**Vulnerable Populations & Disasters**

**SOC 470**

**T & Th 3:30 – 4:45pm**

**Tentative Syllabus**

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**Course Description**

**There is no such thing as a “natural disaster”.** From the sociological perspective, disasters reflect a global distribution of power and human uses of our natural and built environments. While disaster risk is partially influenced by physical location, it also reflects the social divisions that already exist in a society. Simply put, social vulnerability occurs when unequal exposure to risk is coupled with unequal access to resources.

This course is designed to critically examine the relationship between social inequality and disaster vulnerability. Special emphasis will be placed on social theories of disaster vulnerability, research examining the experiences of socially marginalized populations during disasters, and strategies for reducing disaster vulnerability among marginalized populations.

**Required Textbook**

Social Vulnerability to Disasters 2nd Edition. Edited by Deborah S.K. Thomas, Brenda D. Phillips, William E. Lovekamp, Alice Fothergill (Available at the SLU rental bookstore)

**Additional readings will be available on Moodle and through the SLU library.**

**Course Objectives**

1. To develop the ability to understand the ways in which individuals and communities are vulnerable to natural hazards and disasters.
2. To compare the ways in which social groups differ in experiencing natural hazards and disasters.
3. To apply a critical perspective to the ways in which social inequality related to disaster vulnerability.
4. To employ social science inquiry, particularly sociological theory and methods of research, to analyze the effects of disasters on socially marginalized populations.
5. To contrast the ways in which leading social theories of vulnerability construct “vulnerability” and vulnerable populations.
6. To understand how the principles of social justice can be used to reduce vulnerability among socially marginalized populations.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the leading social theories of disaster vulnerability and the ways in which they construct “vulnerability”.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to compare the ways in which social groups differ in experiencing natural hazards and disasters.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to critically analyze the relationship between social in equality and disaster vulnerability.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to employ social science data and theories to analyze the effects of disasters on socially marginalized populations.
5. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how the principles of social justice may be employed to reduce vulnerability among socially marginalized populations.

**Course Requirements**

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| **Item** | **Points** |
| Tests (3 x 100) | 300 |
| Disaster Case Study | 100 |
| Participation | 50 |
| Total | 450 |

*Tests* – Three (3) unit tests will be administered throughout the semester. More information regarding tests format and content will be provided in class.

*Disaster Case Study* – Students will complete a case study of a disaster event of their choice. For the case study, you will consult relevant academic research, government reports, and news accounts of the chosen event. Students will provide an overview of the disaster event and provide a critical examination of how two (2) socially marginalized groups were affected by the event. Students will prepare a written report and provide an in-class presentation to their peers.

*Participation* – Student participation will be assessed through various in-class assignments and activities.

**Grading Scale**

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| **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** | **F** |
| 405+ | 404-360 | 359-315 | 314-270 | 269 and below |

**Tentative Course Outline**

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| **Unit/Week** | **Topic** |
| **Unit 1** | **Theories of Disaster Vulnerability** |
| **Week 1** | **Welcome!** |
|  | Introduction to the course and the study of disaster vulnerability |
| **Week 2** | **Socio-political Ecology** |
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| **Week 3** | **Feminist Political Ecology & Environmental Feminism** |
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| **Week 4** | **Social Vulnerability Theory** |
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| **Week 5** | **Community Resilience**  |
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|  | **Test 1** |
| **Unit 2** | **Factors Influencing Vulnerability** |
| **Week 6** | **The Social Construction of Vulnerability**  |
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| **Week 7** | **Social Class** |
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| **Week 8** | **Gender and Sexual Orientation** |
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| **Week 9** | **Race and Ethnicity** |
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| **Week 10** | **Age, Health and Ability** |
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| **Week 11** | **The Homeless**  |
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| **Week 12** | **Social and Cultural Capital**  |
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|  | **Test 2** |
| **Unit 3** | **Empowering Vulnerable Populations & Communities** |
| **Week 13** | **Community Emergency Response Teams** |
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| **Week 14** | **Community Responses to Disasters** |
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| **Week 15** | **Disasters as Opportunities for Social Justice** |
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|  | **Case Study Due** |
| **Week 16** | **Student Presentations** |
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| **Week 17** | **Exam Week** |
|  | **Test 3** |