

EADP 4050 Social Vulnerability in Disasters

Spring 2026

Chilton Hall 240

Wednesdays, 2:25 pm – 5:15 pm

Syllabus Last Updated: 08/24/2026

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Course Description

Why are certain groups of people more susceptible to loss or harm in a disaster? Survey the aftermath of any disaster, and you will see disparity in impact. Some homes receive more damage than others. Some groups and communities require more resources to cope with or to recover from a disaster. Physical hazard impacts only partially explain why these disparities exist. Social vulnerability is the other half of the answer. This course explores the many processes through which human systems and institutions create and perpetuate inequalities before, during, and after disasters.

We will examine how sociocultural attributes (e.g., gender, age, disability, class, race, ethnicity, housing tenure, and language/literacy) relate to specific needs and unequal outcomes across the emergency management cycle. **Challenges of communication, aid delivery, evacuation, sheltering, housing reconstruction, physical and mental health, and capacity building are profiled.** This course aims to engender empathy for vulnerable groups and to identify creative strategies that minimize disaster impacts and promote resilience to extreme events.

Learning Objectives:

Through this course, students will learn to:

1. Describe the social and geographic dimensions of vulnerability.

2. Synthesize research findings, documentary evidence, and personal reflections to characterize the needs of vulnerable individuals.
3. Obtain and evaluate sociodemographic data to draw conclusions about vulnerable groups.
4. Perform a holistic community vulnerability analysis utilizing the social vulnerability approach.
5. Propose and justify appropriate capacity building strategies for distinct vulnerable groups.

Course Structure

This course is a 16-week face-to-face course. The Canvas course shell includes a new module each week. This is where students can find an overview of the week's lesson plan, readings (to be completed before class), assignment details, and lecture slides (posted just before class time).

Course Prerequisites & Notes

There are no prerequisites for this course, however I do not recommend it for freshmen.

You should have some familiarity with the following:

- Microsoft Excel
- How to read academic journal articles

Given this, I recommend EADP majors complete EADP 3010 (Principles of Emergency Management) and EADP 3020 (Methods in Emergency Management) prior to taking this course.

Required and Recommended Materials

There is **no required text** for this course. Required readings and media for the course consist of academic research articles, news articles, podcast episodes, and documentary films. These materials will be linked in Canvas. Films will be available via an external URL web link posted on Canvas for you to rewatch at home, if you miss them in class.

This course has digital components. To fully participate in this class, students will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System. Additional software needs may include:

- Zoom (required)
- Webcam (required)
- Internet browser (required)
- Microsoft Word (required)
- Microsoft Excel (recommended)
 - Note: you will have access to Excel on lab machines in Chilton 240 during class or Chilton 209 outside of class time.
- Microsoft PowerPoint (recommended)

If circumstances change, you will be informed of other technical needs to access course content. Information on how to be successful in a digital learning environment can be found at [Learn Anywhere \(https://online.unt.edu/learn\)](https://online.unt.edu/learn).

How to Succeed in this Course

- **Show up.** Come to every class. All students 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 is preparing 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's 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 during our scheduled class time), you are encouraged to contact our teaching assistant (TA) first.

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

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

- When emailing, please include EADP 4050 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 in this class.
- Some questions are better addressed verbally – for instance, **we cannot discuss grades via email**. In these instances, I encourage you to visit in-person during office hours or reach out to schedule another time for us to chat.

How I Will Communicate with You

All class-wide communication about this course will be sent 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 be proceeding as scheduled (unless I’ve 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.

Classroom Emergency Response

Immediately call 9-1-1 for any life-threatening emergency.

In the event we are notified to take shelter (e.g., we receive a Tornado Warning), we will immediately move to the designated Tornado Shelter Area in the building.

In the event we are notified to evacuate the building, we will take the nearest (and safest) exit and proceed to the parking lot on the west side of the building.

Attendance

This course requires both your **physical and mental presence** for success. I expect students to arrive on time and come prepared for class. Because we only meet once a week, every class meeting is essential to your success. Although I will not take formal attendance, 30% of the final grade comes from quizzes and in-class participation.

UNT recognizes excused absences for active military service, certain religious observances, or official university functions. See the [Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy \(PDF\)](#). In these cases, or if you receive training mandates or official deployments that conflict with class, **please see me in advance so we can make alternate arrangements**. For extenuating circumstances (e.g., severe medical issues requiring hospitalization or extended treatment), please report these to the Dean of Students. I am happy to work with both you and the Dean of Students Office to come up with an alternate plan to complete the course requirements.

Please inform me if you are unable to attend class meetings because you are ill, in mindfulness of the health and safety of everyone in our community. It is important that you **communicate with me prior to**

being absent, so we can discuss and mitigate the impact of the absence on your attainment of course learning goals. An absence may be excused for illness or injury, if the student can provide a doctor's note.

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: Critical Synthesis Essay	15%
Signature Assignment 2: Local Demographic Profile	15%
Signature Assignment 3: CVA and Capacity Building Proposal	30%
In-Class Participation	20%
Exams (3 exams worth 10% each, lowest grade dropped)	20%
Total	100%

Your final grade will be calculated on the following scale:

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

NOTE: Because this course (EADP 4050) counts as a UNT Social and Behavioral Sciences Core Course, three of the written assignments, called “Signature Assignments” (SAs), will be scored, in part, using standard UNT rubrics that assess four core objectives: social responsibility, empirical and quantitative skills, communication skills, and critical thinking. Copies of these rubrics are included with each signature assignment’s instructions under the Assignments tab on Canvas.

Signature Assignment 1: Critical Synthesis Essay (15%)

For this assignment, you will write a response to one documentary film (due date will vary depending on which film you are assigned). You must be present for discussion of that film in order to respond. Detailed assignment guidelines will be discussed in class and provided under Assignments in Canvas.

Signature Assignment 2: Local Demographic Profile (15%)

For this assignment, you will choose one US city or county to profile. After practicing these skills in lab exercises, you will download, organize, and interpret socio-demographic data, writing a report to summarize findings. Detailed assignment guidelines will be discussed in class and provided under Assignments in Canvas.

Signature Assignment 3: Community Vulnerability Assessment and Capacity Building Proposal (30%)

For this assignment, you assess the vulnerability of a vulnerable group in your chosen US city or county (from Signature Assignment 2). Then, you will propose and justify a strategy promoting resilience using evidence from your assessment. Detailed assignment guidelines will be discussed in class and provided under Assignments in Canvas.

In-Class Participation (20%)

Participation activities are interspersed throughout the semester. These include lab activities, exercises/simulations, and discussions. Regular attendance and engagement in class activities are essential to scoring well here. Each class session counts equally toward your participation grade. The lowest 3 participation scores are dropped. **Participation activities completed during class may NOT be made up**; however, participations may be exempted 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). Partial credit may be awarded at the discretion of the instructor or TA for incomplete submissions.

Exams (20%)

There will be three (3) exams in this class. Exams will consist of multiple choice, true/false, short answer, and essay questions. Each exam will be facilitated during class time on the following dates:

- September 23
- October 28
- December 9

The lowest exam grade will be automatically dropped. Students will be provided an exam study guide the class prior to the exam. NOTE: All material related to this class (including readings, in-class activities, lectures, handouts, etc.) will be subject to inclusion on the exam. It is important to attend class regularly to be best prepared for the tests.

Assignment Policy

Students should refer to the schedule in this syllabus to know when assignments are due. Official due dates and times will be posted in Canvas in the Syllabus tab. Instructions and rubrics for each assignment are posted under the Assignment tab in Canvas. **Assignments should all be saved and submitted to Canvas as either .DOC, .DOCX, or .PDF file types.** Do not use any Mac file extension (e.g., .pages, .numbers); these formats are unreadable in Canvas and will NOT be scored. Click on the assignment title in the Canvas Assignment tab to access the submission window. **I reserve the right to use Turnitin or similar plagiarism detection software on submitted assignments.** Instances of cheating, plagiarism, or academic dishonesty will be addressed according to the [Student Academic Integrity policy](#) (UNT Policy 06.003).

Late Work

Submitting work on time is crucial to receiving timely feedback and scores on assignments.

- I will only accept late work for major assignments (SA 1, SA 2, SA 3)
- A late penalty will be applied to late assignments; the penalty is -10% *per day* the assignment is late. (Percentage of total score possible will be deducted accordingly.)
- All late work must be submitted in the specified format (e.g., all major projects are due via Canvas).
- If you have an extenuating and documented reason (see examples under Attendance Policy) for submitting late work, I may waive or reduce the late penalty at my discretion. Please communicate with me as soon as possible if you anticipate missing a deadline so we can make alternate arrangements.

Tentative Course Outline

It is important to note that this course outline is tentative and may be changed. In the event changes to the outline are made, students will be notified in class. It is important, therefore, that students attend class to learn about important changes.

Week 1: Emergency Management Basics and an Introduction to Vulnerability

- Class Meeting: August 19 (Wednesday)
 1. Syllabus Review
 2. Lecture
 3. **Activity:** How Vulnerable Are We?
- Readings: No readings. Get ahead on Week 2 readings.
- Assignments:
 1. Complete the *Help Me Get to Know You* survey via Canvas by Sunday, August 23 at 11:59 p.m. ☺

Week 2: Social Vulnerability Applications and Theory

- **Read before class:**
 1. Cutter, S.L. 1996. "Vulnerability to environmental hazards."
 2. Brown-Jeffy, S, and Kroll-Smith, S. 2009. "Recovering Inequality: Democracy, the Market Economy, and the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire." (access via [Course Reserves](#) – use password "elliott2")
 3. Weber, L. 2010. "The Story of Margaret Welch: A Case Study." (access via [Course Reserves](#) – use password "elliott2")
- Class Meeting: August 26
 1. Lecture
 2. **Activity:** Embodying Vulnerability Through Intersectionality

Week 3: Gender and Disasters

- **Read before class:**
 1. Richter, R. and Flowers, T. 2010. "Gender Aware Disaster Care: Issues and Interventions in Supplies, Services, Triage and Treatment."
 2. Tobin-Gurley, J., et al. 2010. "Displaced Single Mothers in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: Resource Needs and Resource Acquisition."
- Class Meeting: September 9
 1. Lecture
 2. **Activity:** Interpreting Social Data (preparation for Signature Assignment 2)

Week 4: Children and Older Adults

- **Read before class:**
 1. Peek, L. 2008. "Children in Disasters"
 2. MDC. "When Disaster Strikes – Promising Practices: Older Adults."
 3. News article: Karlamangla et al. 2025. "How Two Cabins Turned Into an Epicenter of Grief in the Texas Floods."
- Class Meeting: September 2
 1. Lecture
 2. **Activity:** Trading Perspectives

3. Film A: Children of the Tsunami (for Signature Assignment 1A)

Week 5: Disability and Functional Needs

- **Read before class:**
 1. Stough, L. M., Sharp, A. N., Resch, J. A., Decker, C., & Wilker, N. (2016). Barriers to the long-term recovery of individuals with disabilities following a disaster. *Disasters*, 40(3), 387–410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12161>
 2. Stough, L.M. and Kang, D. 2016. “The Sendai Agreement and Disaster Risk Reduction: Conceptual Influences from the Field of Disability Studies.”
 3. News article: Morris, A. 2021. “‘We Didn’t Have a Plan’: Disabled People Struggle to Evacuate from Wildfires.”
- Class Meeting: September 16
 1. Lecture
 2. **Activity:** Review an Emergency Shelter Plan
 3. Exam 1 Review

Week 6: Exam 1

- Class Meeting: September 23
 1. **Exam 1**
- **DUE:** Signature Assignment 1A (*if you were assigned to Film A*)

Week 7: Housing, Homelessness, and Poverty

- **Read before class:**
 1. Elliott, J., et al. 2025. “Renter policies and rights in the context of disasters in the United States: A critical review.”
 2. News article: Marshall-Chalmers. 2022. “Mobile Homes [...] Are Going up in Smoke.” *Inside Climate News*.
 3. Yelvington, K.A. 2000. “Coping in a Temporary Way: The Tent Cities.” (access via [Course Reserves](#) – use password “elliott2”)
 4. Newsletter feature: Settembrino, M. 2015. “Vulnerable Yet Resilient”
 5. Fogel, S.J. 2017. “Reducing Vulnerability for Those Who Are Homeless During Natural Disasters.”
- Class Meeting: September 30
 1. Lecture
 2. **Activity:** Retrieving Social Data (preparation for Signature Assignment 2)

Week 8: Race, Ethnicity, and Environmental Justice

- **Read before class:**
 1. Pastor, M., et al. 2006. “Environment, Disaster and Race After Katrina.”
 2. Collins, T., and Grineski, S.E. 2025. “Race, historical redlining, and contemporary transportation noise disparities in the United States.”
- Class Meeting: October 7
 1. Lecture
 2. **Film B and Discussion:** “Fenceline: A Company Town Divided”

Week 9: Community Vulnerability Analysis – Using Social, Hazards, and Geographic Data

- **Read before class:**

1. Thomas, D.S.K., Hyde, I., and Meyer, M.A. 2013. "Measuring and Conveying Social Vulnerability."
 2. "Understanding the ACS: The Basics."
 3. Siebeneck, L., et al. 2019. "GIS Applications in Emergency Management: Infusing geographic literacy in the classroom."
 4. WATCH: Geospatial Revolution: Trailer and Episode 1 (focus on 7:39-11:49)
- Class Meeting: October 14
 1. Lecture
 2. **Activity:** Mapping Vulnerability with GIS

Week 10: Social Vulnerability Simulation and Hazards Data

- **No readings**
- Class Meeting: October 21
 1. **Activity:** Disaster Monopoly
 2. Exam 2 Review
- **DUE:**
 - Signature Assignment 1B (if you were assigned to Film B)
 - Signature Assignment 2

Week 11: Exam 2

- Class Meeting: October 28
 1. **Exam 2**

Week 12: Indigenous Cultures, Livelihoods and Language/Literacy

- **Read before class:**
 1. News article: Smilie, S. 2014. "Tsunami, 10 years on: the sea nomads who survived the devastation." *The Guardian*.
 2. News article: Mazzei, P. 2020. "Florida's Coronavirus Spike is Ravaging Migrant Farmworkers"
 3. Arlikatti, S., et al. 2014. "How Do You Warn Them If They Speak Only Spanish? Challenges for Organizations in Communicating Risk to Colonias Residents in Texas."
- Class Meeting: November 4
 1. Lecture
 2. **Film C (Double Feature) & Discussion:** PBS News Hour – Disappearing Alaska Native Villages & Weathering the Storm: Home Under Siege

Week 13: Administrative Burden

- Read before class:
 1. Raker and Woods. 2023. "Disastrous Burdens: Hurricane Katrina, Federal Housing Assistance, and Well-Being."
 2. Ferreira et al. 2024. "Barriers to equitable disaster recovery: A scoping literature review."
- Class Meeting: November 11
 - Lecture
 - **Activity:** Administrative Burden Exercise

Week 14: Building Resilience Equitably

- Read before class:
 1. Boyce, JK. 2000. "Let Them Eat Risk? Wealth, Rights, and Disaster Vulnerability."
 2. Schumann, R.L. and Tunks, J. 2019. "Teaching social responsibility and geographic literacy through a course on social vulnerability in disasters." (Read only p1 – top of p6)
- Class Meeting: November 18
 1. Lecture
 2. **Activity:** Resilience Building Workshop (Preparation for Signature Assignment 3)
- **DUE:** Signature Assignment 1C (*if you were assigned to Film C*)

Thanksgiving Break: No Class (November 23 – 27)

Week 15: "Shark Tank" Proposals, Course Wrap Up, and Final Exam Review

- **No readings**
- Class Meeting: December 2
 1. Shark Tank Proposals (Extra credit for presenters)
 2. Final lecture: Closing thoughts
 3. Final exam review
 4. Open lab time for one-on-one meetings
- **DUE:** Signature Assignment 3 – December 6, 11:59 p.m.

Week 16: Final Exam Week

Final Exam Time: December 9th, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. (NOTE THE TIME)