Katsushika Hokusai, The Great Wave off Kanagawa, c. 1830.

**Introduction:** Welcome to ES 130A! This is the first course of a three-quarter sequence that examines the human dimensions of global environmental change from an interdisciplinary perspective. Over the next ten weeks, we will learn how people have debated the meanings of disasters, risk, vulnerability, and resilience and how people have faced these challenges in practical ways in a range of social, cultural, and environmental contexts. I have designed the course to help you develop both critical analytical skills and hands-on problem solving skills.

**ES 130A has two themes:**
1) what counts as disaster often depends on a person’s training and experience—for example, in history, in the arts, in the biophysical and social sciences, in the law, and in practice. This context, in turn, shapes how people think about the causes and effects of disasters;
2) utopian and dystopian visions about disasters may be powerfully-compelling explanations but are often too simplistic.

To make these themes as concrete as possible, we will employ a variety of learning methods using an interdisciplinary skill set: gather evidence, look for patterns or discontinuities through case studies, develop explanations about context, causes, and consequences, write and revise our ideas, engage others, and refine our arguments—although not necessarily in that order. One of this course’s main goals is for you to develop and practice these skills by participating in class and completing the required readings and assignments. At the end of the course, you should walk out of the classroom ready to explain how and why disasters develop and how to design, implement, and evaluate strategies to tackle those problems.

**The course goals include:**
1) develop an understanding of the relationships between people and the environment over time, including the social construction of disasters;
2) practice critical thinking and problem-solving skills—reading, writing, talking, listening, reflecting, problem-solving, seeing through other people’s eyes, leading, and working in a community;
3) recognize the complexity of disaster, risk, vulnerability and resilience of environmental problems. Be aware of simple stories and simple fixes.
Readings: You should complete all of the assigned readings before each class meeting. Please bring that day’s reading and notes (either digital or hard copy is fine) to class, so that we can discuss the text together. All articles are available on GauchoSpace in an effort to reduce costs for students.


Assignments and Grades:

- **Participation:** 25 %
- **Multiple-choice exam:** 15 %
- **A Paradise Built in Hell Essay:** 20 %

Puerto Rico Case Study:
- Annotated Bibliography Contribution 5 %
- Opening Statement 5 %
- Workshop Activities 10 %
- Reflection Essay 20 %

Subtotal 40 %

***For every 24 hours that any assignment is late, the grade will drop by one letter. That means, for example, an A paper turned in 30 hours late will become a C paper.***

Participation: The success of this course depends on your good-faith participation. This means coming to every class prepared to contribute to discussion. Most classes will have a mixture of lectures, discussions, informal in-class writings, and other exercises, so there will be a number of different ways for you to participate. Participation can mean something as simple as asking a question in person or over email or posting a relevant article on the course GauchoSpace page! Almost everyday I will ask for short, informal written responses about that day’s readings in order to encourage you to keep up with the readings and to evaluate how well you understand the course’s content and themes. If you need to miss a class for a personal, medical, or religious reason, you must notify me in advance. If you miss two or more classes, your participation grade will reflect your absences. Please check your email regularly. Please do not use your electronic devices during class for any reason except for note-taking. If your head is buried in a laptop when someone is talking and you are not looking up or taking any notes, I will assume that you are not paying attention. Your participation grade for that day will reflect this behavior.

Multiple-choice exam: There will be a multiple-choice exam based on course readings, lectures, and discussions on **Monday, November 20** in week 8. Please bring a bubble test answer sheet to class that day. We will practice some of the types of questions you will encounter before the exam itself. If you are a registered Disabled Students Program (DSP) student and you plan to request an accommodation, you should submit your request for the exam within the first 3 weeks of the quarter. See http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/Index.aspx.

Essay on *A Paradise Built in Hell*: In her book, Rebecca Solnit explores how disasters create much more than apocalyptic dystopias that Hollywood filmmakers and many others would have us believe. Through five case studies, Solnit offers her readers a vision of people coming together to face big problems. She read a lot of material—books, articles, and reports—and spoke to a lot of people—experts, friends, and strangers. You will follow in her footsteps. Imagine that you are writing a letter to Solnit in which you engage her claim that “disasters provide an extraordinary window into social desire and possibility, and what manifests there matters elsewhere, in ordinary times and in other extraordinary times (6).” Since she is a writer, you want to impress her with your ideas, your creativity, your thoughtfulness, and your prose. Your reply will have three parts: a personal reflection, an evaluation, and a source reflection. Each part will be about two pages, six pages in total, with page numbers, double-spaced, 12-point font with polished prose.

First, you will describe how the book engaged you on a personal level. Tell Solnit about one experience you had with disaster, broadly defined—with a particular earthquake, blackout, drought, fire, public violence, or pollution. Use your imagination to reflect on something concrete in the real world. Be specific and descriptive. Give her a sense of what it felt like for you to live through that experience. Remember to narrative the beginning, middle, and end of the experience. Think about individuals, cultural traditions, communities, and the state.

Second, you will tell her how well she made her argument about disaster. In other words, you will review the book. A well-written review is not the same thing as a book report. A good review not only summarizes what
the author wrote, but a good review evaluates how well the author accomplished her goals AND explains whether
the book matters in some kind of larger sense. Name two things that Solnit does well and two things that she might
done differently. What did she do less well and how might she have done those things differently? Here is an
opportunity for you to demonstrate your skills in constructive feedback, because it is not only about what you say,
but how you say it.

Third, you will address specifically her use of sources. Choose ONE of the sources listed in pages 321-345,
read that source carefully, and evaluate how well (or not) Solnit used that source to make her larger argument about
disasters. Describe the source itself and reflect on how Solnit summarized the source. How does this source fit into
the range of sources that Solnit uses for her evidence? How does she move between synthesizing sources and
reflecting on implications for understanding disasters? We will discuss finding and evaluating sources in greater
detail. For citations, you must follow Chicago Manual of Style.

Don’t forget to include an introduction and conclusion that brings together all three parts. Please print out
your typed, 12-point font, double-spaced essay with page numbers (at least six pages) to class on Wednesday,
November 8.

Puerto Rico Case Study: On Wednesday, September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria struck the island of Puerto Rico.
We will use Puerto Rico as a case study to understand the course’s most important concepts and practices. Here is
the premise: You have been invited by four of your smartest friends to help them start a new non-governmental
organization (NGO) to address the recovery and resilience issues in Puerto Rico. Inspired by NGOs and community
activism in Solnit, Clarke, and other readings, your friends want to understand the details of the case study as well as
decide a number of possible solutions to this environmental challenge. Your friends have asked you and other
people to assume the role/identity of one of seven important stakeholder groups, so that your friends will understand
the complexities of the issues and some of the potential consequences of the NGO’s actions and strategies.

The stakeholder groups include: 1) Your friends forming the NGO group 2) people now living in Puerto Rico
who are 70 years or older or 18 years or younger 3) people who are part of Puerto Rico’s Diaspora
communities 4) Puerto Rico’s territorial public officials (i.e., Mayor of San Juan, Governor) 5) Critical infrastructure
experts (water, telecommunications, electricity, hospitals) 6) FEMA officials 7) environmental justice activists in
Puerto Rico and 8) members of the Puerto Rico Chamber of Commerce.

This exercise will be a better learning experience if you assume a specific identity within your group: how
old are you? where do you live? what does a typical day look like? There is a range of possible identities within each
group; notice the differences within the suggested possibilities inside the parenthesis above. I will ask you to rank
your first three choices among the stakeholder groups and do my best to assign you to one of your preferred
stakeholder groups.

Annotated Bibliography Contribution: Each person will post a source to an Annotated Bibliography on GS. Each
person must post a different source: it can be an organization’s report, a news article, a TED talk video, a press
release, an op-ed column, a facebook post. You must follow the Chicago Manual of Style and put your source in
alphabetical order on GS. The url for your source must work. Your contribution to the annotated bibliography will
also include a 5-7 sentence summary of the source (who, what, when, where, why); two sentences that identifies one
or two important issues or questions in the source; two sentences that identifies which of the stakeholder groups
would benefit from reading this source and why; and finally your full name in parenthesis. The Annotated
Bibliography Contribution is due before class on Wednesday, November 22.

Opening Statement: Each group will have 8-10 minutes to introduce themselves in their Opening Statement. Each
group should answer the following questions. 1) How does this disaster touch your life? Your work? Your
community? 2) What does the NGO need to know about this issue from your perspective? What are the important
themes or ideas or histories that need to be unpacked? 3) What problems or opportunities does the issue create? 4)
What is one specific action or strategy that the NGO should consider? 5) What one question would your group like
to direct to any of the other groups?

Each person will write a three-paragraph essay that answers these questions to turn in a hard copy at the
end of class on Monday, November 27. Each essay will be double-spaced, with 12-point font, polished prose, and
at least three footnotes that cite different sources from the Annotated Bibliography. You must follow the Chicago
Manual of Style.

Workshop Activities: You must volunteer—speak, take notes, etc.—during each day of the workshop. With
guidance from the friends/NGO group, we will draw up an agenda and tackle the most salient issues and questions.
At the start of each day, the friends/NGO group will provide a brief summary and at the end of each day, the
friends/NGO group will post a question or activity for the next meeting. For the last day, each group and/or
individual will be required to sum up the most important points, answers, insights from the previous workshops.
Each group will highlight one action or strategy for the NGO to consider. At the close, we will create a plan of next steps for the NGO.

**Reflection Essay:** You will write a 8-page (about 2400 words) reflection essay that explains the four to five most important histories, concepts, insights, or skills that you have learned about the hurricane’s impact on Puerto Rico and disasters generally from the course’s readings, lectures, discussions, workshops, your group members, and other exercises. Now that the course is nearly over, how would you answer the questions: How do I define disaster? Why does that question matter in the first place? How can I take these insights, concepts, skills out into the larger world? In what ways do the histories of disasters help me respond to the contemporary challenges of today and tomorrow?

You can write in the style of a letter, a creative non-fiction essay, or a more formal essay. You can use first person pronouns like “I” or “We,” but your essay must be organized (what are the links among the four to five most important histories, ideas, insights, or skills? how does one lead to the second and to the third and so on?), well-written, proofread, and must demonstrate your critical, thoughtful response to the course.

Don’t forget an introduction and conclusion that brings all three parts together. You must footnote at least four sources from the course readings, two sources from the annotated bibliography, and two lectures or discussion comments to support your analysis. Follow the Chicago Manual of Style for your footnotes. No bibliography is necessary. Please print out your typed, 12-point font, double-spaced essay with page numbers by Monday, December 11, 3 pm. No emailed essays, please. You may submit the essay earlier if you wish. You can turn in the essay to me in my office (Bren 4011).

**Other policies**

*Crashing:* If you are not yet registered, then during week one you should sign the waiting list. You will need to attend all of the classes to be added to the roster. After Monday’s class in week two, I will distribute add codes.

*Equal Access for All Students:* If you have any learning or medical condition that requires accommodation to complete the course work, please ensure that the Disabled Students Program (DSP) is aware of your disability and that you are familiar with your DSP responsibilities. See http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/Index.aspx. I will work with you and DSP to find the appropriate accommodation.

*Gender and Sex Discrimination Policy and Student Support:* Under Title IX, university students are protected from harassment and discrimination based on gender and sex. If you feel uncomfortable or in need of support at any time related to your gender, sex, and/or sexual orientation, please contact me. UCSB’s Resource Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity is also available to advocate and be of and support to students.

*Plagiarism:* UCSB takes plagiarism and other academic misconduct very seriously. If you turn in any work that fails to acknowledge the contributions of others, it may result in failure of the assignment or the course itself. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, please ask me.

*Incomplete Grades:* Incompletes will not be given for this class, except in the most extreme circumstances, such as a debilitating illness or death in the immediate family.

*Copyright:* All of the materials you receive through this course are subject to federal copyright laws and university policies. Distribution of these materials, such as posting them online or selling them to third party businesses, are strictly prohibited.

**Schedule**

**Part 1: Definitions, Evidence, and Disciplinary Approaches**

*Week One*

M, Oct. 2: Introductions

W, Oct. 4: Personal Accounts

Week Two

M, Oct. 9: What is a Disaster?
   2. Lee Clarke, Chapter 1 of *Worst Cases*. Available on GS.

W, Oct. 11: Guest Speakers, Jim Caesar and Amanda McKenna, UCSB Campus Emergency Management

Week Three

M, Oct. 16: Disaster Capitalism

W, Oct. 18: Silver Linings
   Readings: Lee Clarke, Chapter 5 of *Worst Cases*.

Week Four

M, Oct. 23: Historical Approaches


Week Five

M, Oct. 30: Literary and Postcolonial Studies

W, Nov. 1: Earth

Week Six

M, Nov. 6: Air and Water

W, Nov. 8: Discussion of Rebecca Solnit’s *A Paradise Built in Hell*.

   *A Paradise Built in Hell* Essay Due

Week Seven

M, Nov. 13: Globally Relevant Disasters
   Reading: Clarke, Chapter 2 of *Worst Cases*.

W, Nov. 15: Power and politics: What’s the worst that can happen?

Week Eight

M, Nov. 20: Multiple-choice exam
Part 2: Puerto Rico Case Study

W, Nov. 22: Global Climate Change

*Annotated Bibliography Contribution due on GS*

*Week Nine*

M, Nov. 27: Opening statements

*Opening Statement Essay due in class*

W, Nov. 29: Puerto Rico Case Study

*Week Ten*

M, Dec. 4: Puerto Rico Case Study

W, Dec. 6: Conclusions: Why Should We Study Disaster, Risk, Vulnerability, and Resilience?

*Final Essays Due By Monday, December 11, 3 pm, to 4011 Bren.*