



RHETORIC OF DISASTER

RHE309K

Lauren Nelson, summer 2020

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summer session I

office hours: M 1-2:30PM and T 11:30-1PM and by appt.

Warming temperatures, acidified oceans, hurricanes, tsunamis, nuclearization, the end of the world: what makes a disaster a disaster? In this course, we will analyze various types of media to understand how disaster is depicted rhetorically and to what extent this rhetoric interacts with class, race, geography, and scale. Is there a difference between 'man-made' and 'natural' disasters? How are disasters represented in news media, books, television, and film? How might understanding the qualities of disaster as well and their rhetorical depiction in popular culture influence how we respond to them? How are disasters differently constituted when different communities are involved? How does that affect our past, present and future? We will explore how disaster is a foundational part of contemporary media's rhetoric and how disaster rhetoric is central to understanding both our increasingly globalized world and the rapidly changing climate.

Reading list:

Mark Longaker and Jeffrey Walker, *Rhetorical Analysis: A Brief Guide for Writers*, 2011 (Pearson, 1st edition) and the UNC Chapel Hill Writing Resources Handbook.

The remainder of thematic readings will be available for download from the class's secure Canvas site. In addition, students will be required to screen a handful of films and documentaries as part of the course 'readings.' The majority of these films are available for free from various streaming services or are available for a small price (\$2-3).

Writing assignments, short and long:

(Below is a very brief overview of the assignments. Please see the Canvas assignment module for details and due dates.)

Canvas discussion posts responding to a specific prompt, due every week at Sunday midnight.

Rhetorical analysis I: 3-4 page rhetorical analysis on the introduction to Nixon's *Slow Violence*.

Rhetorical analysis II and peer-review: 4-5 page rhetorical analysis on a text of your choice from the syllabus and informed by independent research. Mandatory peer-review that will help you and your peers think about how to revise work from this assignment into the final paper.

Final paper: 10-12 page independent research paper that is driven by an argumentative thesis and independent research. I strongly encourage you to think about this assignment as a revision and extension of the second rhetorical analysis paper.

Method of assessment:

This course will use contract grading for assessment. For each assignment, you will be provided with a detailed checklist that outlines how to receive a full passing and 'default' grade, which I will set at a "B." You will also be provided with detailed instructions as to how to exceed the 'default' "B" and earn an "A." This means that earning an "A" will primarily be related to the rigor and length of each of your major assignment, although attendance and participation may also affect your final grade in this course. As long as you meet the requirements for each assignment, you can expect to pass. Failure to meet these expectations will result in an "incomplete" and a mandatory revision of the assignment until it is up to the course standards. The objective of this grading style is to eliminate the guesswork and systemic discrimination that often accompanies conventional grading systems. Your work will be evaluated on the basis of its individual merits, rather than against a static rubric. You will also be provided with detailed comments on every assignment—large and small—in order to improve your understanding of course material and writing skills generally speaking.

The prompts for each of the major unit assignments will contain additional requirements that you must complete in order for their assignment to be counted as 'above and beyond work.' Essentially, I will build two tiers into each major assignment prompt and you will be able to decide whether they want to undertake the challenge of writing towards the higher tier—in a sense, you "sign up" for the grade you want to earn. A higher tier would potentially entail a combination of (1) longer word count (2) additional research or alternative research (3) mixed-genre or multi-modal component (4) more rigorous critical/theoretical analysis (5) a comparative component (i.e. a comparative rhetorical analysis of two objects). Each assignment that you complete will thus be placed in one of three categories: reject (absolutely does not fulfill the requirements of the prompt), accept (the default grade), and excellent (above and beyond the default). In the case of an inadequate assignment, students will be asked to re-do the assignment to meet the requirements. Following the ethos of this grading model, your assignments will not receive a discreet and quantifiable grade. *As a result, do not consult Canvas to check your grade in this class. I will keep separate records that are more conducive to this grading style, and you need only email me to check your status.*

Furthermore, although an "A" track student is expected to have impeccable in-class participation, the difference between a default "B" and an "A" grade will not hinge on a qualitative judgment of attentiveness and participation.

For a student to merit below the default “B” grade, that student must have serious issues with in-class participation and demeanor, more than 3 missing minor assignments, consistently late assignments, and/or the inability to complete assignments in a satisfactory and within the parameters of each prompt.

Below is a loose outline of an A, B, C, and F grade:

A: Full participation in all class activities and all peer-reviews, no missing assignments (including discussion posts), *at least* two major assignments must fulfill the high-tier requirements.

B: Full participation in all class activities and all peer-reviews, no missing major assignments, all major assignments must be accepted as satisfactory, and no more than two discussion posts can be missed.

C: Students may pass the class and receive lower than a B grade if they miss more than two minor assignments (Canvas posts), and/or miss more than two due dates. In the event of any of these missed requirements, the student’s grade will drop down one-third of a letter grade. In other words, missing three classes and three Canvas posts would bring the grade down two “steps,” and the student would be at a C+.

A failing grade would result from a student going down five or more “steps” to the D or F range.

Course schedule:

Please note: this is a reading schedule for the course, and as such *all texts must be read before you write your discussion post* for each week listed below.

6/4 - 6/7 (*INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE*): Read the syllabus before our first discussion meeting, and please bring questions to class.

6/8 - 6/14 (*DEFINITIONS*): Longaker and Walker, “Chapter 2: Kairos and the Rhetorical Situation” from *Rhetorical Analysis*, pages 7-17; Robert Nixon, “Introduction” from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. **Rhetorical analysis I due midnight 6/14.**

6/15 - 6/21 (*TEMPORALITIES*): Longaker and Walker, “Chapter 3: Argumentation,” pages 44-70; Ruth Levy Guyer, “Radioactivity and Rights: Clashes at Bikini Atoll”; Kyle Whyte, “Indigenous Climate Change Studies.”

6/22 - 6/28 (*CAUSATION & CORRELATION*): Longaker and Walker, “Chapter 4: Structure,” pages 102-123; watch/play Brenda Longfellow, *Offshore*; watch Spike Lee, *When the Levees Broke*, episodes 1 and 4. **Rhetorical analysis II due midnight 6/28.**

6/29 - 7/5 (*DISASTER CAPITALISM*): Longaker and Walker, “Chapter 5: Style,” pages 136-156; Naomi Klein, “Introduction: Blank is Beautiful” from *The Shock Doctrine*; Ethan Varian, “While California Fires

Rage, the Rich Hire Private Firefighters"; and listen (podcast): "Warning system down: California's deadliest fires" from *Reveal* (note that there is a full-length article version of the podcast linked under "DIG DEEPER" if you would prefer to read the story). **Peer reviews of Rhetorical analysis II due 7/5.**

7/5 - 7/9 (APOCALYPSE): Longaker and Walker, "Chapter 6: Ideology," pages 185-200; watch Bong Joon-ho, *Snowpiercer*; Gregers Andersen and Esben Nielsen, "Biopolitics in the Anthropocene: On the Invention of Future Biopolitics in *Snowpiercer*, *Elysium*, and *Interstellar*," 615-623. (You can stop after the section on *Snowpiercer*, or continue if you're interested in the rest of the argument.) **Final paper due midnight 7/17.**

Departmental policies

WRITING FLAG (All classes excluding RHE 306) This course carries the Writing Flag. You will write regularly during the semester, completing both short and long writing projects. Furthermore, you will, and receive feedback from your instructor and your peers. Based on this feedback, you will have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments. A substantial portion of your grade comes from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

ATTENDANCE POLICY Rhetoric & Writing has established this attendance policy for all RHE courses. Any questions or appeals concerning this policy must be made directly to the department Associate Chair. You are expected to attend class, to arrive on time, to have prepared assigned reading and writing, and to participate in all in-class editing, revising, and discussion sessions. **Should you miss the equivalent of five TTH or MW class sessions or seven MWF sessions this semester, excused or not, you will fail the course.** If you find that an unavoidable problem prevents you from attending class, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible, preferably ahead of time, to let him or her know. You will not be penalized for missing class on religious holy days. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor, in writing, well in advance of the absence, so that alternative arrangements can be made to complete work. If you know you will have to miss class(es) for this reason, provide your instructor with the date(s) as early as possible. Please note that the University specifies very few other excused absences (e.g., jury duty). When you must miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes and assignments from a classmate.

SCHOLASTIC HONESTY Turning in work that is not your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty, will result in a major course penalty, possibly failure of the course. This standard applies to all drafts and assignments, and a report of the incident will be submitted to the Office of the Dean of Students and filed in your permanent UT record. Under certain circumstances, the Dean of Students will initiate proceedings to expel you from the University. So, take care to read and understand the Statement on Scholastic Responsibility, which can be found online at <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/rhetoric/RHE%20306/plagiarismcollusion.php>. If you have any doubts about your use of sources, ask your instructor for help before handing in the assignment.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 512-410-6644 (video phone) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations. More information is available online at <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/instructional-tips-for-working-with-students-with-disabilities/>.

TITLE IX AND SENATE BILL 212 Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For

more information about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at titleix@austin.utexas.edu, or call 512-471-0419.

Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct, including the types of sexual misconduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.

DEPARTMENT CLIMATE At the Department of Rhetoric and Writing, we are unambiguous in our commitment to fostering a diverse, inclusive, and respectful professional and educational climate. For more information on our climate commitments, see the complete climate statement at <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/rhetoric/about/mission.php>. If you have any questions or climate-related concerns, please contact the chair of the climate advisory committee: Professor Scott Graham (ssg@utexas.edu).

EMAIL ACCOUNTS Email is an official means of communication at UT-Austin, and your instructor will use this medium to communicate class information. You are therefore required to obtain a UT email account and to check it daily. All students may claim an email address at no cost by going to <http://utmail.utexas.edu/>.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office. Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>.

Other important Emergency Information You can find more information about planning for emergencies on the Emergency Preparedness site at <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/preparedness/>

Behavior Concerns Advice Line: 512-232-5050 Use this resource to help fellow UT members about whom you have concerns. You can learn more about the Behavior Concerns Advice Line on their site at <https://operations.utexas.edu/units/csas/bcal.php>

Questions about these policies Questions about these policies should be addressed to:

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Writing The University of Texas
at Austin Parlin Hall, Room 3
rhetoric@uts.cc.utexas.edu (512)
471-6109