Course Description
This course examines hazards and disasters as they are portrayed in film and various media. Emphasis will be placed on understanding how the portrayal of disaster often departs from scientific knowledge of these events as well as how the depiction of disasters in various media can shape both the public and leaders understanding of disaster management. What do we learn about the phases of emergency management from popular portrayals of disaster? What is accurate in terms of the portrayal of the hazard and what is sensationalized? How do these films generally depict the role of emergency managers and the response of the public? How has recent technology changed the ways information is shared during an event? This course will address these questions and the myths commonly portrayed in film and media.

Course Objectives
The course will prepare students to
1. Understand the portrayal of disaster in film and the mass media as sociological and popular culture phenomena;
2. Analyze the portrayal of disaster themes such as hazard behavior, emergency management activities, and collective behavior with respect to current scientific understanding;
3. Recognize how the persistence of disaster myths (e.g., panic) actually affects people’s perceptions and ultimately decisions in times of crisis.
4. Examine the influence of newer social media technologies in the communication of risk and hazards.
5. Develop creative thinking skills that aid in the development of solutions to address the complex problems students may experience while in the emergency management field.

Course Text
There is no required textbook for the course. However, the weekly readings will be available via Canvas. Students are expected to complete all required readings prior to the corresponding topic’s class period. In other words, have the readings completed before viewing the week’s lecture and film and completing the quiz. Taking notes on the readings will help you contribute to thoughtful and meaningful responses to the film discussion sheets and the Assignment #2 paper.

Course Films
Students will be responsible for acquiring the films viewed in this class. Many of them are available through Amazon, Netflix, and YouTube for purchase.
Grading Scale
A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
D = 60-69
F = 0-59

Grading
1 point: Syllabus Quiz Week 1
30 points: Reading Quizzes (10 quizzes, 3 points each)
14 points: Film Discussion Sheets (7 sheets, 2 points each)
5 points: Assignment 1: Project Kickoff Worksheet
20 points: Assignment 2: “Real World vs. Reel World” Paper
5 points: Assignment 3: Choose Your Own Disaster Film Assignment
25 points: Final Project

Total: 100 points

Late Work
Late work on assignments (Assignment 1, 2, and 3) will be accepted up to 1 week after the original deadline. There will be a 5% deduction for every day late. However, no late quizzes or discussion sheets will be allowed without prior approval from the instructor.

Assignment Policy
Due dates for the assignments are posted in this syllabus and on the course schedule. All quizzes will be completed using Canvas. Discussions should be submitted as a word file or pdf. All papers or worksheets need to be submitted as a word file or pdf. All assignments need to be turned in via Canvas.

Early Feedback on Assignments
In this course, students have the opportunity to have me or the teaching assistant provide feedback on drafts of each assignment. This includes Assignments, 1, 2, 3, and the final project. We are happy to provide suggestions for improving the assignments in order to help you maximize the points you earn. I am happy to review drafts of the assignment up to 1 week before the deadline.

Assignment 1: Project Kickoff Worksheet
In order to prepare students for their final projects, students will complete a short assignment aimed to assist in “brainstorming” ideas for the final project. Students will be required to write out some of the ideas they have for the final project, using a worksheet to guide this assignment. This assignment will be due Sunday October 11th at 11:59 pm and is worth 5 points. Copies of the worksheet will be posted on Canvas by the last week of September.
Assignment 2: “Real World vs. Reel World” Paper
A significant portion of your grade (20 points) will be completing a short research paper pertaining to one of the key issues covered in class. This paper will provide you the opportunity to link the scholarly literature covered in class with a film / several films viewed during the semester. The essay prompts will be provided in class and will be posted on Blackboard.

Each paper should be 3-5 pages in length in 12-point Time New Roman with 1-inch margins. All papers should be double-spaced and the pages should be numbered. References should be included (and do not count as part of the paper length).

Careful consideration of the films or other scholarly sources is essential. You must cite a minimum 3 articles covered in class and 2 additional outside sources, which can include journal articles, book chapters, books, periodicals, etc. Papers will be graded based on the presentation of well-considered observations and interpretations, and on elements of good composition such as grammar and spelling. You will be graded on the content of the paper (70%), format, length, and grammar (15%), and your ability to bridge ideas, concepts, and terminology presented in lecture and the readings (15%). Papers should be turned in via Canvas, This paper will be due Sunday November 15th by 11:59 pm.

Assignment 3: Choose Your Own Disaster Movie
During the week of November 9th, students will have an opportunity to view a disaster film of their choice. Many of the readings in the class reference other films – this is your chance to view a film that is of interest to you. As part of this assignment, you will view the film, identify how well this film aligns with Sander’s (2009) Codes and Convention of Disaster Films, and to propose discussion questions. A worksheet with instructions guiding this assignment will be posted on Canvas. This assignment is due November 22nd by 11:59 pm.

Weekly Quizzes
Throughout the semester, 10 quizzes will be given to ensure you are keeping up with the readings. Each quiz will be worth 3 points. The quiz given during Week 1 of the course will be worth 1 point. These quizzes will be open notes and will be based on the readings assigned for that week. Each Monday, students will be able to log into Canvas and complete the quiz. Quizzes must be submitted by Sunday at 11:59 the week it is posted. Late quizzes cannot be made up.

Discussion Sheets
For each film viewed in class, students will be provided a discussion guide. This worksheet includes questions and key elements I want you to watch for in the film as you are viewing it. These questions will ask you to make note of things such as key elements of a disaster film, themes related to the portray of hazards and societal response, disaster myths, and comparing and contrasting reel vs. real world scenarios. For each film, you will be asked to answer the questions on the discussion sheet and these will be turned in on Canvas for a grade.
These competed sheets can be typed or hand-written. My goal with this is to have you make notes during the films that will be helpful to you as you prepare for the Reel vs. Real paper and for the final project. Therefore, it is okay if the responses to this assignment look more like “note-taking” rather than something that is polished and presented in paragraph format. You will be graded on the completeness of answering the questions. To get full credit, you will need to answer all the questions on the discussion sheet, it needs to be thorough, and turned in on time.

Each Monday, students will be able to log into Canvas and access the discussion sheet for that week’s corresponding film. There are 7 discussion sheets, each worth 2 points. These discussion sheets must be submitted by Sunday at 11:59 the week it is posted. Late discussion sheets cannot be made up.

**Final Project: Disaster Film Proposal**
Each student will prepare a proposal for a disaster movie that will be both entertaining AND scientifically valid. Students will submit a project portfolio including the elements described later in the syllabus. Additionally, students will pitch their film idea in a short video. This project is worth 25% of your grade. More detailed instructions about this project are included at the end of your syllabus.

**Class Materials on Canvas:**
Any class recordings (lectures of online discussions) and material used in this class are reserved for use only by students in this class for educational purposes. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Failing to follow this restriction is a violation of the UNT Code of Student Conduct and will lead to disciplinary action.

**Cheating and Plagiarism**
As future emergency management officials, it is imperative to maintain the upmost level of integrity and honesty. Your actions are not only a reflection of your character, but the reputation of this program and university. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. The UNT definition and policy on cheating and plagiarism is found at the end of the syllabus. Plagiarism.Org expands this definition to include:

- Turning in someone else’s work as your own
- Copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- Failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- Giving incorrect information about the source of the quotation
- Changing words by copying the sentence structure
- Copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of the work, whether you give it credit or not (i.e. copying and pasting from a variety of sources and calling it your own, even if you use citations.)

At a minimum, any student caught cheating or plagiarizing on any assignment or exam will receive a zero on the assignment. The instructor also reserves the right to assign the student an automatic F in the course. All instances of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the
Department and University for further disciplinary action. Please, if you have any questions about whether you are citing sources correctly or if you are unsure whether you are plagiarizing or not, reach out to me before you hand in the assignment. I am more than happy to help.

E-Mail
Students are welcome – and encouraged – to contact me using e-mail if they have any questions or would like make an appointment to see me outside of scheduled office hours. I generally respond to e-mails within 24 hours of receiving them, however, I may take more time to reply during weekends or holidays.

All students are REQUIRED to have a UNT e-mail address. All e-mailed notifications pertaining to this class will be sent through those channels. In other words, if you do not have an account set up at UNT, you may miss out on important information. It is the responsibility of the student to have this account set up. Students are expected to maintain a high level of professionalism when writing e-mails. E-mails should include a proper salutation, use complete sentences, and conclude with the sender’s signature. Also please indicate what class and section you are in. E-mails should not resemble a text message (i.e. C U L8 R). Students are training to be emergency management professionals who will one day represent UNT and the EADP program. Any e-mails that are informal or unprofessional will not receive a response.

Student Behavior
All students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. Students are expected to be respectful to the instructor, fellow classmates, and guest speakers. Any behavior that is disruptive or disrespectful – including but not limited to – talking when the instructor or fellow classmate is speaking, rudeness, listening to your i-pod, surfing the internet, checking Facebook, texting, talking on your cell phone, sleeping, etc. –will not be tolerated and the student will be asked to correct the behavior and/or asked leave the class. Additionally, no tobacco use of any form is permitted in class. We all need to contribute to a safe and open environment where everyone is able to participate in classroom discussion and activities. Repeated offenses will result in a meeting with our program director and/or reporting to the College and University.

Course Technology & Skills
Because this course will be delivered remotely, students will need to have the following technologies:
- Computer or Laptop
- Reliable internet access
- Speakers
- Microphone
- Microsoft Office Suite
- Adobe reader or ability to view pdf files
- Canvas Technical Requirements (https://clear.unt.edu/supported-technologies/canvas/requirements)

Computer Skills & Digital Literacy
As part of this course, it is strongly recommended that students possess the following technical skills.

- Knowledge using Canvas
- Using email with attachments
- Downloading and installing software
- Using presentation and graphics programs (power point)

**Technical Assistance**

Part of working in the online environment involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustration that can arise when technology breaks down or does not perform as expected. Here at UNT we have a Student Help Desk that you can contact for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

**UIT Help Desk:** [UIT Student Help Desk site](http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm)
**Email:** helpdesk@unt.edu
**Phone:** 940-565-2324
**In Person:** Sage Hall, Room 130
**Walk-In Availability:** 8am-9pm
**Telephone Availability:**
- Sunday: noon-midnight
- Monday-Thursday: 8am-midnight
- Friday: 8am-8pm
- Saturday: 9am-5pm
**Laptop Checkout:** 8am-7pm

For additional support, visit [Canvas Technical Help](https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328)

**Server and Online Issues**

The University is committed to providing a reliable online course system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty which prevents students from completing a time sensitive assessment activity, I will extend the time windows and provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Students should immediately report any problems to the instructor and contact the UNT Student Help Desk: helpdesk@unt.edu or 940.565.2324 and obtain a ticket number. The instructor and the UNT Student Help Desk will work with the student to resolve any issues at the earliest possible time.

**UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENT POLICIES**

*End of the Semester Evaluations*

Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) is the student evaluation system for UNT and allows students the ability to confidentially provide constructive feedback to their instructor and
department to improve the quality of student experiences in the course. The SPOT assessment is made available during the last 2 weeks of the course and the instructor will remind the students to compete this important process.

RELEVANT POLICIES TO THIS COURSE

CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM: Academic integrity emanates from a culture that embraces the core values of trust and honesty necessary for full learning to occur. As a student-centered public research university, the University of North Texas promotes the integrity of the learning process by establishing and enforcing academic standards. Academic dishonesty breaches the mutual trust necessary in an academic environment and undermines all scholarship. 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.” Cases of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with UNT Policy 06.003 Student Standards of Academic Integrity and in accordance with the process outlined by the Office of Academic Integrity (http://facultysuccess.unt.edu/academic-integrity).

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION: The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at http://www.unt.edu/oda. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

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. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.deanofstudents.unt.edu

PORTABLE ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM: When used appropriately, certain technologies, such as laptop computers, tablets, and smartphones, can enhance the university classroom experience. They also increasingly play a role in promoting campus safety by allowing students to receive severe weather alerts and other important risk information.
However, when used inappropriately those same technologies can become a distraction to the individual user, other students, and the instructor. Thus, while students may use portable electronic devices for taking class notes, searching the web for class-related content and resources, and receiving risk warnings and alerts, they may not be used for conducting personal communications (e.g., texting and e-mailing), accessing social media, or any other non-academic purposes. In the event that a student’s use of portable electronic devices causes a distraction, he or she will first be asked to refrain from such use, and, if the problem persists, will be asked to leave the classroom.

**Student Support Services -- Mental Health**

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- [UNT Care Team](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)
- [UNT Psychiatric Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry)
- [Individual Counseling](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling)

**Emergency Notification & Procedures**

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). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Retention of Student Records**

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student’s records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University’s policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.
Final Project

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to allow students to apply the cinematic and scientific material they have learned in this course in the creation of a disaster film idea.

Project Overview: Imagine that you are a film writer or director and you are trying to sell your new disaster film idea to a studio. You will select an appropriate disaster; outline a plot; emphasize its cinematic and scientific value (providing evidence for why you think this combination works); provide examples of engaging dialogue; and include other elements that you feel will make a persuasive case for making your film. The project culminates with students “pitching” their ideas to a film producer (the course instructor).

Due Date: Projects must be submitted on Canvas before December 4th, at noon.

Project Grade Breakdown
Portfolio Content – 80%
Final Presentation – 20%

Portfolio Content
Each student will be required to turn in a portfolio containing all project materials. A score sheet for this part of the project will be posted on Canvas. Your portfolio must contain the following elements in this specific order:

1) Film Poster containing the title of the film.

2) Synopsis of the Plot - in a paragraph or two, provide a brief synopsis the film (e.g. what you would see on the back of a DVD or VHS cover)

3) Marketing taglines – you must include three creative marketing taglines that will be used to advertise your film.

4) Cast page - who will star in your film? Explain in 2-3 sentences for each actor/actress why these individuals were chosen to appear in your film. You must do this for at least 5 characters.

5) Theme song/songs - select at least one theme song for your film. Next, provide a paragraph describing why you chose this song.

6) Outline the Plot- this section includes several components: (2-3 pages, you may need more)
   a. Character backgrounds - describe all important characters in your film. What is their background/backstory? What role do they play in this movie? For each important character, provide 3-4 sentences about their background.
   b. Setting - where does your film take place? Why did your group select this setting? Describe the location of this setting and any other information that you feel is important about the chosen location.
c. **Disaster** - describe the disaster or disasters. Why does it happen? What impact does it have on people and places? Describe the scope and magnitude of the event, using scientific terminology. Included in this section, please discuss what is accurate about your portrayal of the disaster and what measures, if any, were taken to alter the “ordinary” behavior of the disaster.

d. **Plot** - describe the progression of the film highlighting the various scenes you have created. Remember to include the pre-impact, trans-impact, and post-impact phases. You may do this in several different ways such as creating an illustrated story board, summarizing the different scenes in paragraph format, or using a combination of these two techniques, etc. If you have any other ideas about how you want to approach presenting the plot, feel free to run your ideas by me. (1-2 pages)

7) Provide 1-2 pages of samples of engaging dialogue.

8) Discuss the special effects that you plan to use when filming your movie. (1-2 paragraphs)

9) Discuss the film genre: (1 page)
   a. What makes your film a disaster film? When answering this question, keep in mind the disaster film characteristics covered in class. In particular, be sure to note any myths you inject into your film. Justify why you did this.
   b. What is the scientific value of the film? In other words, what is it about the material presented that is scientifically correct?
   c. Why do you think your film is entertaining?

**Presentation**
Each student will pitch their idea via Canvas the during the last week of the semester (week of November 30th) Your presentation should be between 2-3 minutes in length. Student will be required to use PowerPoint and/or Windows Media (or alternative), Zoom, etc. to create these presentations. Students will be graded on how well they present their film idea (is it entertaining, is there an adequate description of the film), quality of slides (is it readable, do animations and sound work), and staying within the time limits. Presentations must be submitted via Canvas before **December 4th, at noon**.

For full credit on this assignment, it is expected that this presentation will include 1) the film poster, 2) a synopsis of the film, 3) identification of key cast members, 4) marketing taglines, and 5) why this would film would be the next Hollywood blockbuster. A score sheet for this part of the project will be posted on Canvas.

**Consultation with the Instructor**
Students are highly encouraged to keep me informed about the progress of their projects as well as any questions you may have. If you have any questions or need help, please don’t hesitate to ask.