



# GOUCHER COLLEGE

## Welch Center for Graduate and Professional Studies

### SYLLABUS - Culture and Calamity

Course Number.....CSP 642  
Credits.....3  
Semester.....Spring 2017  
Course Dates.....February 13<sup>th</sup> – May 26<sup>th</sup> 2017  
Course Modality: Online, regular synchronous meetings required  
Instructor.....Michael Shepard  
Email.....[michael.shepard@goucher.edu](mailto:michael.shepard@goucher.edu)  
Office hours: by telephone or live online meeting – schedule an appointment

### Welcome to Culture and Calamity

Throughout history countless societies have formed, thrived and collapsed – some have even learned to achieve sustainable prosperity. *Culture and Calamity* investigates a framework for understanding the factors that support lasting cultural continuity and those that predicate demise. Drawing on historical and current examples, we will consider a set of grim topics, including Natural Disasters, Disease, Environmental Harm, Human Conflict and Degradation of Historic Sites. We will balance the 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, healthy, 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.

### Main Course Topics:

1. Frameworks for making sense of calamity
2. Current and emergent examples of calamity
3. Natural disasters and disease
4. Environmental harm and its impacts
5. Historic and material culture degradation
6. Human conflict
7. How cultural workers can collaborate with communities to rebuild under and after calamity
8. 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. Be able to identify healthy, practical, cooperative, collaborative, and inclusive responses to calamity that promote life, sustainability, cultural stewardship, and reconciliation
2. Arrive at a cultural worker's working definition of "calamity"
3. Identify the variety of human experience lumped under the general undifferentiated category of "calamity"
4. Discuss 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. List some typical and idiosyncratic responses to calamity
7. Spot some of the warning signs of future calamities

### Departmental Learning Outcomes

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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:

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- Fully online course with synchronous and asynchronous elements
- Recorded lecture content in addition to textbook/article and web resources
- Regular live WebEx meetings and ongoing opportunity for live office hours
- Weekly discussion of course topics and readings via Discussion Board and VoiceThread
- Collaborative and interactive assignment elements
- Individual or group research projects

### Required Readings:

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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: Purchase on your own.

- *Between the World and Me*. Ta-Nehisi Coates. 2015.
- *Collapse*. Jared Diamond. 2011
- *This Changes Everything*. Naomi Klein. 2015

### Articles and Book Chapters:

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

## Assignments:

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See Schedule for Due Dates

### Participatory elements:

**WebEx:** Attendance at and participation in scheduled synchronous WebEx is required. You are expected to have completed all relevant readings and ready to contribute to the conversation. During WebEx meetings we will discuss course concepts and readings, answer questions and engage in dialogue. We will also have several guest speakers and these will mostly be during our regularly scheduled WebEx meetings. **Your course participation grade is primarily based on WebEx meeting attendance and participation.**

**Discussion Forums and VoiceThread:** We will have regular asynchronous discussions using written forums or audio/visual VT. 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. You are encouraged to share your own experiences and opinion in discussions, but I you want to cite and reference course materials. Some prompts will be summary/analysis of a reading, others reflection based. Posts should be around 300-500 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. VoiceThread will also be used for discussion. VT discussions will involve a prompt to respond to. I encourage you to respond using the audio/video aspects of VT. At least one reply to a peer or your instructor is also expected.

**Student VoiceThread Presentation** – Each student will make 1 presentations using VoiceThread. Presentations will be summaries and analysis of assigned readings or other course materials. There is a signup sheet to select which readings you present for and when. VT presentations should be 8-15 minutes in length and have a visual aid that helps structure your presentation and the viewer experience. PowerPoint or images are good options for your visual. You will provide 2-3 questions for conversation that relate to your presentation. You are responsible for facilitation of the conversation. You should encourage peer participation, respond to peer posts and moderate the conversation.

**Student WebEx Presentations** – You will be responsible for presenting a short proposal for your final paper in a WebEx meeting. You will also prepare a presentation to accompany your final paper in our last WebEx meeting. Your final presentation must use Prezi, PowerPoint or some other visual aid. The presentation will be about 8 minutes long.

**Stories of Hope and Resistance Wiki** – We will balance some of the gloomy material we cover each week with an ongoing series on hope and resistance. You should also combine an element of action. How can the class take action or participate – petition, congressional calls, personal action, protest? Each student will be assigned a week to make their post in the class wiki. You will feature a story of hope or resistance and describe it. You want to communicate how this story balances some of the difficult content we have read and studied during that week. How is this story relevant to our current conversation? Why is it hopeful or empowering? Provide a link, image, song or video to accompany your post that helps us understand it.

### **Written Assignments:**

Additional instructions for each assignment will be available in the appropriate weekly folder.

#### **Cultural Collapse Short Paper: 6-10 pages**

In Diamond's book he develops and applies a "5-point framework of possible contributing factors that I now consider in trying to understand any putative environmental collapse." Diamond applies this framework to both past and current societies throughout his book. For this assignment, you will select a cultural group that you are familiar with. It could be your local community, state, country or other cultural affinity group. Then apply at least 3 of the factors in Diamond's framework to that cultural group. Discuss how the cultural group you select aligns with or is contradictory to the framework. Provide some analysis of how application of this framework to your society is predictive of collapse or sustainability. Additionally, discuss if you find limitations, needed changes or merits of Diamond's framework. You should find several sources that support your argument and cite them throughout your writing. You should be writing in the context of verifiable source materials, not just from experience or opinion.

#### **The Dream Short Paper: 5-8 pages**

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 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.

#### **Final Research Paper:**

The purpose of the project is to demonstrate your mastery of the concepts and topics studied in the course; your ability to apply them constructively to practical situations; and your skills in research, documentation, and analysis. Your choices are:

1. A 15-20 page paper on some aspect of a calamity, historical, current, or anticipated, utilizing primary and secondary sources, with a strong overall thesis. In other words, your ultimate goal is to construct an argument, rather than a purely descriptive paper.
2. A photo or video ethnography of a calamity, the effects of calamity on a community, or response to calamity, based on thorough background research and including interviews with participants, documentation of cultural forms, and an accompanying artist's interpretative statement.

I encourage you to choose a topic that allows you to work with primary materials, whether that involves fieldwork with a humanitarian or environmental organization, meeting with survivors, or working with archival materials. You will be graded on the clarity, completeness, organization, and conciseness of your argument and project, the quality of your AV documentation (as applicable), the integration of concepts learned in the course, the degree of research, and the depth of your analysis. This is in many ways a wide open field, so it is entirely possible that this paper will become a contribution to the field, or a part of your capstone journey.

You will also present your final paper or project in the last WebEx session, and your presentation will be part of your project grade. A visual aid is required for your presentation.

### Grading:

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| Course Elements                                      | Points     |
|--|------------|
| Discussion/VoiceThread Participation (8 x 15 points) | 120 points |
| Collapse Short Research Paper                        | 50 points  |
| The Dream Short Reflective Paper                     | 50 points  |
| Wiki Assignment                                      | 30 points  |
| Final Research Paper                                 | 100 points |
| Student Presentations (1 x 40 points)                | 40 points  |
| Participation in Live Meetings                       | 20 points  |
| Total  | 410 Points |

### Grade Scale:

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

### Course Policies

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#### Communication:

- Course participants are responsible for maintaining regular involvement with faculty and fellow students. 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.
- I encourage you to ask questions whenever information needs clarification.
- 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 "Ask the Instructor" discussion board.
- For problems with technical aspects of the website: contact [helpdesk@goucher.edu](mailto:helpdesk@goucher.edu) (you may copy the instructor).
- Throughout the course, I will be available at my Goucher email address and, except for unusual circumstances, will respond to queries within 48 hours, hopefully sooner.

Missed Work:

You are responsible for material covered in the course. If you have missed something, it is your responsibility to obtain pertinent materials.

Late Policy:

For proper learning to occur, pacing of content mastery is critical. Assignments follow a logical pattern and therefore are to be completed on time. If extreme circumstances prevent you from completing an assignment by its due date, please notify me before the assignment is due so we can negotiate a new date. Late assignments without such notification will be docked.

Academic Integrity:

All final work products are to be the independent work of the student and stored in the electronic portfolio. Suspected violations of the Honor Code will be referred to the Academic Honor Board. For a full description of the code and what constitutes a violation of the code, refer to the Goucher Handbook or online at [www.goucher.edu/x1292.xml](http://www.goucher.edu/x1292.xml).

Disability Support:

<http://www.goucher.edu/academics/academic-support/disability-support-services>