

Disaster Politics:
New Orleans in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina
December, 2007 – January, 2008

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Course Overview:

This course is an introduction to the politics of disasters, disaster recovery, federalism, local politics, grassroots politics, activism, race, and public policy through the lens of response to Hurricane Katrina. Assigned readings cover these different topics from various perspectives.

After completing the bulk of the academic requirements for the course, we will live together in the Lower 9th Ward with the Common Ground organization. The daily schedule would be packed full of work (rebuilding), personal reflection (journaling), discussion (structured classes), stress relievers (yoga, meditation, etc.), socializing (discovering New Orleans' jazz and culture), and a little sleep. Students will have very few hours of unstructured time each day. This course would be an intense, communal learning experience.

This course officially starts on December 15th and ends on February 29th.

The course is broken down into the following segments:

Written Work On-line: December 15th - December 27th (You do not have to be @ Oxy)
Field Work in New Orleans: December 28th – January 19th
Final Project Work: January 20th – February 29th

Students are also required to watch films in the evenings on the following fall semester dates:

- Wednesday, November 14th, 7 p.m.
- Wednesday, November 28th, 7 p.m.

Assigned Readings:

Brinkley, Doug, 2006. *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. New York: HarperCollins.

Cooper, Christopher and Robert Block, 2006. *Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security*. New York: Times Books.

Dyson, Michael Eric, 2006. *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*. New York: Basic Books.

Howard, Judith and Ernest Zebrowski, 2005. *Category 5: The Story of Camille, America's Most Violent Hurricane*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Toole, John Kennedy, 1987. *A Confederacy of Dunces*. New York: Evergreen Books.

Participation and Attendance

To receive a grade of “C” or higher in this course, you must be active in on-line discussions pertaining to the course readings, complete the work and other activities required while in New Orleans, and attend the mandatory evening meetings each night. Students who do not participate in required activities in New Orleans will be asked to leave the course and the city at their own expense.

Assignments

FaceBook Posts – 20%

You are required to be an active part of the discussion of each course reading on the course FaceBook group. More specifically, students should post thoughtful comments that reflect completion and understanding of all four course readings. I strongly encourage you to respond to other posts so we can have as much of a dialogue as possible. When blogging, please try to engage others in a common theme or topic instead of simply describing your thoughts on the readings. Crew leaders will help guide the discussion by proposing questions of interest, but you are also expected to propose major questions and respond to the questions posed by others.

Please follow the schedule below for course readings and FaceBook posts:

Book	Read by This Date	Post Comments on These Dates
Howard and Zebrowski	December 16 th	December 16 th and December 17 th
Brinkley Book	December 18 th	December 18 th and December 19 th
Cooper and Block Book	December 20 th	December 20 th and December 21 st
Dyson Book	December 22 nd	December 22 nd and December 23 rd
Toole Book	December 26 th	December 26 th and December 27 th

Analytic Essay – 30%

You are required to complete an analytic essay no later than midnight on **Thursday, December 27th**. Please send it as a Word attachment to heldman@oxy.edu. The prompt for the essay is below. This essay cannot be written in one or a few nights, so please start the writing process by the 18th of December (when you have read three of the five assigned books).

Field Work in New Orleans – 20%

This portion of the grade will be based on the effort you put into house rebuilding and other service work, and your attitude on the worksite. Your crew leaders will grade you on these dimensions in consultation with Professor Heldman. Your work grade will suffer if fail to work with your group, take unusually long breaks, complain incessantly, engage in high risk behaviors, fail to listen to direction from your crew leader, or are disrespectful to other members of your crew. Your field work grade will also suffer if you fail to attend mandatory evening meetings or show up late to these meetings, or if you consistently have a problem waking up in the morning and getting to your job site.

Journal – 10%

You are required to keep a journal during our time in New Orleans. The class will engage in structured journaling exercises each night at the evening meeting. The grade for your journal will be based on three things:

- (1) the number of entries you complete (at least 15 entries are required);
- (2) the effort put into each entry; and
- (3) the analytic depth of each entry (e.g., Did you analyze your experiences in terms of theories and ideas presented in the assigned readings? Does each entry reflect critical thinking about the topics presented?)

Student journals are due in Professor Heldman's box (North Swan, Second Floor) on **Friday, January 25th**, one week after we return from New Orleans. Journals should include at least two entries reflecting on the trip after the class has returned to Los Angeles.

Final Project – 20%

The write-up of your final project is due no later than 5 p.m. on **Friday, February 29th**. This project requires you to inform the public about some aspect of New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Coast, your work, working in the region, etc. You can complete it on your own or with other students. Examples of final projects include the creation of a website, blog, documentary, or picture exhibit. Please be as creative as possible.

The grade for your final project will be based on

- 1) The quality of the project;
- 2) The effectiveness of your community outreach (How many people were reached? What actions were encouraged by the project?); and
- 3) The quality of the project write-up.

The write-up of the final project should be four to seven pages long, and must include the following:

- An overview of your public outreach project;
- Supporting materials (DVD, posters, etc.);
- Analysis of the effectiveness of your public outreach project; and
- Confidential evaluations of group members' work (from all members), if completed as a group. (Group members should submit these individually in a sealed envelope with their name on the outside.)

Support Services

The Emmons Health and Counseling Center is available for assistance with **medical and mental health problems**. Visit their website for information on specific services provided:

<http://departments.oxy.edu/emmons/> Please visit Emmons for a free consultation if you are feeling depressed or otherwise unhealthy after the course.

Academic Integrity

A recent national study finds that approximately 40% of college students admit to plagiarizing or cheating at some point. This level of academic deception cheapens higher education and will not be tolerated in this course. Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism/cheating is no excuse since clear guidelines are detailed in your student handbook. You will fail this course if you engage in egregious plagiarism or cheating.

Please keep in mind that the grading process is not a bargaining process. You must *earn* your grade. It is up to both of us to maintain the integrity of the grading system; please do not compromise it by trying to get a grade you haven't earned. I rarely make grade changes, especially to the final grade. However, I am not infallible and will entertain your request for a grade change if I have made a substantive (clerical) mistake. If you feel that you are falling behind, or need additional help with the course material, discuss your situation with me as soon as possible. *Do not wait until the end of the semester to attempt to repair a failing grade!*

Final Grade Breakdown

Your final grade will be based on the following:

FaceBook Posts	20% (at least five posts)
Analytic Essay	30%
NOLA Work	20%
Journal	10%
Final Project/ Write-up	20%
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Total	100%

Analytic Essay Prompt

Learning Goals:

- To demonstrate completion and understanding of the course readings;
- To demonstrate ability to use multiple authors and different types of evidence to support a thesis; and
- To demonstrate critically thinking about the causes and consequences of the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Prompt:

What are the causes and consequences of the response to Hurricane Katrina? What happened before, during, and after the hurricane? Why did these things happen? What are the implications of what happened? Make sure to analyze your authors' arguments, and situate your own voice in the paper through analysis of the author's arguments.

Page Length Requirements:

- This essay must be a full 8 pages long, not including your bibliography.

Formatting and Content Requirements:

- **A clear thesis** presented in the first paragraph and argued throughout. Include “In this essay I will argue that...” or something similar.
- **A blueprint** near the beginning of your essay that clearly tells the reader how you will be arguing your thesis.
- **Evidence to support your thesis** in the form of “facts,” ideas from existing research, and thoughtful, balanced analysis.
- **A bibliography** with a complete list of your sources. *Use all four course authors in substantive ways.*
- **Clear writing** with few grammatical errors.
- 12-point font, 1-inch margins, double-spaced, left justified, no playing with the character spaces!
- Make sure to include an interesting title, centered on the first page.
- Number each page of your paper.

Grading:

Three grades will be earned for this assignment based on (1) content, (2) structure, and (3) mechanics. Content refers to the information presented in the essay and the quality of the evidence and arguments presented. The structure grade will reflect how well the essay is organized. Mechanics refers to the quality of sentence structure, paragraph structure, use of quotes, typos, and a myriad of other grammar issues. An average of these three grades will constitute the overall grade for the assignment.

Due Date:

This essay is due no later than midnight, Thursday, December 27th (via e-mail) to Professor Heldman (heldman@oxy.edu).