

EADP 1010.002 Exploring Disasters

Fall 2026

TuTh 2:20 p.m. - 3:40 p.m.

Location: Chilton Hall 274

Syllabus Last Updated: 8/21/2026

Instructor: Professor Julie Elliott

Office Location: Chilton Hall 302G (Department of Emergency Management and Disaster Science)

Office Hours: Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. (or by appointment)

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Teaching Assistants

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Course Description and Objectives

This course introduces hazards and disasters and discusses the impacts they have on society. Emphasis is given to the role of culture in shaping risks, vulnerability, and resilience. Students will explore the breadth of the emergency management and disaster science fields as well as the causes and consequences of major historical and contemporary disasters. This course is designed to:

- Raise awareness of hazards, disasters, and how they shape communities worldwide.
- Expose students to the concepts of vulnerability and resilience at multiple scales: individual, community, and nation.
- Consider the causes and consequences of major historical and current disasters.
- Introduce students to various risk reduction strategies and examine their potential benefits and drawbacks.
- Explore the breadth of emergency management and disaster science fields.

Required Materials

You should have the following materials to complete this course:

- A three-ring binder for in-class activities
- Internet access for accessing readings and submitting assignments via Canvas
- A device with Internet access to participate in some in-class activities

There is no textbook for this course. Assigned readings include relevant news articles, thought pieces, research briefs, book chapter excerpts, and podcasts (listen or read the linked transcript). These materials will be posted on Canvas, organized by week. I intend for readings to provide background before the lecture and spark questions about class discussion topics. Content from assigned readings may appear in course exams.

How to Succeed in this Course

- **Show up.** Come to every class. You are expected to attend every class period and participate in class discussions and activities. While in class, be engaged: take notes, ask questions, and participate in activities.
- **Find support.** Meet with me or our teaching assistants during office hours. Office hours offer you an opportunity to ask for clarification or find support with understanding class material. Further, there are several other resources the university has made available to you to support your education. I strongly encourage you to utilize the Learning Center for tutoring or the visit the Writing Lab as you work on your paper for this course. Consider forming a study group with other students in this class.
- **Be prepared.** Read assigned readings prior to the start of class and be prepared to discuss concepts during class. Carefully read the syllabus to ensure you understand expectations for class assignments, exams, and activities.
- **Stay focused.** Every assignment, every project, every exam in college prepares you for your future. Stay focused on your goals. Your hard work now will pay off.

Accommodations

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it is important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the Office of Disability Access website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

Academic Success Resources

UNT strives to offer a high-quality education in a supportive environment where you can learn, grow, and thrive. As a faculty member, I am committed to supporting you, and I want to remind you that UNT offers a range of mental health and wellness services to help maintain balance and well-being. Utilizing these resources is a proactive way to support your academic and personal success. To explore campus resources designed to support you, check out mental health services (<https://clear.unt.edu/student->

[support-services-policies](#)), visit unt.edu/success, and explore unt.edu/wellness. To get all your enrollment and student financial-related questions answered, go to scrappysays.unt.edu.

Communication Practices

How You Will Communicate with Us

Whenever you have a question about absences, the syllabus, course materials, assignments, or anything else related to this course (and your question is not answered in the syllabus or during our scheduled class time), I encourage you to contact our teaching assistants (TAs). We have two TAs in this class.

Please send your initial email through our TAs, as they may be able to answer your question quicker than me. If your email is about something the TAs cannot address, they will forward the email to me.

When communicating with us, please be mindful of the following guidelines:

- When emailing, please include EADP 1010 in the subject line.
- We strive to respond within 2 business days; if you do not receive a reply within 2 days, I encourage you to send a follow-up message. A gentle nudge is always appreciated. Keep in mind that response times may be longer on weekends and holidays.
- All communication related to this class should be professional. I will not tolerate rudeness or disrespect directed toward myself, our teaching assistants, or other students.
- Some questions are better addressed verbally – for instance, **we cannot discuss grades via email**. In these instances, I encourage you to visit me or our TAs during office hours.

How I Will Communicate with You

I send all class-wide communication about this course through Canvas. I will be posting several announcements throughout the semester so please check Canvas frequently! I recommend downloading the Canvas app to your phone and ensuring notifications are turned on.

Inclusive Learning Environment

I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates may occur, personal attacks are unacceptable. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please let me know. We are all learning together.

Academic Integrity Expectations

Cheating and Plagiarism

UNT Policy 06.003 defines cheating as “the use of unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise” and plagiarism as the “use of another’s thoughts or words without proper attribution in any academic exercise, regardless of the student’s intent.” Both cheating and plagiarism are considered academic dishonesty and violations of UNT’s Academic Integrity Policy. **I take violations of this Policy very seriously and will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism in my class.** Any cases of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with UNT Policy 06.003 Student Standards of Academic

Integrity and the process outlined by the Office of Academic Integrity. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. A student caught cheating or plagiarizing, or knowingly assisting, will receive a zero on the assignment and, if not the first violation of the policy, an “F” for the course. I also will report the student(s) to the Office of Academic Integrity for further review.

NOTE: Students who use other people’s work without proper citation will be violating UNT’s Academic Integrity Policy.

Please read UNT’s Academic Integrity policy to support your academic success.

(<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>). If you have questions about this, or any UNT policy, please email me or come discuss.

Artificial Intelligence

AI software – such as ChatGPT – is a tool. Like any tool, it can be used effectively and make life and work easier, but it can also be very damaging when used inappropriately.

In this course, I want you to engage deeply with the materials and develop your own critical thinking and writing skills. For this reason, the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools like Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini is NOT permitted in this course, unless stated otherwise during class. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. Using GenAI to complete any part of an assignment, exam, or coursework will be considered a violation of academic integrity, as it prevents the development of your own skills, and will be addressed according to the Student Academic Integrity policy (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>). If I suspect that AI has been utilized in an assignment, I reserve the right to assign a zero on the assignment and, if not the first violation of the policy, an “F” for the course.

Campus Closures

Per UNT Policy 06.049, if campus is closed for any reason (such as inclement weather or another incident), you will receive an Eagle Alert. If you do NOT receive an Eagle Alert, class will proceed as scheduled (unless I have made an announcement otherwise via Canvas). We will not have class if the campus is closed. Please add the Eagle Alert contact information to your phone and pay close attention when you receive an alert from this system: The text message will come from 89361, and the call will come from 940-369-8097.

Emergency Procedures and Notifications

Emergencies can develop quickly and with little to no warning. It is important for each of us to prepare for emergencies so we can better protect ourselves and those around us when life and safety are at risk. **Remember to always call or text 911 in a life-threatening emergency.**

Evacuation

An evacuation may be called for several emergencies such as a fire, gas leak, or bomb threat. The most common reason we may need to evacuate is in response to a fire alarm. If we hear the building alarm or are told to evacuate, we will take the following steps:

1. Quickly leave the classroom
2. Take the closest and safest exit
3. Move to the evacuation assembly area for our building

4. Wait for directions from first responders

Shelter

During our time in class, we may be directed to take shelter. The most common reason we may need to shelter is for a Tornado Warning. If a Tornado Warning is issued, the university will send an Eagle Alert message. When directed to shelter, we will take the following steps:

1. Move to the nearest shelter location
2. Remain in the sheltered area until the warning has expired AND an all-clear Eagle Alert is sent

Notifications

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). Students should confirm that their contact information is correct via the myUNT portal.

In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials. If Canvas is not accessible during the emergency, contact me via email or phone for more information: Julie.Elliott@unt.edu.

In any life-threatening emergency, call 911. Report non-emergencies to the UNT Police at 940-565-3000. Maintenance concerns may be reported to UNT Facilities at 940-565-2700.

Additional Information

You can find additional information about emergency preparedness at www.emergency.unt.edu.

Attendance

Research has shown that students who attend class are more likely to be successful. You should attend every class unless you have a university excused absence such as active military service, a religious holy day, an official university function as stated in the Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (PDF) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-039>). An absence may also be excused for illness or injury if the student can provide a doctor's note.

Because this course involves collaboration, participation is essential to learning. Please be punctual to class and plan to be present until the scheduled ending time, as you must be present to complete in-class activities and receive credit.

If you cannot attend class or complete assignments because of an emergency, please reach out to your TA and me. It will be up to my discretion, as the instructor, to determine whether the absence will be excused.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all

instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's Code of Student Conduct (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>) to learn more.

Course Requirements/Schedule

Assessing Your Work

Course requirements and their relative weight for grading purposes are as follows:

Signature Assignment 1	15%
Signature Assignment 2	20%
Signature Assignment 3	15%
Group PSA Video	10%
Exams (3 exams, 10% each, lowest grade dropped)	20%
Participation	20%
Total	100%

I will calculate your final grade on the following scale:

- A = 90-100
- B = 80-89
- C = 70-79
- D = 60-69
- F = 50-59

Signature Assignment 1: Hazard/Disaster Interview (15%)

For this assignment, you will use a provided interview guide to conduct an interview with someone (not yourself or a professor) about a hazard or disaster event they experienced. Write a well-organized report that synthesizes your findings. Guidelines on report organization and scoring are provided under Assignments in Canvas.

Signature Assignment 2: Disaster Case Study (20%)

Choose a disaster event that has occurred in a country different from your home country OR that occurred at least 50 years. Research the disaster and write a well-developed report based on your findings. Guidelines on report organization and scoring are provided under Assignments in Canvas.

Signature Assignment 3: Public Service Announcement Script (15%)

Write a well-organized public service announcement script that reflects a chosen hazard and intended audience. Research both the hazard and the proper protective actions people can undertake to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, or recover from this hazard. Your PSA will reflect your findings. Guidelines on scoring are provided under Assignments in Canvas.

Group PSA Video (10%)

As a group, create a public service announcement video/animation either 30 seconds or 1 minute in length. The PSA should clearly describe the hazard and risk and provide information on how to protect oneself from the hazard. The end of the PSA should provide details about where someone can find more information about this hazard (e.g., NWS, NOAA, DHS). Videos should be uploaded to YouTube, with the link to the video submitted by one group member via Canvas. Videos will be shown during the Film Festival (scheduled during our final exam block). Guidelines on scoring are provided under Assignments in Canvas.

Exams (20%)

There will be three (3) exams in this class. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions. Each exam will take approximately 1 hour to complete. Our exams are on the following dates:

- September 15
- October 22
- December 1

I will drop your lowest exam grade at the end of the semester. I will provide you an exam study guide the class session prior to each exam; I only provide a physical copy of the exam study guide, so you must be present in class, coordinate with your peers, or visit my office hours to get a copy of the guide. In-class activities and handouts will be extremely valuable study tools, so it is important you attend class regularly to be prepared for the tests. Content from the readings is subject to inclusion on exams.

Participation (20%)

Participation activities are interspersed throughout the semester. These include short homework assignments, in-class activities, and discussion responses. Regular attendance and engagement in class activities are essential to scoring well here. Each class session counts equally toward your participation grade. I will drop your lowest 3 participation scores at the end of the semester. I do not offer make-ups; however, I may choose to exempt a participation with an acceptable and documented absence (e.g., university athletic event, religious holiday, injury with hospital visit). Participation activities receive full credit for completion and on-time submission (i.e., end of class time for in-class activities & beginning of class for homework). Our TAs or I may, at our discretion, award partial credit.

Participation Academic Integrity Information

Participation activities fall under the provisions of our campus academic honesty policy. Students must not engage in academic dishonesty when completing participation activities. This includes but is not limited to having another student complete your in-class activity on your behalf. Any student found to be in violation of these rules will lose participation points and, if not the first violation of the policy, an “F” for the course. I also will report the student(s) to the Office of Academic Integrity for further review.

Assignment Policy

Students should refer to the schedule in this syllabus to know when assignments are due. Completing assignments on time is essential to get the most out of discussion and team-based learning during class time.

Assignment deadlines are available in Canvas and are generally midnight on Tuesday/Thursday, unless otherwise noted. I have posted instructions and rubrics for each assignment under the Assignment tab in Canvas. Assignments should all be saved and submitted in the specified format (usually .DOC, .DOCX, or .PDF, sometimes .JPG or .MP4 formats are required based on the assignment). Click on the assignment title in the Canvas Assignment tab to access the submission window. I reserve the right to use Turnitin or similar software for submission on some assignments. Extra credit and bonus credit will be given at the instructor’s discretion and announced via Canvas and/or in class.

A penalty of -10% per day will be assessed to any large assignment (i.e., Signature Assignments) submitted after the due date. This percentage of the assignment’s graded score will be deducted accordingly. All late work must be submitted in the specified format (that is, via Canvas – *email or link to*

a Drive is not acceptable). Please communicate with me about planned absences or extenuating circumstances. Exceptions may be given on a case-by-case basis.

If there is an extenuating circumstance that will or may impact your ability to complete work in this class, please contact me via email (Julie.Elliott@unt.edu) as soon as possible. In your email, please explain your situation in depth. I will consider your request to determine if make-up revisions may be provided. **I consider all requests on a case-by-case basis (and in accordance with UNT policy); I cannot guarantee approval of requests.** Please read more about UNT authorized absences in UNT policy 06.039 Student Attendance and Authorized Absences.

Tentative Course Outline

It is important to note that this course outline is tentative and may be changed. In the event changes I make changes to this outline, I will notify students in class. It is important, therefore, that you attend class to learn about changes. 😊

Week 1: The Basics

- August 18 (Tuesday): Syllabus review, Ice breaker, Hazards vs. Disasters
- August 20 (Thursday): Classifying Hazards and Defining Risk
- **Complete this week:**
 - *****Help Me Get to Know You Survey***** - complete via Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, August 20
 - **Week 1 Readings** - access and read via Canvas:
 - Olson, R. 2018. Speaking Truth to Power: Please Don't Call Them Natural Disasters. Research Counts.
 - Emergency Management Definition, Principles, and Authority. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
 - Disaster risk. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

Week 2: Vulnerability - Setting the Stage for Disaster

- August 25: Who are emergency managers? Vulnerability in all its forms
- August 27: Vulnerability – Hurricane Katrina Case Study
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 2 Readings** - access and read via Canvas:
 - Sanders, M. 2023. What's Driving the Boom in Billion-Dollar Disasters? Pew.
 - Von Meding, J. 2018. 'Natural Disasters' and people on the margins—the hidden story. The Conversation.
 - Davis, M. 2018. A tale of two wildfires: devastation highlights California's stark divide. The Guardian.

Week 3: Resilience in a Changing Climate

- September 1: Chronic, compound & cascading - How hazard risk is evolving
- September 3: Disaster resilience amid new extremes
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 3 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - Sommer, L. 2022. Green infrastructure helps cities with climate change. So why isn't there more of it? All Things Considered. NPR.

- Roque, A.D., D. Pijawka, and A. Wutich. 2020. Unity is Strength: Community Resilience in Puerto Rico After Hurricane Maria. Research Counts. Natural Hazards Center.

Week 4: The Emergency Management Cycle (Part 1)

- September 8: The Job of the Emergency Manager + Intro to the Emergency Management Cycle
- September 10: Guest Speakers – University of North Texas Emergency Management & Safety Services
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 4 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - Canton, L. (2013). Emergency manager. In Encyclopedia of Crisis Management. Sage Publications.
 - Eby, C. (2019, March 13). *The seven and a half traits of the ultimate emergency manager*. Domestic Preparedness.
 - Listen (17 min): Schneider, C.M. Earthquakes happen all over the world. Here's how to start preparing for one. Life Kit. NPR.

Week 5: Disaster Science + Exam 1

- September 15: **Exam 1**
- *September 17: Review SA #1; What is disaster science? Why does it matter?
- **Complete this week:**
 - ***Signature Assignment 1: Hazard/Disaster Interview** – upload to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on September 17
 - *No readings this week*

Week 6: The Emergency Management Cycle (Part 2)

- September 22: Preparedness and Mitigation (Blue Skies)
- September 24: Response and Recovery (Grey Skies)
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 5 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - Nelan, M., S. Penta, and T. Wachtendorf. 2023. Avoiding the “Second Disaster” of Unwanted Donations. Research Counts. Natural Hazards Center.
 - Kettl, D. 2024. Why Washington Can't Get Out of the Disaster Relief Business. Governing.
 - Hersher, R. 2025. Hurricane Katrina forced changes at FEMA. Trump is rolling them back. NPR.

Week 7: Seeing the Phases in Action, Introduction to Culture in Disasters

- September 29: What is culture and why does it matter in a disaster?
- October 1: Guest Lecture, Dr. Ronald Schumann
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Mid-Course Student Feedback** - complete on Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, October 4th
 - **Week 7 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - FEMA, 2019. What is Culture and How is it Useful for Approaching Preparedness? Excerpt (pp 9-14 only) from Building Cultures of Preparedness. FEMA Higher Education Program.
 - Schumann, R., and E. Zavar. 2024. More Than Words in Stone: Commemorating Places Reshaped by Disaster. Research Counts. Natural Hazards Center.
 - Browne, K. 2017. Who Lives Here? How Understanding Culture Reduces Suffering, Speeds Recovery, and Supports Resilience. Research Counts. Natural Hazards Center.

Week 8: Disaster Myths

- October 6: Disaster Myths, Part 1
- October 8: Disaster Myths, Part 2
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 8 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - Mooallem, J. The Lives They Lived: Enrico L. Quarantelli – He proved that disasters bring out the best in us. The New York Times.
 - Louis-Charles, H.M., B.E. Aguirre, and J.M. Kitnurse. Looting or Community Solidarity? Reconciling Distorted Post-Hurricane Media Coverage. Research Counts. Natural Hazards Center.

Week 9: Risk Perception

- October 13: Risk Perception, Part 1
- October 15: Risk Perception, Part 2
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 9 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - Tierney, K. 2017. There's Something in the Water. Research Counts. Natural Hazards Center.
 - Vogel, J. and B.G. Henning. 2023. Saving Lives from Extreme Heat: Lessons from the Deadly 2021 Pacific Northwest Heat Wave. The Conversation.
 - Taylor, A. 2014. Bhopal: The World's Worst Industrial Disaster, 30 Years Later. The Atlantic.

Week 10: Exam 2

- October 20: SA #2 Peer Review Activity + Exam 2 Review
- October 22: Exam 2
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 10 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - VIDEO: Baltimore Bridge Collapse
 - Read or listen (5 min): Rivero, D. 2022. Researchers sound alarm about electric vehicles and hurricane evacuations. WLRN.
 - Fox-Sowell. 2026. One year after devastating Texas floods, adoption of warning systems remains uneven. StateScoop.
 - Additional videos: To be posted on Canvas

Week 11: Business Continuity + Technology in Emergency Management

- *October 27: Business Continuity
- October 29: Technology in Emergency Management
- **Complete this week:**
 - ***Signature Assignment 2: Disaster Case Study** – upload to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on October 27
 - Explore: UNT's Continuity of Operations page

Week 12: Working in Emergency Management

- November 3: Special Activity – To Be Announced
- November 5: Special Activity – To Be Announced
- **Complete this week:**
 - **Week 12 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - Berliner, U. 2017. Keep It Simple and Stay Open: The Waffle House Storm Menu. NPR, The Two-Way.
 - How FEMA Works. Federal Emergency Management Agency.
 - Meyer, M. (2023). Recovery from a disaster like Hurricane Ian takes years, and nonprofits play many pivotal roles before and after FEMA aid runs out. The Conversation.

Week 13: Communicating in Disasters

- November 10: Emergency Alerts and Communication
- November 12: Public Service Announcements, SA 3 Peer Review Activity
- **Complete this week**
 - **Week 13 Readings** - access and read via Canvas

- Hagerty, C. 2024. Inside the Patchwork World of Emergency Alerts. Rolling Stone.
- Kemp, A. 2024. When the storm came, alerts came only in English. This team is trying to change that. PBS News.
- Friedman, S., Parks, E., Ayala, E., & Walinchus, L. (2025, September 3). Hundreds of Texas cities, counties unable to alert all cell phones. NBC DFW.

Week 14: Wrapping Up the Class

- *November 17: Wicked Problems in Disasters
- November 19: Burning Questions and Concluding Lecture
- **Complete this week:**
 - ***Signature Assignment 3: Individual PSA Video Script** – upload to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on November 17
 - **Week 14 Readings** - access and read via Canvas
 - Listen (46 min): Lustgarden, A., and K. Boyd. 2024. You might have to move because of climate change. Think podcast. KERA.
 - Watch: Camp safety changes put to the test. KXAN.
 - Ruby, E. (2025, October 29). After Camp Mystic tragedy, new Texas laws could shut down beloved summer camps. Dallas Observer.

Thanksgiving Break (11/23 through 11/27) – No Class

Week 15: Exam 3 and Project Work Day or Extra Credit Opportunity

- December 1: **Exam 3**
- December 3: Group Project Work Day
 - **Optional Extra Credit Opportunity: Visit to the UNT Emergency Operations Center**
 - 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM (info forthcoming)

Complete this week: Nothing. No readings this week.

Final Exam Week (NOTE: Due dates and times)

- **DUE:** Group PSA video (YouTube link posted to Canvas) by **11:59 p.m. on December 6th**
- **Film Festival: Tuesday, December 8, 3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. (NOTE THE TIME)**
 - **DUE:** *Peer evaluations of PSA group members – submit via Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, December 10th