

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF FILM STUDIES
FILM 2194A-650 SPECIAL TOPICS IN FILM GENRE, SUMMER 2016
CINEMAS OF DISASTER**

Dr. Barbara S. Bruce

Email: bbruce2@uwo.ca

Please read the following information completely and carefully:

WELCOME to Special Topics in Genre: Cinemas of Disaster Online. This course was Film and Distance Studies by Dr. Barbara Bruce. The course provides an introduction to the study of genre, a survey of disaster films, and analyses of films from a number of different perspectives. The lectures are supplemented by secondary articles, which are posted in Owl. You are further encouraged to discuss course material with your classmates, through the Forum, and with your professor. As a result, you are in the advantageous position of studying a cross-section of a genre and a wide range of interpretations. You should come away from this course with an enriched understanding of how this popular genre developed and of the variety of disaster films and the critical responses to them.

Please do not hesitate to ask me questions or to let me know if you encounter any problems or see any errors in the course. I try to keep the course as up-to-date as possible, but sometimes a web link will no longer function if the URL has changed, an image in a lecture will disappear (often for some inexplicable reason), etc. This syllabus contains important information about the course requirements, expectations for the course, how to contact me, assignments and grade

documented in this syllabus.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT THIS ONLINE COURSE

Any online course demands as much time and effort from you as a conventional lecture-based university course in Film Studies, but this is a 12-week course condensed into 6 weeks, so it is particularly intense. You are required to participate in the course regularly, as you would in a classroom setting, which means watching the assigned films, reading the lectures and the assigned articles, and engaging with the material, the professor, and your classmates. As in any university course, then, you will have to devote several hours a week to each unit and there are two units per week in order to keep up with the reading and to complete the assignments. I recommend you schedule specific times for this course each week, just as if you were attending a regular class.

This course is designed for Owl, which operates as an "online classroom." Whether from home, from the computers provided by the university, or from the public library, but you must ensure that you have access to the internet on a regular and consistent basis. This means that, in the event of a service interruption to your internet connection at home, you are expected to find another way to access the course materials: for instance, by working at a computer lab on campus or in a public library.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will examine how disaster is conceptualized and narrativized in Hollywood and other cinemas in an attempt to address the following questions:

How do

Why is this a Hollywood-dominated genre? How is disaster figured in relation to such issues as gender, sexuality, the Other, the family, ideology, the hegemony, technology, religion,

corporatization, and the environment? Drawing on cultural/historical and psychoanalytic theories, among others, this course offers an overview of cinemas of disaster from the early days of filmmaking to the present day. In particular, this course will focus on the Hollywood disaster cycles, but will also consider non-Hollywood approaches or responses to the genre, and will address theories of spectacle and the cinematic technologies that have defined and influenced the development of the genre.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Successful students who complete the course will be able to:

- offer an understanding of the importance of historical/national perspectives and how social norms and customs and the construction and consumption of films are products of time, events and context;
 - explain how the dominant concerns/thematics in an historical period may be used to signify social status, subjectivity, cultural identity, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, political power, and state nationalism;
 - develop further their ability to analyze films critically and formulate and produce essays that have an effective thesis with a clear, well-articulated intent and a logical argument supported by adequate evidence from the film(s) under discussion;
 - explain various theoretical and rhetorical approaches to cinema, with specific attention both to their concepts, their historical, cultural and intellectual contexts, and to their application to different films;
 - develop research skills which will not only augment their knowledge of the field of study, but will also be able to incorporate the results of this research into their essays and other assignments;
 - o among the basic research skills are the ability to collect relevant bibliographic material on a prescribed topic (online and in the library), to engage critically with the scholarly literature with an assessment of the relative merits of an argument in essays and other written/oral assignments, and to articulate their own positions within a particular scholarly discussion;
 - develop further their written/oral communication skills in the clear and organized
- p

Participation	weekly		10%
Close Reading 1	Sun., May 22	300-350 words	10%
Close Reading 2	Sun., June 5	600-700 words	10%
Close Reading 3	Sun., June 19*	900-1050 words	20%
Final Exam	tba	3 hours	35%

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COURSE INFORMATION

COURSE CONTENT

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	p.m.
Units 9 and 10	Sun., June 12 by 11:59 p.m.
Units 11 and 12	Sun., June 19 by 11:59 p.m.

the course from a list to be determined by the professor and then choose a motif, scene, or sequence from the film to analyze. The topics and choice of films for each reading will be posted well before the due dates.

This type of assignment differs somewhat from a conventional essay in that you do not have to develop a thesis in the way you would for a critical or theoretical essay. However, your analysis must still have a beginning, middle, and end. Begin with an introduction that includes a statement that focuses and summarizes the argument you will be presenting, an argument about the significance or meaning of the element, motif, sequence, or scene. The rest of the analysis should also be organized into paragraphs, each one focusing on a specific point and beginning with a topic sentence that highlights the main point of that paragraph. End your analysis with a succinct conclusion.

In your paper, you must analyze the specific details of the film. Vague and/or generalized discussions of the films, and especially mere plot summaries, will receive low grades. In developing your analysis, you should consider narrative details—setting, plot, characters, and symbols—as well as such cinematic details as sets, props, costume/make-up, lighting, and performance or figure behaviour, camera angles and distance, sound.

In the Assignment Information subpage under Course Content in Owl, I have provided a document with information that will help you to write these assignments. It includes a list of questions to help you develop your analysis.

Grading will also depend on organization and the quality of the writing. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of good writing skills. Students should make good use of a writing handbook, such as Checkmate or The Little Brown Handbook, and if necessary, the [Writing Support Centre](#). They offer drop-in and on-line services. If you have difficulties with the English

exceeds the word limit by more than 10%, I will deduct marks at my

been contacted by your academic counsellor will s/he grant the extension or schedule a make-up exam and inform your TA.

Keep a copy!

Always keep a paper copy of each of your papers and save electronic copies of each file on your computer and on an external hard drive, a USB key, or a cloud. Retain all assignments at

plan to go on to grad school, keep everything!

Grading

All papers are rigorously marked according to the Grading Rubric, which gives the criteria for each grade level and which is posted in Owl, under Course Content/Additional Assignment Information.

Returning Assignments: I will do my very best to return assignments as soon as possible after the due date but certainly well before the next assignment is due. If you wish to discuss the comments or grade you have received with me, ***you must wait for at least three days after the assignment has been returned to you*** no exceptions.

If you believe an assignment has been unfairly graded for whatever reason and you to launch [Student Rights](#)
[Academic Appeals Undergraduate and Responsibilities](#) and in the Academic Calendar.

In brief, though, you must first consult with the person who marked your paper. If a TA marked

The University will take all appropriate measures to promote academic integrity and deal

appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what co

[Rights and Responsibilities](#)

the PDF

Plagiarism

and other scholastic offences will be prosecuted to the fullest extent that university regulations allow. In its academic calendars, Western University defines plagiarism as "The act or an instance of copying or stealing D Q R W K H U ¶ V Z R U G V R U L G H D V" (emphasis added).

Western University subscribes to **Turnitin**, a plagiarism-prevention service, and the Senate subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>)

All assignments in this course will be submitted through Owl and checked by and marked it Turnitin. This service is not used on the assumption that the majority of students plagiarize, rather to deter a small minority of students who may be tempted to plagiarize and to protect all students from academic theft. As well, we do not rely solely on Turnitin: other measures are in place to ensure students hand in their own, original work.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences

If you are not sure what plagiarism is or what constitutes an academic offence, ask! The [Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students](#) and are thus knowledgeable about academic integrity. Remember, ignorance is no excuse.

TALKING TO YOUR PROFESSOR

hours are scheduled for this course. Instead, students who wish to talk to me may do so by email.

Email

I am happy to communicate with students via e-mail. Please allow 48 hours for a response, and remember that I may not (but often do) check email after the end of workdays or on weekends (therefore, emails received Friday to Sunday will be answered no later than

will talk by phone. We will establish a convenient time for both of us, you will provide me with your phone number, and I will call you at the agreed-upon time.

I sincerely encourage you to make use of me, your professor. Do not hesitate to contact me to talk or ask questions about any topic or issue, including assignments, difficulties you are having with the course, suggestions for further reading, or clarification and expansion of issues raised in class. Unfortunately, most students wait until the last minute or until all hell is breaking loose before consulting their instructors. Please see me well ahead of deadlines and the onset of nervous breakdowns.

FURTHER INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, medical issues, or religious obligations. Contact the appropriate person (myself, an academic counsellor, a staff member in Student Services, etc.) as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Medical Illness: Please go to the website for information on the university [Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness](#). Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

If you require accommodation for religious observance, see the [Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#) page posted in the Academic Calendar. [Rights and Responsibilities](#)

Students with disabilities should contact the [Student Development Centre](#) to obtain assistance and/or letters of accommodation.

Learning Skills: go to [_____](#), Rm 4100 WSS. From the SDC: counsellors are ready to help you improve your learning skills. They offer presentations on strategies for improving time management, multiple-choice exam preparation/writing, textbook reading, and more. Individual support is offered throughout the Fall/Winter terms in the drop-in Learning Help Centre and year-

Complaints: If students have a complaint concerning a course in which they are enrolled, they must first discuss the matter with the instructor of the course. If students are still not satisfied, they should then take the complaint to the Film Studies Office, International and Graduate Affairs Building, Room 0N64.

These regulations are in place because a failure to follow these procedures creates the potential for injustices of various kinds affecting either the instructor or the students themselves, or both parties. Concerns should not be allowed to fester but should be raised with the instructor in a timely manner, so that they can be addressed in time to make a difference to the course.

If you are having difficulties coping with the pressures of academic life or life in general, please seek assistance immediately from an academic counsellor in your home faculty and/or from someone in [Psychological Services](#) or [Student Health Services](#). Never hesitate to seek assistance for any problem you may be having. Consult the [Current Students](#) yourself of all the assistance available to students.

For further information, including the regulations governing Term Work, Exams, Faculty Office Hours, Academic Relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please see the [Academic Policies](#) the [Student Services](#) pages

Unit 5 The Sci-Fi Disaster Film in the Cold War Era

Required Film:

The Day the Earth Caught Fire (Guest, UK, 1961, 98m, b/w, 2.35:1)

Required Reading:

article discusses the ending of the film, I recommend you read it after watched the film.)

Unit 6 The Cold War Disaster Drama

Required Film:

Fail-Safe (Lumet, USA, 1964, 112m, b/w, 1.85:1)

Required Reading:

Early Sixties Am (Note: Spoiler Alert! Because this article discusses the ending of the film, I recommend you read it after

Week 4 May 30 to June 3**Unit 7 The Disaster Movie in the 1970s**

Required Film:

The Poseidon Adventure (Neame, USA, 1972, 117m, c, 2.20:1)

Required Reading:

Unit 8 The Disaster Film Parody

Required Films:

Zero Hour! (Bartlett, USA, 1957, 81m, b/w)

Airplane! (Abrahams and Zucker, USA, 1980, 88m, 1.85:1)

Required Reading:

Close Reading 2 due Sunday, June 5 by 11:59 p.m.

Week 5 June 6 to 10**Unit 9 The Disaster Cycle in the 1990s**

Required Film:

Volcano (Jackson, USA, 1997, 104m, c, 1.85:1)

Required Reading:

Camera Obscura 17.2 (2002): 109-53.

Unit 10 The Un-Disaster Film

Required Film:

Last Night (McKellar, Canada, 1998, 95m, c,)

Required Reading: tba

Week 6 June 13 to 17**Unit 11 Global Warning**

Required Film:

The Day After Tomorrow (Emmerich, USA, 2004, 124m, c, 2.35:1)

Required Reading: tba

Unit 12 The Modern Disaster Drama

Required Film:

The Impossible

Enjoy the course, and best of luck with your studies.