Sample Syllabus: ENG 3387
DISASTER LITERATURE

ENG 3387-01: Disaster Literature [semester] Prof. Louise A. Sullivan-Blum
[Meeting Time and Location] Office: BH 207-C, ext. 4597
Office Hours: [days and times] ☎ lblum@mansfield.edu

Course Description: This class explores what the influential critic and novelist Susan Sontag has called “the imagination of disaster.” While natural and unnatural disasters have provided Hollywood and science fiction writers with material for decades, less familiar are the meditations on disasters that serious novelists have taken up in literary fiction. In this class we will consider how novelists imagine catastrophe. From pandemic to plague, climate change to global anti-US backlash, genetic engineering to nuclear war, alien invasion to zombie pandemic, from swift destruction unleashed by human avarice to the slow death of a dying world, we will examine the ways fiction reaffirms, questions, or rewrites the modalities of disaster. Along the way we will consider the social, historical, and political contexts of disaster fiction, exploring what it means to “think the unthinkable” in different times and places. We'll examine the recent surge in disaster literature—to what extent is it a predictor of our future and to what extent a warning? Expect stimulating reading, spectacular discussions, terrifying visions, and a personal appearance by one of the authors on our reading list. The emphasis of the course will be on active discussion and close introspection into the literature, our society, and ourselves. Course requirements include classroom participation, online discussion forums, quizzes, papers, tests, and a final project, in which we'll explore our own visions of the future that awaits us, and the steps we can take to influence that future.

★ This course is an elective in the Women's Studies minor.

Warning: The reading load is very heavy. Don’t fall behind.

Classroom Conduct: All students are expected to show respect to the instructor and the rest of the class. Please be conscious of how your behavior affects other people. This course is largely a discussion course, so please listen to each other and allow everyone a chance to participate in the discussion. Do not talk privately, even quietly, during the class except when you are engaged in group workshopping. Do not talk to others during freewriting. It irritates other students and breaks everyone’s concentration. Just as it is rude to talk while someone else is talking, it is rude to use an electronic device during class or to get up and walk out while class is being conducted. Please leave your cell phone, iPod, or other devices off and in your bag during class and take care of all personal business during the breaks between classes.

★ Note: Post a picture of yourself on D2L right now for 10 points extra credit!

Books Required Texts:
- *In a Perfect World*, Laura Kasischke, ISBN 0061766119
From the MU Catalog: This course focuses on analyzing the social, historical, and political contexts of disaster fiction, exploring what it means to “think the unthinkable” in different times and places.

General Education Course Objectives: ENG 3387 is an approved course in the Approaches to Knowledge—Humanities block. As such, this course will:

1) address the importance of multiple interpretations and reasoned defenses of texts, events, and ideas (evaluated in class discussion, online discussion forums, tests, quizzes, and paper assignments);
2) include how ideas are developed, challenged, modified, and defined over the course of time, by examining contemporary novels and comparing and contrasting current visions of possible dystopian futures with historical perspectives (evaluated in class discussion, online discussion forums, group work, tests, quizzes, and paper assignments);
3) address the analysis and evaluation of a variety of texts within their social and cultural contexts (evaluated in class discussion, in class group work, tests, quizzes, and informal and formal paper assignments);
4) require students to read discipline-specific texts and to engage in writing that totals at least 1,500 words (evaluated in informal response papers, in-class writing, essay portions of tests, and formal analysis papers);
5) address the interconnectedness between culture and knowledge and how the target discipline is both an element of culture and a method for analyzing it (evaluated in class discussion, online discussion forums, tests, and the final project);

General Education Student Learning Outcomes: This course is approved as a Humanities course in the General Education Program implemented in Fall 2011. The course’s objectives and outcomes listed above are consistent with the learning outcomes for Humanities courses, as listed below. This course may also be used in the Block 2: Languages and Literature Section of the old General Education model.

Upon completion of this course, students will have demonstrated that they can:

- interpret orally and/or in writing basic texts using critical analysis and reference to cultural contexts (linked to course outcomes 3, 4, and 5, as assessed by the final exam);
- describe the development or application of key concepts in the target disciplines (linked to course outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 5, as assessed by the final exam)
- use methods appropriate to the target discipline to inquire, analyze, and critique ideas and events (linked to course outcomes 2, 3, 4, and 5, as assessed by the final exam).
- analyze issues using a humanistic perspective (linked to course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, as assessed by the final exam).
- articulate an interconnectedness between culture and knowledge (linked to course outcomes 2, 3, 4, and 5, as assessed by the final exam).

General Education Assessment: The final exam may be used to help the university assess the extent to which the General Education program meets its stated learning outcomes.

Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes: In addition, ENG 3387 is a course that may be taken by English BA majors to fulfill an English program degree requirement. As such, this course includes outcomes consistent with several of our English degree program learning outcomes. Students who successfully complete this course will
• demonstrate their ability to interpret texts critically (linked to course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5);
• demonstrate their ability to situate literature in various contexts, including literary, cultural, and/or historical (linked to course outcomes 2, 3, and 5);
• demonstrate their ability to understand writing as a process, to assess rhetorical contexts, and to revise written work effectively (linked to course outcomes 1, 4, and 5);
• demonstrate their ability to conform to the prescriptive rules of standard written English (linked to course outcomes 1, 3, 4, and 5);
• demonstrate an understanding of and ability to use the structure of the English language (linked to course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5).

Note: The final exam for this course may be used to help the English Program assess the extent to which the program is meeting its stated learning outcomes.

 Desire2Learn (colloquially and fondly referred to as D2L: Copies of the course syllabus and assignment sheets will be made available on the D2L site for our course. If I must cancel class, I will communicate with you via your MU email account, and I will post instructions on our D2L site as soon as possible. Please continue to keep up with all the reading assignments, even if class is cancelled.

 Academic Integrity: All students are expected to turn in original work. Dishonesty in academic work, including cheating, academic misconduct, fabrication, or plagiarism is unacceptable. When information from outside sources is used, proper credit must be given to the original source. The student handbook, The Mountie Manual for upperclassmen, or The Student Planner for freshmen, outlines the procedures faculty will use to initiate disciplinary action in cases of academic dishonesty.

 Plagiarism: You have plagiarized when you represent someone else's words or ideas as your own. Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty. If you plagiarize in this class, your offense will be reported to the Provost's Office. The student handbook, The Mountie Manual for upperclassmen, or The Student Planner for freshmen, outlines the procedures faculty will use to initiate disciplinary action in cases of plagiarism. Consequences may range from failure of the course to expulsion from the university.

 Exceptionalities: If you have a documented psychological or learning disorder or other significant medical condition, please consult with the Department of Academic and Human Development (141 South Hall, 662-4798, wchabala@mansfield.edu) to make sure your professors are properly notified of your situation.

 ✓ Attendance: Attendance is crucial to your success in this course. I expect you to attend every class meeting. Because circumstances sometimes prohibit your attendance, however, you are permitted to miss one class (the equivalent of one week of the semester) without penalty. If you accumulate more than one unexcused absence, your final grade will be lowered one letter grade for each unexcused absence.

 If you must miss class due to documented illness or other excusable absence (illness, bereavement, sanctioned university events, etc.), you must do the following:
  1) inform me before the class, if possible, but no later than the first class after the excused absence
  2) provide me with a copy of the signed excuse (the original must be available for my review)*
  3) make up missed work as soon as possible
* Please see contact me as soon as possible if you have any special circumstances.

**Classroom Participation:** You are expected to attend the required classroom sessions consistently, in mind as well as body; to be on the alert for ways to contribute meaningfully to class discussion; to engage issues raised by your classmates & instructor; and to assume personal responsibility for the vitality and collaborative spirit of the class. Besides freeform discussion, you should always be ready to join in other classroom activities, whether pre-announced or impromptu. These may include small group exercises, writing exercises of various lengths, peer review of a classmate’s work, and anything else that enhances our work as a class.

Attendance and performance are closely intertwined. If you have a number of absences but become an active and engaged participant whenever you do happen to show up, you do not compensate for your absences. Similarly, if your attendance record is perfect, but you're not engaged, make no effort to listen or speak, or show a poor attitude, this is not adequate either. You will receive two participation grades - one at midterm, and one at the end of the semester, for a total of 100 points. Your participation grade will be determined in the following way:

- **48-50:** Participation in classroom discussion is **excellent.** You show up on the days classroom attendance is required. Your posts to the D2L discussion forums are timely and thoughtful. You contribute to the face-to-face conversation through active listening and thoughtful speaking. Both face-to-face and online, you offer insights into the topic. You ask questions of others’ ideas, showing interest in the contributions of others. If the occasion arises, you challenge others’ ideas in a respectful and helpful way. You lead discussion well where applicable. You take group work seriously, both leading and facilitating the discussion. You use the time given in class to write for that purpose. You never (let's face it: ever) text in class or wander in and out of the classroom without explanation; you don't consistently walk in late and leave early, and your cell phone never rings at inopportune moments, thus disrupting everyone's concentration. Your classroom decorum is, in a word, **impeccable.**
- **45-47:** Your participation as described above is **very good.**
- **40-44:** Your participation as described above is **good.**
- **35-39:** Your participation as described above is **adequate.**
- **30-34:** Your participation as described above is **inconsistently adequate.** If your participation in classroom discussion is minimal, you will received a grade in this range even if you attend every class.
- **25-29:** Your participation as described above is **inadequate.**
- **24 and below:** Your participation as described above is **extremely inadequate.** Students who miss a significant number of classes or whose behavior in class is disruptive will receive this grade.

**Participation in Online D2L Discussion Forums:** Because we meet only once a week, online discussion forums are a way for us to continue our conversations outside of class time. They are also a way for you to process ideas and prepare for class. I will post discussion questions and writing prompts periodically. You should check D2L regularly for new forums and new posts. All posts are due by 11:59 p.m. Friday (the night before class). Instructions for posting your responses and dates by which they must be posted will be included in the instructions for each online D2L forum. I may assign individual students to moderate or to summarize the discussion, depending on the nature of the post. As the
instructor, I will initiate the discussion, and I will read and assess your posts. I will respond to the class as a whole, rather than responding to individual posts.

Your responses to discussion questions, or posts, should be thoughtful and indicative of careful reading. The quality of the writing counts, too. Some characteristics I consider to be part of excellent discussion contributions are outlined below. I will consider these characteristics when assessing the quality and level of your response.

1) Posts and responses should be thorough and thoughtful. Just posting an "I agree" or "Good ideas" will not be considered adequate. Support statements with examples, experiences, or references.

2) Posts should be within a range of 75-150 words. If a post does not meet the minimum word count of 75, I will not count it toward your grade.

3) Discussions occur when there is dialogue; therefore, you need to build upon the posts and responses of the other students in your group to create discussion threads. Make sure to revisit the discussion forum and respond if necessary.

4) When relevant, add to the discussion by including prior knowledge, work experiences, references from the text or texts, web sites, resources, etc. (giving credit where appropriate). Include page numbers in parentheses and cite all information sources.

5) All contributions to the discussions (posts and responses) should be complete and free of grammatical or structural errors.

Online posts count for 10 points each. If your post meets the above criteria, then you will get full credit for the discussion. If your post meets some but not all of the criteria (for example, if the post does not build on the discussion or does not show college level writing), then you will get half credit for the discussion. Late posts, posts less than 75 words, or posts meeting none of the above criteria will receive no credit. Online posts will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- **10:** Your post is thorough and thoughtful, going beyond a simple "I agree" or "Good ideas." Your statements are supported with examples, experiences, or references. Your post is within a range of 75-150 words. If called for in the specific forum instructions, you contribute to the dialogue, revisiting the forum and responding if necessary. When relevant, you add to the discussion by including prior knowledge, work experiences, references from the text or texts, web sites, resources, etc. (giving credit where appropriate and including page numbers in parentheses). Your post is complete and free of grammatical or structural errors.

- **5:** Your post meets some but not all of the criteria listed above. It may fail to address the topic or include references when needed, or it may fail to show college level writing.

- **0:** Your post is late, nonexistent, or meets none of the criteria.

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.Midterm & Final Exam: These are worth 100 points each, and will be a combination of objective (in-class) and essay (take-home) questions.

Final Project: For this project, you—working alone or with a group—will create your own disaster narrative. You may use one of the many possible scenarios we discuss this semester (e.g. resource depletion or pandemic) or develop one of your own. You are free to approach this topic in whatever way you like, using your personal knowledge and talents. Some examples would be a one act play, a short
story, a graphic novel, a short film, a lyric poem, a monologue, or a work of art. More information on this later in the semester.

Grades:

- Attendance & Participation: 100
- Online Discussion Forums: 50-100
- Quizzes: 50-100
- Midterm: 100
- Final Exam: 100
- Final Project: 100

Total Points: Approximately 550. Additional assignments may be added during the course of the semester. (You can keep track of your grades on D2L. To calculate your final grade at any time in the semester, simply divide the total points you've received by the total points accumulated so far, or feel free to ask me.)

Tentative Schedule of Assignments: Each book must be read in full by the date it appears on the following schedule. Specific due dates and assignments may change during the course of the semester, depending on the pace of the class. All changes will be announced in class and on the D2L website for our class. Regular attendance and daily log-ins to the D2L site will ensure that you are up to date on all changes. All work is due by the date on which it appears in this schedule. No late assignments will be accepted without prior authorization.

★ Check D2L for discussion forum guidelines and due dates.

Week 1: Introductions & Discussion
Week 2: Oryx and Crake, to p. 218
Week 3: Oryx and Crake, to the end
Week 4: The Rapture, first half
Week 5: The Rapture, second half
Week 6: The Road
Week 7: The Road (film)/midterm exam
Week 8: Parable of the Sower, first part
Week 9: Parable of the Sower, second part
Week 10: In A Perfect World
Week 11: World War Z - first half
Week 12: World War Z - second half
Week 13: Enders Game
Week 14: Enders Game/In-class work on final projects
Week 15: Final Project Presentations

★ FINAL EXAM [date and time]