

Syllabus Culture and Calamity

Course Number CSP 642
Semester 1/27/25 – 5/16/25
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Welcome to Culture and Calamity

Calamity is all around us today and the impacts on our cultures and communities are dramatic. This course dives right into some of the pressing issues of the day, including race relations, colonization, natural and industrial disasters, climate change, and The Anthropocene. In this course we will investigate and develop frameworks for understanding the factors that support cultural continuity and those that predicate demise. We will balance negative cases with positive examples of resilience, renewal and sustainability. In looking at those elements that are destructive, we can begin to understand humane, humanitarian, healing, and holistic responses, to understand also responses that are not constructive or inclusive, even design responses that reflect the more creative and collaborative values we bring to our work. This course strives to decolonize curriculum and the academic experience through the scholars we engage with, topics we focus on and projects that students have the opportunity to work on.

Main Course Topics:

1. Frameworks for making sense of calamity
2. Historical, current and emergent examples of calamity
3. Anthropocene and Climate Change as cultural calamity
4. Racial injustice as cultural calamity
5. Colonization as cultural calamity
6. How cultural workers can collaborate with communities to rebuild under and after calamity
7. Resilience, renewal and sustainability

Key Learning Outcomes:

Assuming faithful participation in and successful completion of the course, at the conclusion you will be able to do the following:

1. Identify healthy, practical, cooperative, collaborative, and inclusive responses to calamity that promote life, sustainability, cultural stewardship, and reconciliation
2. Construct a cultural worker's working definition of "calamity"
3. Identify the variety of human experience lumped under the general undifferentiated category of "calamity"
4. Determine the ways that different writers from a variety of disciplines schematize and discuss human calamity and ways of responding
5. Develop a cultural lens through which to read emerging literature on humanitarian and development studies
6. Explain how decolonizing curriculum is relevant to cultural calamity
7. Predict some of the warning signs of future calamities

Departmental Learning Outcomes

This course is aligned with the following departmental learning outcome. Students will meet departmental learning outcomes through successful completion of assignments and activities in core and elective courses. A list of all

departmental learning outcomes can be found at: <http://www.goucher.edu/graduate-programs/ma-in-cultural-sustainability/curriculum>

Outcome 1: Research, demonstrate and apply knowledge of cultural practices and contemporary issues pertaining to cultural sustainability which contribute to human and ecological well-being.

Course Format:

- Fully online course with synchronous and asynchronous elements
- Recorded lecture content in addition to book/article and web resources
- Regular opportunity for live office hours
- Regular discussion of course topics and readings via Discussion Forums
- Collaborative and interactive assignment elements
- Individual research projects

Required Readings:

Required Technology: Regular access to the Internet is required. A computer with speakers and mic, or a mic headset is required to participate and present in synchronous online meetings.

Texts (Most are Goucher Library eBooks, chapters assigned in the course modules):

- Jake Bittle, *The Great Displacement: Climate Change and the Next American Migration*
- Candis Callison, *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: the Communal Life of Facts*
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*
- Kim Fortun, *Advocacy After Bhopal*.
- Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*
- Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead*
- Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*
- Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*
- Tommy Orange, *There There*
- Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future*
- Ben Pauly, *Flint Fights Back*
- Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*
- Jacob Remes and Andy Horowitz, *Critical Disaster Studies*
- Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*
- Anna Tsing, et al, *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene: The New Nature*

Articles:

Additional readings and multimedia sources are linked for you in Canvas.

Assignments:

See Schedule for Due Dates

Participatory elements:

Discussion Forums: We will have asynchronous discussions about every week. Some weeks will include a discussion forum prompt that pertains to the week's reading, lecture or other resources. Thoughtful posts that reference the prompt, integrate discussion of one or more readings and contextualize the content in your own experience will receive full credit. I expect to see at least one citation in your post. You are encouraged to share your own experiences and opinion in discussions, but I want you to also reference course materials whenever possible. Some prompts will be

summary/analysis of a reading, others reflection based. Posts should be around 250+ words. *This is graduate work* so I am not counting words. I do expect you to learn from your classmate's posts by reading them and making regular, *meaningful* replies throughout the term. Forums are worth 20 points each. The initial post is worth 15 points (due Thursday) and replies (due Sunday) are worth 5.

Written Assignments:

Additional instructions for each assignment will be described in Canvas.

Call to Action Draft Proposal

Several of the cases and examples we will examine present a range of political, economic, cultural and environmental problems and impacts. In this short Call to Action Proposal, you will identify an issue or impact relevant to you, your work, or your community. In your proposal do the following: Articulate the problem and its impacts. Identify why this problem is relevant to the field of cultural sustainability or historical preservation. Describe a way to address your identified problem through action (see examples of adaptation planning in the additional resources under the topic of Displacement and Migration). As you describe a proposed action or plan, consider a rationale for the solution you are providing, including specifics on impacts. Your Draft Proposal should be around 2-4 pages. We will revisit this proposal as part of your final presentation. You should plan to continue working on the project and incorporate the feedback you get from your instructor into your final proposal and presentation.

The Dream Paper

Ta-Nehisi Coates makes use of "The Dream" as a way to consider how his life experience is contrasted and at times oppositional to the dominant hegemonic narrative of "White America." Discuss the significance and meaning of "The Dream" as a concept in *Between the World and Me*. How does Coates use this concept to construct his message and connect his experience with race, racism, structural violence and cultural segregation with readers? How have you experienced this concept in your own life? How is this concept a unifying or oppositional experience for you? Lastly, how does the concept of "The Dream" contribute to cultural calamity or sustainability in the US? This paper can be reflective. You are welcome to identify useful sources, but this is not a requirement.

Aim for 5-7 pages of writing. **Note:** If you have already read this book and would like to select a different text on a similar topic, contact me with a suggested alternative. You will still be expected to participate in class discussions, but the paper topic can be adjusted.

There There Paper

The colonization of North American and the accompanied attempt at cultural erasure of Native Americans is a clear example of a cultural calamity. In *There There* Tommy Orange's characters regularly experience challenges and some moments of success. The book also deals with complex issues of identity construction, modernity and cultural continuity for Native Americans. The book showcases how attempts at achieving cultural sustainability are complicated by ongoing implications of cultural calamity. In essence, the ongoing cultural calamity that impacts their communities, threatens their capacity to sustain their culture. This is a book of fiction, but it has clear real-world connections. For this paper: How do characters in the book navigate this challenge and what does that mean for the real people and communities who are dealing with these struggles? How do the experiences of Orange's characters demonstrate real cultural calamities? What are real examples of cultural resiliency and sustainability that are brought up in the text?

Aim for around 6-8 pages of writing. **Note:** If you have already read this book and would like to select a different text on a similar topic, contact me with a suggested alternative. You will still be expected to participate in class discussions, but the paper topic can be adjusted.

Call to Action Proposal Presentation: At our final Teams meeting you will make a presentation (about 15 minutes) on your Call to Action Plan. Your presentation should be a summary of your Call to Action plan, including articulation of the problem you have identified, what is creating this calamity and your intended action. You can consider ways that others can be involved in working to create positive change related to your topic.

Call to Action Final Plan: Your plan is an updated version of the proposal you developed earlier in the term. In this final version, you should revise your proposal with feedback you have received. Given that we have studied additional topics, your topic may have also evolved. Your final plan should include specific information about how this topic is relevant to Cultural Sustainability and/or Historical Preservation. You should show how this issue represents a cultural calamity and the cultural impacts. You should identify a plan to take action on this problem that can raise awareness, help those in need, and/or make a positive impact. You also should identify specific steps and resources needed to implement your plan. These steps and resources could be additional research, stakeholders, partners, funding and more. This final proposal should be about 5 pages in length.

Grading:

Discussion Forums (12 x 20 points)	240 points
Call to Action/White Paper Draft Proposal	25 points
The Dream Reflective Paper	75 points
There There Research Paper	100 points
Participation in Live Meetings (6 x 10 points)	60 points
Final Presentation	50 points
Final Call to Action Plan	75 points
Total	625 Points

Grade Scale:

- A 93 or more percent
- A- 90 - 92 percent
- B+ 87 - 89 percent
- B 83 - 86 percent
- B- 80 - 82 percent
- C+ 77 - 79 percent
- C 73 - 76 percent
- C- 70 - 72 percent
- D 60 - 69 percent
- F 59 percent and below

SCHEDULE – Culture and Calamity

Description – See Canvas for content and links	Due Dates
Week 1 – Introduction, Scope, and Decolonizing Curriculum	Jan 27 – Feb 2
Review of the syllabus and course expectations	
Discussion forum	Post and Reply Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Week 2 – Frameworks and Perspectives for Studying Calamity	Feb 3 – 9
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday

Week 3 – Critical Disaster Perspectives	Feb 10 – 16
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Week 4 – Climate Change Perspectives	Feb 17 - 23
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Week 5 – Displacement and Migration	Feb 24 – Mar 2
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Week 6 – Indigeneity and Colonialism	Mar 3 - 9
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Week 7 – Racial Injustice	Mar 10- 16
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
There There Paper Due	Sunday
Week 8 – Aftermaths and Advocacy	Mar 17 - 23
Teams Meeting	
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Week 9 - Review and Guest Speaker	Mar 24 – 30
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams with Erik Assadourian	March 25 7 – 8PM
Call to Action Draft Proposal Due	Sunday
Week 10 - Bhopal	Mar 31 – April 6
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Week 11 – Katrina and Guest Speaker	April 7 - 13
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams with Guest Presenter, Maida Owens Bayou Culture Collaborative	April 7 6 – 7PM
Dream Paper Due	
Week 12 – Flint	April 14 - 20
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Call to Action FINAL Proposal Due	Sunday
Week 13 – Heritage Perspectives	April 21 – 27
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	

Week 14 – Future	April 28 – May 4
Discussion Forum	Post by Thursday, Reply by Sunday
Teams Meeting	
Week 15 - Presentations	May 5 – 11
Teams Meeting Presentations	
Week 16- Reflections	May 12 -18
Teams Meeting and or Discussion Forum	

Course Policies

Academic Integrity:

All final work products are to be the independent work of each student original to this course and stored in the electronic portfolio. Suspected violations of the Honor Code will be referred to the Academic Honor Board. For a description of the code and what constitutes a violation of the code, refer to Goucher College's [Academic Honor Code](#).

Accessibility Services:

Please inform me of any accommodations you need to participate fully in the course. Goucher College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must make their request and provide appropriate documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS). Because classes change every semester, eligible students must obtain a new accommodation letter from the Disabilities Specialist every semester and review this letter with their professors so the accommodations can be implemented. The Director of OAS is available by appointment to answer questions and discuss any implementation issues you may have. For more information, please visit Goucher College's [Academic Accommodations](#) site.

Communication:

- Faculty will be available at their Goucher email address and will respond to queries within 24-48 hours.
- Course participants are responsible for maintaining continuous involvement with faculty, fellow students and student groups. In particular, participation in all online discussions is required. Ongoing communication allows you to gain deeper insights into the content, activities and assignments in the course. Please give notice of any obstacle that prevents this.
- You are encouraged to ask questions whenever information needs clarifying.
- For questions pertaining to your assignments: send an email directly to the instructor (please do not post personal questions on the discussion board).
- For questions about assignments that may be interesting and helpful to other class members: please use the discussion board.
- For problems with technical aspects of the course website: chat with [Canvas Support](#).

E2Campus Emergency Notification System:

In an ongoing effort to better disseminate information during emergencies and campus closings, Goucher has implemented the e2Campus Notification System. The notification system will only send information regarding emergencies and campus closings as text messages* to your mobile phone. To receive these messages, you must be registered in the system. Click the following link for information about how to create your [E2Campus account](#).

Late Policy:

For proper graduate student learning to occur, pacing of content mastery is critical. Therefore, assignments are to be completed on time. If extreme circumstances prevent an assignment to be completed in a timely fashion, please notify me before the assignment is due so a new date can be negotiated. Only follow-ups completed by the due date can be redone. Late assignments without such notification will be docked.

Inclement Weather:

Online courses will not be cancelled for inclement weather when the college campus is closed. Students and faculty are expected to access their courses just as they would if the campus were open. Each

faculty member and student is expected to have a contingency plan for attending online courses in case their primary computer is unavailable or out of service. Additionally, the online component of a residency or hybrid course is not affected when the college campus is closed for inclement weather, although if the residency or hybrid course has a face-to-face meeting scheduled on the closed campus, the meeting will be rescheduled for another day. The course instructor will notify students of the makeup day and time. Only in extreme situations, such as wide spread power outages, may exceptions to this policy be made by the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs. In such severe cases, an official statement concerning online activities will be issued via normal emergency channels.

Missed Work:

You are responsible for material covered in the course. It is your sole responsibility to obtain any materials missed.

Nondiscrimination Policy:

Goucher College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, sex, age, disability, marital status or genetic information in its programs and activities. The college has adopted a [Nondiscrimination Policy](#). Further details and contact information for the college's Title IX coordinator can be found on [Goucher's Nondiscrimination Notice and Policy page](#).