11/14, in class	10%
Case study	Research paper that provides a sociological case study of a major disaster	11/21, identical copies uploaded via Turnitin and Blackboard	20%
Test 2	Short answer and multiple choice exam covering course material from 10/24 to 11/28	12/5, in class	20%

Grading

Class Participation - Each class will allow time for full class and small group discussions and other ways of engaging with the course material. I highly value your input and feedback, and provide rewards for it. See below for my notes on attentive listening as a form of participation. If and when I give small group or individual in-class exercises, your completion will be counted toward the participation grade. Everyone is required to participate equally in class exercises that involve group work. Class participation is worth 4 points toward your final grade. Students that do not participate in discussions or exercises will receive 0 points. Students who participate rarely will get 1 to 2 points. Students who participate on a regular basis will receive 3 to 4 points depending on quality and frequency.

Reaction Cards – You will turn in reaction cards at the end of each class session, which are worth a total of 6 points. You will have 8 opportunities to turn in reaction cards throughout the semester. I will count 6 of these toward your final grade, which means you can miss turning in reaction cards for two class sessions with no penalty. I will not accept “make ups” for missed reaction cards.

At the end of each class, write 2-3 sentences of thoughtful reaction to that day's class on an index card (along with your name and date). These sentences can describe reading, lecture, or discussion material you found particularly enlightening, material you found difficult or confusing, questions you wished you had asked but for whatever reason did not, or something you would like to follow up on in coming weeks or on your own.

Reaction cards will only be graded for "done/not done." You will get credit for completing a reaction card unless it is clear to me that you did not make a serious effort. Reaction cards should be turned in at the very end of class. I will give you 5 minutes to complete them at the end of each session. Please do not try to turn in a reaction card and then leave class early unless you have previously obtained my permission to do so.

Case study – Throughout the semester, you will work toward completing a sociological case study of a major socio-technical disaster. You get to choose the disaster, pending my approval. The final report should be 6-10 pages in length and include scholarly sources. The report will be graded on originality, analytic rigor, how systematic or comprehensive your analysis is, and the overall quality of your writing and exposition. Additional details of this assignment, and advice for getting an excellent mark on it, will be discussed in class.

Memo 1: In your first memo of approximately 1 to 2 paragraphs, propose the case of disaster you would like to write about. You should mention what type of disaster it is (i.e. what is this case a case of?), why it is important and to whom, and how you plan to collect source material on it. The memo is primarily to get you thinking early on in the semester about your research topic, and so as long as you complete it and it makes sense as a case of disaster, you will get 4 points. However, full credit will be given to projects that exhibit clarity of thought, analytic rigor, and a systematic approach to your case.

Memo 2: Outline and Annotated Bibliography – In your second memo, you will provide a detailed outline for a case study of disaster and an annotated bibliography of at least three scholarly references related to your case study. The references may be directly focused on your particular case of disaster or they may be thematically related. For example, if you are going to write about the BP oil spill, you include a few references to research on this particular oil spill, but you might also draw from Chip Clarke's work on the Exxon Valdez oil spill for thematic comparison. Your outline and bibliography will be evaluated for how comprehensive it is, the rigor of the emerging analysis of your case, and the strength of the annotations in terms of your ability to relate them to your empirical and thematic case of disaster.

Tests – There will be two in-class tests in this class. Both will involve short-answer and multiple-choice questions. The tests evaluate your critical and creative thinking skills along with your overall comprehension of the assigned readings, lectures, audio-video material, and class discussion topics. The first test covers material from the first five weeks of our class. The second test covers material assigned for the classes between 10/24 and 11/28.

Group Presentation on Katrina – On our 11/14 class we will all collaborate on an in-depth investigation of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. The core text for this section of the class will be *The Sociology of Katrina, Second Edition*. With a small group, you will select a chapter from this book and prepare an in-class presentation based upon it. You will be evaluated by the clarity of

your presentation, the rigor with which you present your case, and your group's ability to engage the core issues raised by the chapter. I will also be evaluating your public speaking skills, but since this is sociology and not a class in leadership, this is of decidedly less import than the substance of your presentation. Nerds and idiosyncratic minds are welcome here! Finally, everyone will be evaluated individually and in terms of the group as a whole. Each of you will have an opportunity to provide anonymous evaluation of your group members as well, which I will consider when allocating points for this assignment. More details on these presentations will be discussed in class.

Course Schedule

Notes: A/V material will be presented throughout the semester but are not listed below. If you miss any of this material, it is your responsibility to view them outside of class. Some of the readings are hyperlinked directly and can be clicked on to access through the UTM Library. All others (except the Katrina book) can be found under "Readings" on blackboard.

9/12 Introductions

9/19 The Promise and Perils of Rationalization

- Charles Perrow, 1973. "Why Bureaucracy?," Pp. 1-10 and 23-30 from *Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay*.
- Scott, James C. 1999. "Geographies of trust, geographies of hierarchy." Pp. 273-289 in *Democracy and Trust*, edited by M. E. Warren: Cambridge University Press.
- [Ulrich Beck, 2006. "Living in the World Risk Society." *Economy and Society*. 35, 3: 329-345](#)

9/26 Organizational Deviance: Cognitive Bias, Entrenched Interests, or Global Capitalism?

- Marc Gerstein. 2008. "Ch. 1: The Bystanders Among Us," "Ch. 2: Human Biases and Distortions" from *Flirting With Disaster: Why Accidents Are Rarely Accidental*
- [Elizabeth Kolbert, 2016. "Fort McMurray and the Fires of Climate Change." *The New Yorker*.](#)
- [John Bellamy Foster, 2015. "The Great Capitalist Climatic," *Monthly Review*. 67, 6.](#)

10/3 Normal Accidents and Normalized Danger

- Vaughan, Diane. 2003. "Rational choice, situated action, and the social control of organizations." Pp. 443-456 in *The Sociology of Organizations*. Edited by Michael Handel.
- [Charles Perrow, 1999. "Ch. 3: Complexity, Coupling, and Catastrophe" from *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies*.](#)
- MEMO 1 DUE

10/10 Reading Week, No Class

10/17 Test #1

10/24 Recognizing Disaster All Around: From Acute to Crescive

- [Beamish, Thomas D. 2000. "Accumulating trouble: Complex organization, a culture of silence, and a secret spill." *Social Problems*: 473-498.](#)
- [Beamish, Thomas D. 2001. "Environmental hazard and institutional betrayal: lay-public perceptions of risk in the San Luis Obispo County oil spill." *Organization & Environment* 14:5-33.](#)

10/31 [Community After Disaster: Fragmentation and Conflict or Resilience and Cooperation?](#)

- [Kai Erickson, 1998. "Trauma at Buffalo Creek." *Society*. 35: 153-161.](#)

- Rebecca Solnit. 2010. "A Tale of Two Princes: The Halifax Explosion and After," from *A Paradise Built in Hell*.
 - [Buckland, Jerry and Matur Rahman. 1999. "Community-based disaster management during the 1997 Red River Flood in Canada." *Disasters* 23:174-191.](#)
 - MEMO 2 DUE
- 11/7 Inequality and Disaster Pt. 1
- Hollie Nyseth Brehm and David Pellow. 2013. "Environmental Inequalities." *The Society Pages*. <https://thesocietypages.org/papers/environmental-inequalities/>
 - [Klinenberg, Eric, 1999. "Denaturalizing disaster: a social autopsy of the 1995 Chicago heat wave." *Theory and Society* 28.2: 239-295.](#)
- 11/14 Inequality and Disaster Pt. 2: Katrina
- David Brunson, David Overfelt, and J. Steven Picou. 2010. *The Sociology of Katrina, Second Edition* (selections)
 - SMALL GROUP PRESENTATIONS ON KATRINA
- 11/21 Financial Failure and Organizational Misconduct
- [Calavita, Kitty, Robert Tillman, and Henry N. Pontell. 1997. "The savings and loan debacle, financial crime, and the state." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 23: 19-38.](#)
 - [Palmer, Donald, and Michael W. Maher. 2010. "The mortgage meltdown as normal accidental wrongdoing." *Strategic Organization* 8, 1: 83-91.](#)
 - CASE STUDY DUE IN CLASS
- 11/28 Positive Reasons for Thinking Negatively
- Karen Cerulo, 2008. "The Breadth and Scope of Positive Asymmetry," from *Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst*.
 - Steve G. Hoffman and Paul Durlak, "The Shelf-Life of a Socio-Technical Disaster: Post-Fukushima Policy Change in the United States, France, and Germany." Unpublished manuscript.
- 12/5 Test #2

Every attempt will be made to follow this schedule, but it is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

Procedures and Rules

Missed Tests or Assignments

Students who miss a term test or assignment will be assigned a mark of 0 unless they satisfy the following conditions.

Exceptions: UTM policy permits accommodation for these reasons beyond a student's control:

- Illness
- Religious observances (i.e., holy days), see <http://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/publicationsandpolicies/guidelines/religiousobservances.htm>
- Other unplanned circumstances entirely beyond the student's control (e.g., a court subpoena for which you have no option except to show up, a funeral, a car accident).
- Reasons such as "too much work", technology failure, weddings, family vacations, or not adding the class in time, are not compelling.

Missed Tests

Please read the instructions below carefully and follow the guidelines listed on the website located at: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/sociology/missed_tests

You will have to:

1. **Provide appropriate supporting documentation** (e.g., Verification of Student Injury or Illness form available at: <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>, a death certificate, an accident report).
2. You must declare your absence on ROSI. If you are a student registered with AccessAbility, a medical note is required only if you miss an assignment deadline/test date for a reason not connected to your registered disability, otherwise the required documentation may be supplied by the UTM AccessAbility Resource Centre.
3. You must present your case to the DEPARTMENT by submitting the Special Consideration Request form. You will find the link to this form and important instructions at: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/sociology/missed_tests

Timing: Requests for accommodation and supporting documentation must be submitted within **72 hours** of the missed test or assignment.

The dates for the make-up tests are posted on the department website located at http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/sociology/missed_tests. Only those students who are approved by the department will be allowed to write the make-up tests.

Missed Assignments

To request accommodation for a **missed assignment** you must present your case to Professor Steve Hoffman via email or in class.

In order not to be considered late, assignments must be submitted by the due date, time, and place listed under “Evaluation Components and Grading Policies.” ***You are expected to keep a back-up, hard copy of your assignment in case it is lost.***

- For lateness *beyond your control*, the documentation must indicate that you were unable to engage in school work *on the due date of the assignment* for a ONE day extension. For a longer extension you must prove that you were unable to engage in school work for a longer period or provide documentation that you encountered an exceptional, unforeseen circumstance. In the unlikely event that your documentation indicates that you are too ill to make-up an assignment within the term, you must petition the office of the registrar for an extension of time to complete term work.
- Late assignments for reasons that are *within your control* will be penalized 5% marks per day. The penalty will run from the day the assignment was due until the day it is submitted to the instructor via email, Blackboard, or in class. The penalty period includes weekends and holidays. Assignments that are more than 7 days late will not be accepted.
- Given multiple opportunities to submit Reaction Cards, and because you can miss 2 reaction cards without penalty, late submissions will not be accepted.

Grade Appeals

Instructors and teaching assistants take the marking of assignments very seriously, and will work diligently to be fair, consistent, and accurate. Nonetheless, mistakes and oversights occasionally happen. If you believe that to be the case, you must adhere to the following rules:

- If it is a mathematical error simply alert Professor Hoffman of the error.
- In the case of more substantive appeals, you must:
 1. Wait at least 24 hours after receiving your mark.
 2. Carefully re-read your assignment, all assignment guidelines and marking schemes and the grader’s comments.
 3. You have up to one month from the date of return of the item to inquire about the mark beyond the course instructor. If you are not satisfied with the instructor’s re-evaluation, you may appeal to the Associate Chair, if the term work is worth at least 20% of the course mark. If your work is remarked, you must accept the resulting mark.

If you wish to appeal:

- A. You must submit to the instructor a written explanation of why you think your mark should be altered. Please note statements such as “I need a higher grade to apply to X” are not compelling. Also, please note that upon re-grade your mark may go down, stay the same, or go up.
- B. Attach to your written explanation your original assignment, including all of the original comments. Submit a hardcopy of the package to the instructor during office hours and after class.

Electronic Communication and Electronic Learning Technology

Email communication is rapid, convenient, and efficient—and you are encouraged to use it to enhance your learning and experience in the course. With that said, it is essential that you follow a few rules:

- Assignments will not be accepted via email. See above for how to submit them.

- All course communication should be conducted through Blackboard or your utoronto account.
- All emails must include the course code (e.g., SOC 123) in the subject line.
- All emails should be signed with the student's full name and student number.
- Emails from students will be answered within 24 hours of receipt, but usually within 2 hours unless sent after 6 PM.
- Treat emails as you would any other professional communication.
- Emails that ask questions that are answered in the course syllabus or website (e.g., "how much is assignment X worth") will not receive a response.
- All general questions about the course that are NOT addressed on the syllabus and course website should be posted to the "general inquiries" section of the Blackboard discussion board.

Emails that do not follow these guidelines will not receive a response.

Classroom Etiquette

Students are expected to arrive at class on time having read the assigned readings and ready to engage in discussion about them. Please refrain from using your laptop, phone, or other communication technology for any purpose that is not directly related to the class, such as note taking or translation. If you insist on using a laptop, cell phone, or other communication device for non-approved or non-class related work, you will be asked to leave and will not have an opportunity to make up any work from that day.

- Videotaping and recording lectures is strictly forbidden without written permission from the instructor.

Academic Integrity

- Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean's office for adjudication and punishment. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties.
- Students are expected to cite sources in all written work and presentations. See these links for department citation formats and tips for how to use sources well
<http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/sociology/resources/resources-students>
(<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>)
- By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the university's rules regarding academic conduct, as outlined in the Calendar. You are expected to be familiar with the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/code/the-code-of-behaviour-on-academic-matters>) and *Code of Student Conduct* (<http://www.vicereprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/publicationsandpolicies/codeofstudentconduct.htm>) which spell out your rights, your duties and provide all the details on grading regulations and academic offences at the University of Toronto.
- Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The

terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Student Resources

AccessAbility Centre. We take seriously our obligation to make this course as welcoming and accessible as feasible for students with diverse needs. Students are encouraged to register with the Centre (and, if appropriate, alert the instructor) as early in the term as possible. In many instances it is easier to arrange certain accommodations with more advance notice, so we strongly encourage you to act as quickly as possible. We also understand that disabilities can change over time and will do our best to accommodate you. Students seeking support must have an intake interview with a disability advisor to discuss their individual needs. To schedule a registration appointment with a disability advisor, please call the Centre at 905-569-4699 or e-mail at: access.utm@utoronto.ca. See also <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/access>.

The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre offers workshops, seminars and individual appointments to help students identify and develop their skills. It is located in Rm 390 of the Library, online at <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/undergraduate-students> and can be reached at (905) 828-3858.

A variety of **other student resources** can be found on the UTM website under “Current Students,” <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/sas/>, including academic services, registrar and registration services, diversity & equity, administrative services, and others.

Equity and Diversity

The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns you may contact the UTM Equity and Diversity officer at edo.utm@utoronto.ca or the University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union Vice President Equity at ypequity@utmsu.ca.