History 301.02: [Writing the] History of Environmental Disasters

Fall 2018
Class Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:50 pm; SBS N310
Instructor: Chris Sellers, N-301A, SBS Bldg., History Dept.
Office Hours: 1-2 pm, 4-4:30 pm Tuesdays and Thursdays or by appointment
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HIS 301 is a writing intensive course for junior History majors and minors, intended to prepare you for the 400-level research seminar. In this course we will be thinking, reading, and (especially) writing about the history of environmental disasters across the world, with a twentieth- and twenty-first century focus. We’ll look at a variety of disasters—industrial and natural as well as terrorist, fast and slow, bigger and littler. While we will concentrate on more on those in the U.S., we’ll also include examples from Europe, Asia, and elsewhere in the mix.

At the same time, we’ll also be learning how to write a history research paper. You’ll become acquainted with how to find secondary and primary sources, also how to begin interpreting your evidence and translating into an historical narrative, an argument about changes over time. Along the way, you’ll learn or review the basics of outlining, organizing, and referencing a research paper. And your semester’s work will culminate in a full-length (10 pp. or more) research paper on a disaster, or type of disaster, of your own choosing.

Requirements:

1) class attendance, discussion, group participation, group reports (all of which require completing the assigned readings in advance of every class (about 35%) If you have more than two unexcused absences, your participation grade will suffer. It is your responsibility to find out what you missed. I strongly suggest you find a fellow classmate to be your back up should you miss a class. The participation grade includes completion of informal in class exercises and “homework” assignments to be done outside of class. One of those assignments will be to complete peer reviews of a classmate’s work. Detailed instructions for these assignments will be given to you in class and via the BB site.

2) One shorter essay (3-4 pages) (20% each). This paper will be typed, double spaced and with formal citations, and based on a set of questions and document sets I will provide for you. You will be given detailed instructions for this essay early in the semester. Due October 4.

3) A final 10-12 page paper (40%), due in stages. This paper (typed, double spaced and with formal citations) will be based on a disaster or type of disaster you will select, and based on primary as well as secondary literature that you will gather. A proposal for this
paper is due **October 23**. The paper itself will be submitted in two rounds: you will hand in a rough draft in late November, and be given detailed constructive criticisms for its improvement. Your revised draft is due by December 12. You will be given detailed instructions for this essay early in the semester. If graded as B or higher, the paper will satisfy the History Department Writing Requirement.

**Required Course Books:**


Both are available in the online campus bookstore.

All the other required readings will be posted on our course Blackboard site.

**BLACK BOARD SITE:**

I’m creating a Blackboard site for our course, where course announcements, lecture notes, documents, readings, and other important information are posted. It can be accessed at [http://blackboard.sunysb.edu](http://blackboard.sunysb.edu). In order to log into this website, you will need your Blackboard user name and password. If you have trouble logging on, go to one of the following SINC sites for help: Student Union Room 080, Computing Center Room 138, Main Library Room S1460, or HSC Library (3rd floor.) There are 11 SINC sites (public computer labs) on campus where you can access BB. For their locations and schedules, go to [http://sinc.sunysb.edu/Sinc”](http://sinc.sunysb.edu/Sinc”).

**General Course Policies**

1. **Disability Support Services:**

   If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, 128 ECC Building (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

2. **Academic Integrity:**

   Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at [http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/](http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/)

3. **Personal Integrity:**
The University at Stony Brook expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty is required to report to Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students’ ability to learn.

OUTLINE OF COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

Readings available on our Blackboard site are marked BB below

August 28 and 30—Introduction and First Exercises

What are environmental disasters? How may we study and write their history?

Readings on Superstorm Sandy on BB:


https://inequality.studies.stonybrook.edu/wordpress/mapping-sandys-inequalities/


Marius and Page, chapter one

September 4 and 6 Defining and Narrating Disasters: Natural, Environmental, Industrial

http://www.icdo.org/en/about-icdo/history


On BB: Chris Sellers and Jo Melling, “Introduction; From Dangerous Trades to Trade in Dangers,” Dangerous Trade: Histories of Industrial Hazards across a Globalizing World, 1-16

Introducing first essay assignment: pick a disaster, do some research on its dynamics of damage, and analyze its natural/environmental as well as human/social impacts; details of this assignment to be posted on BB

September 11 and 13—Environmental Disaster (Hi)stories from the 20th Century

Readings on BB:


Myrna Santiago, “Work, Home and Natural Environments: Health and Safety in the Mexican Oil Industry, 1900-1938,” from Dangerous Trade

Mike Davis, “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn,” from The Ecology of Fear


From Brown, Plutopia, chapters 31 and 32

Introducing databases and other research tools for disaster history; looking up a potential topic for your first short essay

September 18 and 20—Getting ready to write

Reading: Marius and Page, 51-87, 164-80.

Homework: Review the different modes of historical writing outlined in Marius and Page and come prepared to discuss them, how they apply to what we’ve read thus far.

Exercise for Sept. 20: using database and research tools, outlining and paper structure

September 25 and 27—Making Nuclear Disasters Part One

Reading: Brown, Plutopia, Chapters 1-17

Research Exercises: sources, quotes and citations

October 2 and 4—Making Nuclear Disasters Part Two

Reading: Brown, Plutopia, chapters 22-30, review 31 and 32, also read 33-35

First essay due October 4

Discussion of your findings in your first essays

October 9—fall break
October 11--

Reading: Brown, *Plutopia*, chapters 36-43

Reading on BB: Kai Erickson, *A New Species of Trouble* (1994), excerpts

Writing Mechanics Exercise

October 16 and 18—


Reading: Marius and Page, 88-113

Exercise: finding primary and secondary sources related to your second paper topic.

October 23—More Unnatural Disaster Hi(stories), Local and Global

Readings on BB:


Excerpts from Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*

Excerpts from Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*

Proposal worksheet for second essay due.

October 25—no class

October 30 and November 1—

Readings TBA depending upon student interests and research paper choices

More on research methods

Secondary Source Worksheet for second essay due November 1

November 6 and 8—

Readings TBA depending upon student interests and research paper choices

Primary Source Worksheet for second essay due 11/8

November 13 and 15—

Readings TBA depending upon student interests and research paper choices
Outline of second essay due 11/15

November 20
Readings TBA depending upon student interests and research paper choices

November 27 and 29
Draft of second essay due 11/27

Reading for 27nd: review Marius and Page sections on revising and editing, peer review

Homework for 29th: bring initial version of peer review of classmate’s rough draft on Tuesday

December 4 and 6—Final Reflections
Readings TBA depending upon student interests and research paper choices
Student’s choice movie on December 6
Homework: work on revisions

December 13—Final essays due by 5 pm; please place in a box outside Susan Grumet’s office
First Set of Reading Questions for January 30th

Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 3-18; be prepared to answer in class

In what different ways have “suburbs” been defined? How does Hayden define them?

Which definitions are closest to those we came up with in class on January 28th?

In what ways does she suggest that today’s suburbs are “diverse” as well as “urban” or city-like?