

Syllabus for Sociology 347—The Sociology Of Disasters And Emergency Preparedness;  
Spring, 2009; Three Credit Hours;

Class meets Tuesday and Thursday from 4:30 – 5:45 p.m. in Starr 122;

Course Instructor: Dr. Thomas Behler, Department of Social Sciences

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Office hours--Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 9 - 9:50 a.m., and 11 - 11:50 a.m.; Tuesday and Thursday 3 – 4:15 p.m.; and by appointment.

#### COURSE PRE-REQUISITE INFORMATION:

In order to be admitted into this course, you must have successfully completed ONE of the following courses:

- A. Sociology 121--Introductory Sociology
- B. Sociology 122--Social Problems, or
- C. Anthropology 122--Introduction To Cultural Anthropology.

#### GENERAL EDUCATION GUIDELINES INFORMATION:

Sociology 347 clearly fulfills the GE Social Awareness requirement. As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- A. Understand the sociological approach to a variety of both natural and man-made disasters or emergency situations
- B. Appreciate the sociological significance of various well-known major disasters, and the responses to those events as they occurred
- C. Understand what studying major disasters can teach us as we look toward developing mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery strategies for future disasters or emergencies
- D. Appreciate the importance of personal and community preparedness for various types of disasters or emergencies that could occur here in Michigan

The knowledge, skills, and values just described will contribute to students as citizens by helping them become informed about the various realities that shape responses to, actual or potential disasters or emergency situations. The course will aid students in their chosen profession by giving them an increased ability to respond effectively to any disasters or emergencies that might occur in the work place. In general, the course will make students better people by providing them with the tools that will help them more completely prepare for, and respond to, any disasters or emergencies that they might experience, either personally, or on the broader community level.

Specific Course Objectives: This course has been designed to achieve three basic objectives. You will be expected to show that you have fulfilled each of these objectives in order to receive a passing grade in the course:

- A. Gaining the ability to utilize basic sociological approaches to understanding the nature, consequences, and implications of a variety of both natural and man-made emergency or disaster situations
- B. Documenting competence in various aspects of emergency preparedness and response by completing a combination of “on line” course examinations and other certification programs,

C. Demonstrating a willingness to become personally, socially, and politically involved in issues of concern in the field of emergency preparedness and response.

In order to determine the extent to which these outcomes are being achieved, you will be assessed via a number of practically-oriented assignments and class activities. These are discussed in detail in the “Course Requirements And Grading Criteria” section of this syllabus.

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

There is no required textbook for this course. The required readings will come from a variety of other sources, and will be assigned when appropriate for certain designated course units. These sources will include the following:

- A. Articles or other selected postings from relevant web sites
- B. Class hand-outs
- C. E-reserve articles, which will be made available soon on a specially-designated web site for this course.

#### SPECIFIC COURSE SCHEDULE:

Although every effort will be made to cover all of the topics outlined below, some modifications to the course schedule may be necessary as the term proceeds. Notice of any such changes will be given so as to allow ample time for needed adjustments in the scheduling or completion of affected course activities. As a registered student in this course, you will be responsible for keeping informed about these alterations if they occur.

##### I. January 13, 15, 20, and 22--Basic introductory activities

- A. Introduction and general orientation to the course—Do practical exercise 1.
- B. Introduction of useful sociological principles and concepts for the Sociology of Disasters and Emergency Preparedness
  1. C. Wright Mills’ sociological imagination
  2. Major theoretical perspectives—i.e. structural-functionalism, conflict theory, and interactionism—Do practical exercise 2.
  3. In-class simulation exercise aimed at demonstrating the extreme importance of careful listening and accurate communication during an emergency or disaster situation—Do practical exercise 3.

##### II. January 27 and 29--A review of some common patterns of response to disasters and emergencies

- A. January 27—Some General thoughts on our overall lack of preparedness for major disasters—Read the E-reserve article entitled “Chapter 18: The Future: Where Do We Go From Here?”, and the June, 2006 article from University Of Chicago magazine—to be distributed as a class handout.
- B. January 29--An overview of the wide variety of social and psychological responses to emergencies and disasters—Read Introduction to The Unthinkable by Amanda Ripley on E-reserve.

##### III. February 3 and 5--- Overview of important concepts in the field of disasters and emergency preparedness

- A. Emergency, state of emergency, disaster, Federally-declared disaster
- B. Mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery as the four basic phases in effective emergency management practice
- C. The nature and growing importance of Incident Command, and the National Incident Management System (NIMS) as a standardized way to handle emergency or disaster situations—  
Read the E-reserve article by Wenger et. al. if available. (possible guest speaker)

IV. February 10--Summary overview of major hazards facing Michigan and the United States

A. Michigan hazards—taken from “hazards analysis” documents to be distributed as class handouts.

B. Brief mention of other U.S. hazards- hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes, tsunamis, etc. that we typically don’t have to be concerned with here in Michigan.

V. February 12 through March 17—Detailed consideration of the nature, consequences, and public-policy implications of selected types of emergency or disaster situations that either have occurred, or could occur here in Michigan

A. February 12--- Weather-related emergencies—severe thunderstorms, tornados, floods, blizzards, and ice storms--guest speaker from the National Weather Service Grand Rapids Forecast Office. Also see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website: <http://www.hhs.gov/emergency> and class hand-outs to be distributed.

B. February 17--Hazardous materials incidents, including chemical spills, radiological accidents, toxic gas releases, and toxic waste problems--Guest speaker presentation by a certified hazmat instructor. Also, see (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website: <http://www.hhs.gov/emergency> and class hand-outs to be distributed.

C. February 19 and 24--Terrorist events (both international and “home grown”--See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website: <http://www.hhs.gov/emergency>, and class hand-outs to be distributed. Also, read the following library E-reserve readings from the following “Annual Editions on Violence and Terrorism” anthologies:

- 07/08 AE – “The Origins of the New Terrorism” by Matthew J. Morgan pp.9-15.
- 06/07 AE – “Understanding the Terrorist Mind-Set” by Randy Borum pp. 22-24.
- 06/07 AE – “The Making of a Suicide Bomber” by Michael Bond, pp. 25-27.
- 08/09 AE – “Toy Soldiers: The Youth Factor In The War On Terror” by Cheryl Benard pp. 34—37.
- 06/07 AE – “Due Process for Terrorists?” by Thomas F. Powers pp. 111-113.
- 07/08 AE – “Homegrown Terror” by Michael Reynolds pp. 86-91.
- 07/08 AE – “Port Security Is Still A House of Cards” by Stephen E. Flynn pp. 190-193.
- 06/07 AE – “The Next Threat” by Robert Lenzner and Nathan Vardi pp. 202-204.
- 07/08 AE – “Are We Ready Yet?” by Christopher Conte pp. 194-197.

and the following article from the 2008 Annual Editions anthology on Homeland Security: “The Terrorism Index” from Foreign Policy pp.174-178.

D. February 26--School terrorism--Guest speaker from local Emergency Management Office. Also, see [www.keystosaferschools.com](http://www.keystosaferschools.com) web site, and read the following two distributed class hand-out articles from the Big Rapids Pioneer:

- “Taking Action During A Crisis” 10/14 and 10/15/2006, and
- “Spoiled Milk Led To School Evacuation” 10/16/2006.

E. March 3--Violent or terrorist incidents on the University campus--A special look at the

Virginia Tech Tragedy and other related incidents—Will involve the showing of a DVD entitled “When Lightning Strikes”, and a panel presentation by representatives from Ferris who are actively involved in ensuring the University’s preparedness and ability to respond effectively to such an event if it were to occur here. Also, refer to the following web sites:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techPanelReport.cfm>

<http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/story.php?relyear=2007&itemno=459>

and

<http://www.ferris.edu>

**THURSDAY: MARCH 5—CLASS PERIOD WILL BE DEVOTED TO GETTING EVERYONE STARTED ON THE REQUIRED CLASS GROUP PROJECT.**

F. March 17--Public health-related emergencies—disease outbreaks, food or water contamination situations, etc.

(possible guest speaker from Mecosta County Health Department) Also, read distributed class hand-outs, and see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website:

<http://www.hhs.gov/emergency>.

VI. March 19 through 31—Detailed consideration of the nature, consequences, and public-policy implications of selected types of emergency or disaster situations that either have occurred, or could occur in other parts of the United States

A. March 19 and 24--Weather-related disasters such as hurricanes—See class hand-outs, and relevant web sites to be determined.

1. The special case of Katrina—a real “eye opener”—Guest speaker will share experiences and other insights on Katrina from the perspective of New Orleans residents who actually lived through the disaster, and are still coping with it today.

Read: the class hand-out article entitled “Hurricane Katrina – Our Experiences” by Paramedics Larry Bradshaw and Lorrie Beth Slonsky Sept. 6, 2005 from [www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org),

the class hand-out article by Mary Foster entitled “Before Storms: A Nursing Home Dilemma”,

the assigned E-reserve article entitled “Hurricane Katrina: A Multicultural Disaster” taken from the [Communique](#) , March, 2006 pages i – xvi and xxvii – xxxiv).

Also, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website:

<http://www.hhs.gov/emergency>.

B. March 26 and 31--Natural/geological events such as earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes, and tsunamis—possible guest speaker.

Also, see distributed class hand-outs, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website: <http://www.hhs.gov/emergency>

**THURSDAY: APRIL 2—“ON LINE” CERTIFICATION TEST DAY:**

You will be given the opportunity to work on the FEMA IS22 “Are You Ready?” course, plus one other on line FEMA class of your choice, if you have not already done so.

VII. April 7—Emergency/disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery: some personal considerations—Read distributed class hand-outs, and see the following relevant

web sites:

[www.michigan.gov/michiganprepares](http://www.michigan.gov/michiganprepares)

[www.theiceguy.com](http://www.theiceguy.com)

[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

[www.hhs.gov/emergency](http://www.hhs.gov/emergency)

and [www.accessKent.com/getready](http://www.accessKent.com/getready).

Also, do practical exercise 4, and view basic family preparedness DVD.

VIII. April 14 through 23—The dynamics and mechanics of emergency-disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery on the local, State, and Federal levels—agencies involved, issues of importance, etc.

A. April 14--Local issues and concerns--(Emergency Managers' panel involving Emergency Managers from Local County Emergency Management offices)

B. April 16—The special case of “search and rescue” operations as means for locating lost or missing persons (Guest speaker from local Search And Rescue organization.)

C. April 21—State and Federal issues and concerns—Possible guest speaker from the Michigan State Police Office Of Homeland Security And Emergency Management Division.

D. April 23—Emergency planning and preparedness for special needs populations—Read distributed class hand-outs.

IX. April 28 and 30—Class group project presentations.

**THE FINAL WRAP-UP ACTIVITY FOR THE COURSE WILL OCCUR ON THURSDAY: MAY 7 FROM 4 – 5:40 P.M.-- THE UNIVERSITY-SCHEDULED FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD. IN ORDER TO GET CREDIT FOR HAVING COMPLETED THIS FINAL COURSE ACTIVITY, YOU WILL NEED TO BE IN CLASS AT THIS OFFICIALLY-DESIGNATED TIME. THE FINAL COURSE ACTIVITY WILL CONSIST OF PRACTICAL EXERCISE 5 – A FINAL REFLECTIVE WRAP-UP PAPER WHICH WILL BE PRESENTED BY EACH STUDENT.**

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA:**

As already should be apparent, this will not be the traditional type of course that contains highly structured exams, and other assignments that are geared toward typical Ferris classes with 40 or more students. Instead, the course will involve a considerable amount of reflective thinking and writing, some small group work, a significant “on line” instructional component, and a tremendous amount of “hands on” learning out there in the broader community. Therefore, it will be extremely important for you to be a highly motivated student who is sincerely interested in the topics that will be addressed. You also will need to be a “self directed” learner, who is comfortable functioning in a flexible class setting, where assignment parameters or deadlines may need to be changed if circumstances warrant. More specifically, the grade that you ultimately receive in this course will be determined by your performance on a wide variety of items, each of which will have an associated point value. The entire course grade will be based on a total of 100 possible points. The points will be divided up as follows:

1. A series of 5 practical exercises, which will consist of brief written assignments, in-class group exercises, or outside class activities. The exercises will involve sociological analyses, “hands on” tasks, or personal reflections. (worth 25 points total).

2. Documented completion of the FEMA IS22 “Are You Ready?” course, plus one other “on line” FEMA course of your choosing. A list of acceptable courses will be handed out shortly after the semester begins. (Each course is worth 10 points, for a total of 20 points.)

3. Documented attendance at two meetings of at least one local emergency-service-related organization. Examples of organizations include county local Emergency planning teams, the local Red Cross, Central Michigan Search and Rescue, our local amateur radio ARES/RACES organization, The Big Rapids Area Amateur Radio Club and relevant Ferris State University organizations. Scheduling information will be provided as it becomes available. Also, meetings of relevant organizations not listed here can count toward this requirement, as long as they have been approved by me. (Each meeting is worth 5 points, for a total of 10 points.)

4. Completion of at least one other emergency certification exam or activity, such as passing a CPR or First Aid certification course, acquiring an amateur radio license; or obtaining National Weather Service Basic Skywarn training. Scheduling information regarding these training opportunities will be provided as it becomes available. Other types of training also will be accepted, as long as they are approved in advance. (worth 15 points).

5. A 10 to 15-minute in-class group presentation. The specific topic of the presentation must pertain to some aspect of disaster/ emergency preparedness or response that is of interest to the involved student group. The actual format for the presentation can be determined by the members of the group, as long as it is appropriate to the college classroom setting. Suggested presentation formats might include, but are not limited to:

- a. A presentation of the results of a group-generated survey or interview study
- b. A panel discussion or debate on a controversial matter of concern, or
- c. A discussion regarding an issue or set of issues that you wish had been covered more thoroughly in the course.

The topic and format of the group presentation, as well as the composition of the presentation groups, will be outlined in a 1 to 2-page written proposal. This proposal will be submitted to me for approval on Thursday: March 5. Once the presentation proposal has been approved, the group will meet periodically with me in order to ensure that sufficient progress is being made on the presentation as the semester proceeds.

All group presentations will be given sometime during the last two class periods of the semester (i.e. Tuesday: April 28 or Thursday: April 30). The specific time and date for each presentation will be agreed upon jointly in advance by me and the participants. This agreed upon time cannot be changed once it has been set. In addition to presenting its material to the class, each presentation group will submit a written copy of its material in final typed form on the class presentation due-date.

The group as a whole will be graded on the class presentation, and on the final written report that has been submitted. The ultimate group presentation grade will be the same for all students in the group.

(worth 15 points)

6. A major emergency response simulation “table top” exercise, which will be organized with the help of several county emergency managers, and will be conducted on a Saturday toward the very end of the semester. More details regarding this activity will be provided as the semester proceeds. (worth 15 points)

7. Attendance—Class attendance is going to be highly important for every student in the class, and for the overall success of the class itself. Therefore, this course has an attendance policy that will be adhered to rigorously.

Specifically, you will be allowed two unexcused absences during the entire length of the term. For every unexcused absence that exceeds the allowable limit of two, five percentage points will be deducted from your final course grade. In order for an absence to be considered "excused", you will have to provide documentation in the form of a medical excuse or some other official written verification of the problem which caused you to miss class. This verification should be provided immediately upon your return to class, and should be a copy that I can keep for my records.

Serious attention to attendance also can be something for which you can be rewarded positively when final course grades are calculated. If, at the end of the semester, you have a perfect attendance record (i.e. no absences), five percentage points will automatically be added onto your final course grade. Additional extra points also may be added onto your final course grade in marginal grading situations if your total number of absences is minimal (i.e. two or fewer), and if those absences are "excused" via official written verification.

#### A BRIEF NOTE ON MID-TERM GRADES:

Even though I will not be giving mid-term grades in this course, I would like to meet with each of you individually sometime between Monday: March 2 and Friday: March 20, in order to assess your degree of progress in the course, and to address any developing problem areas of concern.

The following percentage grading scale will be used for all course final grade calculations:

A = 93 to 100  
A- = 90 to 92  
B+ = 87 to 89  
B = 83 to 86  
B- = 80 to 82  
C+ = 77 to 79  
C = 73 to 76  
C- = 70 to 72  
D+ = 67 to 69  
D = 63 to 66  
D- = 60 to 62  
F = 59 and below

#### A NOTE ON CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Unfortunately, discipline is a topic that we must address at the outset. The following disruptive and disrespectful behaviors will not be tolerated in this course:

- A. Arriving late to class
- B. Walking in and out of class during discussions or lectures (If you walk out of class, do not plan to return for the duration of the class period.)
- C. Engaging in private discussions or random conversations; reading newspapers or magazines; or doing homework for other courses during class
- D. Using cell phones during class—All cell phones must be turned off at the beginning of the class period. (Anyone who uses a cell phone during class will be asked to leave the room.)
- E. Using language that degrades individuals or categories of people in a dehumanizing way

#### A NOTE ON ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Students with a documented disability (physical, learning, mental, or emotional) which requires a classroom accommodation should contact the University's Disability Services Office. Staff from this office can be found in room 313 of the Starr Building (telephone extension 3057).