# EADP 4050-001: Social Vulnerability in Disasters

## Instructor Information

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### Teaching Assistants

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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 inequality. 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.

### 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).

### 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.

## How to Succeed in this Course

### Five Tips for Success:

#### Communicate with me and the TAs:

Please don’t hesitate to reach out to the TAs or to me about assignment questions or extenuating circumstances. The best ways to reach us and have your questions/concerns addressed quickly are email (useful for quick clarifications) or office hours (for more detailed project questions). The TAs can sometimes have quicker response times, so I recommend starting with them first. I am generally on campus Tuesdays and Thursdays, plus some Fridays (email about Friday availability). If my door is open, please drop in! If you need to see me on Monday or Wednesday, email me, and I can usually Zoom with a couple hours’ notice. I respond to emails within 24 hours, except on weekends, so send me a follow-up note if I don’t respond in that time frame. I might be juggling a lot in my inbox.

#### Check the reading guides on Canvas:

This is a 4000-level class that exposes you to peer-reviewed research on disasters. I realize that the journal article format may be new to you and seem challenging at first. The TAs and I have prepared reading guides for each article to help you focus on the most important information that will be quizzed at the beginning of class. Use these as your study guide to prepare your notes. These are posted with each module on Canvas. Quizzes are open notes, but NOT open book.

#### Assignments: start early and submit each one:

Assignments are a large part of your grade in this class, since there are no exams. That means opting to not submit even one could have a significant negative impact on your final grade. Signature Assignment (SA) 1 is a stand-alone writing exercise. SA 2, the CVA (Community Vulnerability Assessment) Project, and SA 3 form a series where each assignment builds on the previous. Due dates for several of these come quickly at the end of the term. For success, begin your drafting or analysis for each component as soon as we cover the required topic or skillset in class. Use the rubrics to structure your assignments and score yourself using the university version of the assignment rubric before you submit. Remember, your first draft should never be your final draft, since writing is a process! See the TAs or me with questions and make use of the [UNT Writing Center](https://writingcenter.unt.edu/index.html).

#### Collaborate with your classmates:

Don’t be afraid to ask your neighbor first, if you are unsure. Often, students will have the same question, but someone will likely know the answer. You might find this quicker than waiting on the TAs or the instructor to assist during lab exercises. Peer-to-peer learning is another way we can support each other that mimics the professional work environment. And if you know the answer and can teach a peer, research shows you learn and retain more than by simply receiving information.

#### Remember we’re here to learn and grow:

Not everything in this course will be easy. A lot of EADP alumni I have spoken to have even said this was one of their hardest classes. There may be uncomfortable moments when you are frustrated or stuck, but that is to be expected as we grow our skills in writing, spatial thinking, sociocultural literacy, and problem solving. Those same alumni are also quick to tell me that they use much of what they learned in this class in their jobs every day. Approach this class with a growth mindset and you will thrive!

### ADA 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](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

### Classroom Culture

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 belonging. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, 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 stop by my office and let me know. We are all learning together.

### 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://digitalstrategy.unt.edu/clear/student-support-services-policies.html) (<https://clear.unt.edu/student-support-services-policies>), visit [unt.edu/success](https://www.unt.edu/success/), and explore [unt.edu/wellness](https://www.unt.edu/wellness/index.html). To get all your enrollment and student financial-related questions answered, go to [scrappysays.unt.edu](http://scrappysays.unt.edu/).

### Course Prerequisites & Notes

**There are no prerequisites for this course, however I do not recommend it for freshmen**. Familiarity with Microsoft Excel and knowledge of how to read academic journal articles are helpful for success. 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.

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 SA’s instructions under the Assignments tab on Canvas.

## Course Requirements

| **Assignment** | **Percentage of Final Grade** |
| --- | --- |
| **Signature Assignment 1 – Critical Synthesis Essay** (25 points)  *Respond to one documentary film (due date varies). Requires sign up during class the day we watch the film, so you must be present for discussion of that film in order to respond.* | 10% |
| **Signature Assignment 2 – Local Demographic Profile** (20 points)  *Choose one US city or county to profile. Download, organize, and interpret socio-demographic data (you will practice these skills first through lab exercises).* | 10% |
| **Project – Community Vulnerability Assessment** (20 points)  *Choose either Option A: Social & Hazards Context Report or Option B: Vulnerability Maps in GIS (you will practice these skills in lab exercises). Same due date for both format options.* | 20% |
| **Signature Assignment 3 – Capacity Building Proposal** (40 points)  *Propose and justify a strategy promoting resilience of a vulnerable group in your chosen US city or county (from SA 2) using evidence from your CVA Project.* | 20% |
| **Participation** (20 points)  *Participation in 5 engagements for 4 points each. Engagement opportunities include 4 lab exercises, 2-3 guest speaker conversations, 1 social vulnerability simulation, 1 resilience building workshop, and 1 Shark Tank proposal session.* | 20% |
| **Quizzes** (200 points)  *13 open-note quizzes on the weekly readings for 20 points each. These are usually at the beginning of class. Lowest 3 quiz scores are dropped.* | 20% |
| **Total** | 100% |

### Required/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 posted in Canvas under the corresponding week (i.e., module). To help with retention, I highly encourage you to print and make notes in the margins or annotate these articles digitally as you read—use the reading guides to help you. Then, transfer notes to **a single 3-by-5-inch notecard, which you can bring into the quiz**. 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.

Lecture material is based, in part, on the text below. This text is accessible as an eBook through the UNT library’s website. It is not required that you follow along, however **this text may be helpful** to consult for rationale or ideas **when preparing your CVA project and/or SA 3 Capacity Building Proposal**:

* Thomas, D.S.K., Phillips, B., Lovekamp, W.E., and Fothergill, A. (eds). 2013. *Social Vulnerability to Disasters*. 2nd Ed. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press. ISBN 978-1-4665-1637-3.

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 include:

* Zoom (required – guest speakers, virtual office hours with TAs or Instructor, as needed)
* Webcam (required – guest speakers, virtual office hours with TAs or Instructor, as needed)
* Internet browser (required – we will access ArcGIS Online through a browser)
* Microsoft Excel (recommended – full version is preferred over the UNT free version included with Outlook & MS 365 – Excel is used in completion of later Signature Assignments). 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 – for Shark Tank or graphics in later projects, assignments)

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>).

## Assessing Your Work

### Grading Scale

A=90% or above, B=80-89%, C=70%-79%, D=60%-69%, F=Below 60%. I always round up to the nearest point when assigning final grades.

### 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. This will generally be 11:59 PM each Thursday, unless otherwise noted. Instructions and rubrics for each assignment are posted under the Assignment tab in Canvas. **Assignments should all be saved and submitted 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](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003) (UNT Policy 06.003).

Late Work & Grace PeriodSubmitting work on time is crucial to receiving timely feedback and scores on assignments, but I understand that sometimes there are extenuating circumstances.

* I will only accept late work for major assignments (SA 1, SA 2, CVA Project, SA 3)
* You have a 72-hour grace period when no late penalties will be deducted. Due dates for the course are always Thursdays at 11:59 PM, so the grace period ends on Sundays at 11:59 PM after the due date.
* Grace period does NOT apply to any assignment with a due date during final exam week.
* **Following the grace period, 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 SAs and the CVA project are due via Canvas).
* If you have an extenuating and documented reason (see examples below under Attendance Policy) for submitting late work beyond the grace period, 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.

### Instructor Feedback

For signature assignments, you can expect grades and feedback to be posted in Canvas within 2-3 weeks after the due date. Turnaround time will be faster for the CVA project and SA 3, which are submitted near the end of the term. Quiz scores will generally be updated weekly. Due to FERPA guidelines, all communication about grades should be handled in person, through Canvas, or via a one-on-one Zoom call.

I am happy to pre-review a *completed draft* of any major assignment once per student, per assignment. The assignment must be submitted via email at least 72 hours before the due date. This gives me time to offer suggestions and for you to revise accordingly. Last-minute requests will be ignored.

### Statement on Use of Generative AI (GenAI)

### 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 (e.g., Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini) is not permitted. 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) (UNT Policy 06.003).

## Attendance and Participation

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, 40% of the final grade comes from quizzes and participation in class.

UNT recognizes excused absences for active military service, certain religious observances, or official university functions. See the [*Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (PDF)*](https://policy.unt.edu/sites/policy.unt.edu/files/06.039%20Student%20Attendance%20and%20Authorized%20Absences.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 the professor 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.

### Make-ups

**I do NOT offer makeup quizzes**. Please arrive on time to participate in the quiz, as you will not receive extra time to complete it. I do understand that many of us are balancing life, work, and family responsibilities in addition to school, so you will automatically receive three dropped quiz scores—consider these your excused absences. Participation “engagement” activities completed during class also may NOT be made up for a grade. There will be 8-10 participation “engagements” during the semester, and you need to attend 5 for full credit. (So there is some built-in flexibility). Labs and lecture slides will be posted to Canvas by class time so you can work on these independently and see the TAs, your peers, or me for assistance outside of class time.

### Syllabus / Schedule Changes

Any changes to the syllabus, course information, course schedule, or due dates will be posted in Canvas. This will be reflected in Modules and the printable version of the Syllabus available under the Syllabus tab. I will also make a Canvas Announcement regarding any of these changes. Occasionally there will be emergencies or hazardous conditions that threaten the safety, health, or welfare of the campus community. In these cases, students will be notified by Eagle Alert if there is a campus closing. See the [Campus Closures Policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/15-006) for more information.

## Course Schedule

#### Week 1: August 21 – Complete Module in Canvas – No Class Meeting

* Emergency Management Basics & Introduction to Vulnerability
  1. Vulnerability reflection / response – submit for a quiz grade (based on completion)
  2. Review Syllabus & Take Syllabus Quiz
  3. Complete the [first-week survey](https://forms.gle/1rLnYb326L6L44ru6) – for seating purposes and to help me get to know you
  4. Discussion Post: Self-introductions
  5. Quick Read: “Speaking Truth to Power: Please Don’t Call then Natural Disasters”
  6. View Lecture
  7. Discussion Post: Activity - How Vulnerable Are We?

#### Week 2: August 28

* Social Vulnerability Applications & Theory

1. 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.”
   3. Weber, L. 2010. “The Story of Margaret Welch: A Case Study.”
2. Lecture
3. Activity: Embodying Vulnerability

#### Week 3: September 4

* Age: Children & Older Adults

1. 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.”
2. Lecture
3. Film A & Discussion – *Children of the Tsunami*

#### Week 4: September 11

* Disability & Functional Needs

1. Read before class:
   1. Stough, L.M. and Kang, D. 2016. “The Sendai Agreement and Disaster Risk Reduction: Conceptual Influences from the Field of Disability Studies.”
   2. News article: Morris, A. 2021. “‘We Didn’t Have a Plan’: Disabled People Struggle to Evacuate from Wildfires.”
2. Potential Guest Lecture
3. Discussion

#### Week 5: September 18

* Gender: Men & Women in Disasters

1. 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.”
2. Lecture
3. Lab Activity 1: Interpreting Social Data

* **Due: Signature Assignment 1A**

#### Week 6: September 25

* Housing, Poverty & Disasters

1. Read Before Class:
   1. MDC. “When Disaster Strikes – Promising Practices: Renters.”
   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.”
2. Potential Guest Lecture
3. Film B & Discussion – *TBD: Focus on Poverty & Housing*

#### Week 7: October 2

* CVA: Using Social and Hazards Data

1. 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.”
2. Lecture
3. Lab Activity 2: Retrieving Social Data

#### Week 8: October 9

* Race, Ethnicity & Environmental Justice

1. 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.”
2. Lecture
3. Film C & Discussion – *Fenceline: A Company Town Divided*

* **Due: Signature Assignment 1B**

#### Week 9: October 16

* CVA: Using GIS and Geospatial Data

1. Read before class:
   1. Siebeneck, L., et al. 2019. “GIS Applications in Emergency Management: Infusing geographic literacy in the classroom.”
2. Lab Activity 3: Mapping Vulnerability with GIS

#### Week 10: October 23

* Social Vulnerability Simulation & Hazards Data

1. Disaster Monopoly
2. Response & Discussion
3. Lab Activity 4: Hazards Data

* **Due: Signature Assignment 1C**
* **Due: Signature Assignment 2**

#### Week 11: October 30

* Indigenous Cultures, Livelihoods & Language/Literacy

1. 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.”
2. Lecture
3. Film D & Discussion: *PBS News Hour – Disappearing Alaska Native Villages*

#### Week 12: November 6

* Building Resilience Equitably

1. 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)
2. Workshop: Resilience Building Strategies

#### Week 13: November 13

* Homelessness & LGBTQ+ Populations

1. Read before class:
   1. Newsletter feature: Settembrino, M. 2015. “Vulnerable Yet Resilient”
   2. Fogel, S.J. 2017. “Reducing Vulnerability for Those Who Are Homeless During Natural Disasters.”
   3. Gorman-Murray, A., et al. 2017. “Problems and possibilities on the margins: LBGT experiences in the 2011 Queensland floods.”
2. Potential Guest Lecture
3. Mini-lecture & course conclusion
4. Remaining time: open lab– work independently on CVA Project or SA3

* **Due: Signature Assignment 1D**

#### Week 14: November 20

* “Shark Tank” with Capacity Building Proposals

1. Attend session (Extra credit for presenters)
2. Work independently on CVA Project or SA 3

* **Due: CVA Project (Option A or B)**

#### Thanksgiving Break – No class: November 27

#### Week 15: December 4

* Work independently on SA 3
* One-on-one consultation, if needed
* **Due: Signature Assignment 3**

#### Final Exam Week – No Class Meeting

* No exam