

SOCIOLOGY OF DISASTER

SOCIOLOGY 313

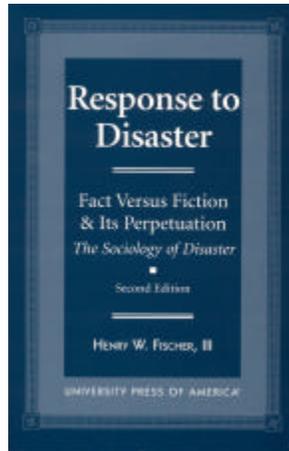
DR. HENRY W. FISCHER
E-MAIL: hfischer@millersville.edu

EXT. 3568
LUZERNE 202

Regardless of your major or what career path you follow after completing your degree, you *will* be able to count on one thing: environmental hazards and disasters will unfortunately be your constant companions. As the world's population continues to increase, continues to inhabit areas prone to disaster, and continues to develop technologies that produce hazardous environments, each of us is a potential victim. Most of us tend to believe that disasters are something that *others* will experience. If you speak with survivors of Hurricane Andrew, the Loma Prieta earthquake, the Andover tornado, the frequent mid-western floods, Three Mile Island or Chernobyl, or NYC residents/workers after September 11, 2001 you will find that they had believed "it would never happen to me." Unfortunately, disasters are increasingly common and we are often unprepared--as individuals, as a community, as a nation, or as a community of nations. By completing a course in *The Sociology of Disaster* you should be better prepared to function as an effective member of your community to enhance the chances of improving preparedness, mitigation, and response to possible natural or technological hazards.

What will we study in this course? We will determine what constitutes a *disaster* and how frequently disasters occur. We will differentiate between the various types of disasters and hazards, how communities and individuals typically prepare for them, how survivors often respond, how emergency organizations respond, how the media responds and how the media can help, and how planning and mitigation can help effect a disaster resistant community. We will consider reasons why terrorism exists, contemporary terrorist weapons and response strategies and limitations. We will examine actual disaster events and contemporary research; we will have guest speakers share their expertise; we will also meet the major disaster researchers via Internet. Each student will apply what is learned in the course to producing a project by the end of the semester.

I enjoy teaching and have a particular interest in the sociology of disaster as it is my research specialty. Behavioral and organizational response to disaster is my primary focus. I have been studying these phenomena for approximately 17 years, have presented more than three dozen professional papers on this topic at conferences throughout the world, published more than a dozen scholarly journal articles and a book (currently in its 2nd edition) on this topic. I look forward to sharing my knowledge and experiences with you this semester. I anticipate having fun together while applying sociology to a contemporary concern that affects each of us. What you learn here may help your community and may save lives—this is unfortunately even more imperative since 11 September 2001. Let's get started.



REQUIRED BOOKS:

- (1) Fischer, Henry W. 1998. *Response to Disaster: Fact Versus Fiction & Its Perpetuation. The Sociology of Disaster*. 2nd Edition. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.
- (2) Erikson, Kai. *Everything In It's Path*. 1976. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- (3) Preston, Richard. 1994. *The Hot Zone*. New York: Random House.

REQUIRED ACTIVITIES:

- (1) **Background Research.** Various Websites & readings will be designated as those you are expected to digest and write a 1-2 page summary & critique of what you find.
- (2) **Guest Speaker Reports.** A written 1-2 page summary and critique of each Guest Speaker's presentation is to be turned in within one week of their appearance.
- (3) **Book Annotations.** Two books (not Fischer's text) are to be annotated and turned in by the assigned due dates. Annotations should include summaries, personal reactions or responses, and critiques where you apply course concepts.



<u>GRADING:</u>	25%	-	Exam 1 (Essay—Please Bring Blue Books)
	25%	-	Exam 2 (Essay—Please Bring Blue Books)
	25%	-	Background Research, Speaker Reports, Homework; 2 Book Annotations
	25%	-	Project

CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICY:

- a. Attendance at all class meetings is required. Your attendance, or lack thereof, **WILL** affect your grade. Past experience indicates that by missing class the student punishes him/herself. A good performance in the course is usually directly related to class attendance, proper preparation and participation.
- b. A first cut does **not** require a written excuse from a doctor, etc. A **written excuse** (doctor, etc.) is required for a second and third cut.
- c. Four cuts constitutes grounds for dismissal from the course and a grade of "F." Reinstatement *may* be possible pending conference with the professor.
- d. Five or more cuts **WILL** result in an automatic "F" and reinstatement is NOT possible.

PLEASE NOTE:

- a. The class schedule is subject to change, e.g., readings, tests, and so forth; **you** are responsible for keeping up with any changes. Not being in class when a change was made is not an acceptable reason for missing a deadline.
- b. Exams are to be taken in class when administered. Arrangements may be made for unusual circumstances if the professor is approached and arrangements are made **before** the exam is given. Otherwise, an excuse must be presented that is signed by a physician, etc. The university final exam rules apply to this course.
- c. Experience suggests that the student who **reads and studies** the assigned material **BEFORE** coming to class performs better in the course than those who attempt, usually in vain, to "catch up."



PROJECT OPTIONS:

25% - COURSE GRADE !

Each student is required to complete a course project that provides him or her with the opportunity to apply concepts learned during the semester. You are encouraged to submit two separate drafts. The first draft will receive editing comments, but it will not receive a grade. It is due the 12th week of the semester. The second draft (also turn in the first with it) will receive a grade. It is due the 14th week of the semester.

THE SUBMITTED PROJECT MAY TAKE ONE OF THREE FORMS:

Paper

If you elect to complete a paper, it does *not* have to be a formal research paper. While it you may use an informal writing style, it should be well written and reflect the use of good grammar, etc. Include a title page (format of your choosing), pages are to be numbered, use sub-titles (bold font) when appropriate, double space, develop an introductory section to the paper that explains what this paper is about, develop a concluding section to the paper that summarizes and brings closure to the paper. Make sure the paper is written according to the specifics noted in your project selection (below)—and applies course concepts, addresses course issues, etc., clearly and completely. It should be 8-10 pages in length.

Product

If you elect to develop a product, make sure it conforms to the project specifics in your project selection (below)—and applies course concepts, addresses course issues, etc., clearly and completely. It should be a very professional looking finished product suitable for distribution or use in the relevant community.

Presentation

If you elect to do a class presentation, make sure it conforms to the project specifics in your project selection (below)—and applies course concepts, addresses course issues, etc., clearly and completely. The presentation should include the use of Power Point slides (with pictures when appropriate), perhaps illustrative video vignettes, and/or links to relevant Internet sites. The oral presentation should take between 15-20 minutes. If you need more time, make sure to let the professor know in advance of the presentation date. Handouts are encouraged if appropriate and possible.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS TO CHOOSE FROM:

Disaster Film Critique

Select and view a relevant disaster film. Summarize the film and, most importantly, apply sociological knowledge, course concepts, etc., to explaining and critiquing how people and organizations were portrayed in the film. Films you may wish to consider include, but are not limited to: *China Syndrome*, *Towering Inferno*, *Twister*, *Volcano*.

Develop Your Own Website

Develop a site that provides relevant disaster information and provides appropriate links. Launch your site and email your site address to your professor.

Disaster Plan Critique

Outline and critiques (in detail) the written disaster plan of your community or business. The primary focus of your critique is to access how successfully the plan appears to address mitigation, planning, and response needs. Include a photocopy of relevant portions of the plan as an appendix item.

Hazards Assessment

Complete a hazards assessment for your community or business. For details on how to do such an assessment access the FEMA website and/or see Dr. Fischer for Project Impact information.

Content Analysis of Media Portrayal of Major Disaster

Complete a content analysis that describes and assesses the nature of the portrayal of the behavioral and organizational response to a major disaster event. The university library will be a good source of newspaper and newsmagazine coverage. Alternately, you may video-tape news coverage of a disaster event that occurs during the semester and use this source for analysis. See Dr. Fischer for more information on how to do a content analysis.

Literature Review of a Disaster Researcher

Select a disaster researcher, obtain copies of his or her major works. Complete a thorough literature review of these major works.

Disaster Agent Primer

Develop a primer of a particular disaster agent, e.g., hurricane, tornado, etc. Information should be provided that yields the following: explaining, demonstrating the nature (natural science) of this agent (how does a hurricane form, etc.); an assessment of where in the U.S. the agent is most likely to occur (or most frequently occurs); how individuals should prepare and respond to this agent and/or guide how communities should prepare to mitigate against and respond to the disaster agent.

Shadow a Disaster Mentor

Spend the day with a practitioner or researcher (e.g., DRC). Observe what they do in the course of their job and interview them to gain detailed information. Summarize and assess what you learned.

Develop Your Own Idea

Design a project idea of your own—with the prof's approval.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Introduction to Sociology of Disaster

Course Orientation, Video Illustrations, Name Game
Student & Professor Personal Disaster Experiences/Road to Research
Why Study Disasters?
The History of Disaster Research & Who's Who in the Sociology of
Disaster
Prince & The Halifax Explosion—Video *Sea Tales*
The Work of the Disaster Research Center (DRC,UD)
The Work of the Natural Hazards Center (UC)
Disaster Research Journals
Professional Organizations: ISA RC39; IAEM
The Sociological Perspective: Behavior in Everyday Life

II. Dimensions of Disaster

What is a Disaster?
Differences Between: Emergencies, Hazards, & Disasters
The Fischer Disaster Scale, Disaster Time Periods & Frequency of Disaster Events
Socio-Economic Differences in Disaster
Types of Hazards or “Disaster Agents”
Natural Hazards:
Hurricanes, Tornadoes, Earthquakes, Tsunamis, Volcanoes, Floods,
Droughts, Conflagrations, Famine
Video Illustrations: *I Survived a Disaster &/or Cyclone!*
Technological Hazards:
Hazardous Materials (Fixed Site & Transportation), Nuclear Power Accidents,
Electric Grid Breakdown, Internet Breakdown,
Terrorism (Conventional Weapons, Various NBC Agents & WMD)
Video Illustrations: Segments from HazMat & TMI Videos; 911)

III. Behavioral Response to Disaster

The Common Perception of Behavioral Response During “Disaster Time”
The Disaster Mythology
Fact Versus Fiction & Observed Behavior Patterns
Case Studies & Video Vignettes From the Field
The Ephrata Fire
The Andover Tornado
Other Video Illustrations
Research Methods Used in Disaster Research; Research Ethics

IV. The Socialization of Our Perception of Disaster—the Media & Disasters

The Perception of Disasters We Receive From the Mass Media:
Film Industry, Broadcast Industry, Print Media
Reasons for the Portrayal We Receive
Historical Trends in Disaster Reporting
Reporting & Editing Norms: Normal Time, Disaster Time; Disaster Time Behavior—
Pack Animals
The Impact of the Media During Disaster Time:
Love/Hate Relationship—Don't Trust/Trust
How the Media is Both a Hindrance and an Asset During Disaster Time— *Feed Them!*

ESSAY EXAM 1 – PLEASE BRING BLUE BOOKS

V. Organizational Response to Disaster

- Perception vs. Reality—Knowledge of Personnel, Response Patterns—Past/Contemporary
- Examples of Past Problems: Andrew, HazMat, TMI, Austin Video Vignettes
- The Disaster Organizations
 - Private/Charitable: Red Cross, Mennonite Disaster Relief, Salvation Army
 - Public: Local, State and Federal Emergency Management Agencies
 - The Local Emergency Management Agency in Normal & Disaster Time
 - The Emergency Operating Center (EOC)
 - Effective Communication—What a Successful “Message” Looks Like
 - Effective Involvement of the Media
 - The Purpose of the State Agency & FEMA
 - PEMA & Floods, Drills, Training
 - FEMA & Disaster Training, Insurance, Temporary Assistance
- The Professional Workforce: Past/Contemporary Training, Education, Career Paths
 - FEMA Goals/National Training Institute, the IAEM, Certification, Distance Learning

VI. Building a Disaster Resistant/Resilient Community

- What One Would Look Like: Disaster Mitigation & Response
- Project Impact*
 - Creating a Community Network of Partnerships
 - Conducting a Hazards Assessment of the Community
 - Identifying & Implementing Mitigation Needs
 - On-Going Communication & Updating
- Community Application Project

VII. A New Potentially Catastrophic Disaster: NBC Terrorist WMD

- How “911” Has Changed the Landscape & Our View of Terrorism
- History Lesson & the Cold War Legacy
- Sociological Perspective of Terrorism
- Conventional Terrorist Weapons
- Nuclear, Biological & Chemical Weapons of Mass Destruction
- Illustrations—Video Vignettes
- The Domestic Preparedness Program
- War on Terrorism
- What Does *The Hot Zone* Demonstrate Re Our Preparation for Such Events?

VIII. Demonstrate What We Have Learned

- Critique Video/Film Illustrations Produced for Public Consumption
- Application Activities
- Student Oral Project Presentations

EXAM 2 – PLEASE BRING BLUE BOOKS

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barton, Allen H. 1970. *Communities in Disaster: A Sociological Analysis of Collective Stress Situations*. Garden City: Anchor Books.

- Cohen, Stanley and Jack Young. 1981. *The Manufacture of News*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Combs, Cindy C. 2000. *Terrorism in the 21st Century*. 2nd Ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Drabek, Thomas E. 1986. *Human System Responses to Disaster: An Inventory of Sociological Findings*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Erikson, Kai. 1976. *Everything In Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Fischer, Henry W. and Valerie J. Harr. 1994. *Emergency Operating Center Response to Media Blame Assignment: A Case Study of an Emergent EOC*. *The International Journal of Disaster Prevention and Management*. 3-3:7-17.
- Fischer, Henry W.; Charles K. Scharnberger and Charles F. Geiger. 1996. *Reducing Seismic Vulnerability in Low to Moderate Risk Areas*. *International Journal of Disaster Prevention and Management*. 5-4:5-18.
- Fischer, Henry W. 1996. *What Emergency Management Officials Should Know to Enhance Mitigation and Effective Disaster Response*. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. 4-4:208-217.
- Fischer, Henry W. 1998. *Response to Disaster: Fact Versus Fiction & Its Perpetuation. The Sociology of Disaster*. 2nd Edition. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Fischer, Henry W. 1998. *Behavioral Response to Chemical and Biological Terrorism*. White Paper. Church Falls, VA: Research Planning, Inc.
- Fischer, Henry W. 1999. *Dimensions of Biological Terrorism: To What Must We Mitigate and Respond?* *International Journal of Disaster Prevention and Management*. 8-1:27-32.
- Fischer, Henry W. 2000. *Mitigation and Response Planning in a Bio-Terrorist Attack*. *International Journal of Disaster Prevention and Management*. 9-5:360-367.
- Fischer, Henry W. 2001. *Deconstructing the Command and Control Model*. Paper Presented at the Annual Meetings of the European Sociological Association, Helsinki.
- Laska, Shirley Bradway. 1991. *Floodproof Retrofitting*. Boulder: University of Colorado.
- Matusow, Barbara. 1983. *The Evening Stars*. New York: Ballantine.
- Mileti, Dennis S. 1999. *Disasters By Design*. Washington, D.C.: John Henry Press.
- Osterholm, Michael T. and John Schwartz. 2000. *Living Terrors*. New York: Delta.
- Peacock, Walter Gillis; Betty Hearn Morrow & Hugh Gladwin. 2000. *Hurricane Andrew: Ethnicity, Gender, and the Sociology of Disasters*. Miami: Florida International University.
- Preston, Richard. 1994. *The Hot Zone*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Preston, Richard. 1997. *The Cobra Event*. New York: Random House.
- Proceedings of the Committee on Disasters and the Mass Media Workshop. 1980. *Disasters and the Mass Media*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences.
- Quarantelli, E.L. 1978. *Disasters: Theory and Research*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Quarantelli, E.L. 2000. *What is a Disaster? Perspectives on the Question*. New York: Routledge.
- Stallings, Robert A. 1995. *Promoting Risk: Constructing the Earthquake Threat*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.