

COURSE CONTENT

Course Code / Title : HS4023 Sociology of Risk and Crisis

Pre-requisites : HS1001 Person and Society
HS2001 Classical Social Theory
HS2002 Doing Social Research
HS3001 Contemporary Social Theory
HS3002 Understanding Social Statistics

No. of AUs. : 4

Contact Hours : 52

Course Aims

As a noted sociologist reminds us, we now live in a society characterized by rampant production and global distribution of risk. Here the term “risk” refers less to physical conditions than to social circumstances that produce it. Risk in this subject is understood as an inevitable product of modern culture arising from the complex arrangement of socio-technical systems in the capitalist society. For the past century, our modern history has witnessed a myriad of unpleasant occurrences showing us that the world we are living in is not as safe as we have generally assumed. Many people in the world have gone through life-threatening natural disasters like earthquake, landslide, flood, hurricane, etc. Such threats are not only created by nature. Our material culture contributes dangers more than we can imagine. From simple things like car that we drive or cell phone we use to communicate to sophisticated technologies such as nuclear power and air transportation, risk is constantly present and in certain conditions it can turn into physical harms with disturbing effects. Our mindless exploitation of natural resources is another increasingly significant factor evoking instability in the environment that often times lead to unforeseen disasters. The bottom line is that there is always human intervention that provokes such horrific events to occur.

This course is an introduction to risk as a social concept. In the technical field, risk is defined as the probability of dangers or harms to happen. This course does not teach how to calculate or assess risk but to understand risk as an inherent part of social production in (late) modernity. It deals with structural and cultural factors that shape the dynamic of risk perception, production, distribution, and prevention. It also examines how knowledge about risk is produced in dealing with uncertainties in risk governance. As risk often transforms into harmful circumstances, this course covers topics on crisis and disaster that give students comprehensive understandings of the correlation between the construction of risk and the growing trend of crisis and disaster.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Distinguish risk as a scientific concept and risk as a social experience.
2. Apply sociological theories and concepts in examining how risk is defined and managed. Investigate specific issues of risk in Singapore through documentary film.

Course Content

Week 1: Introduction: Risk And Modernity

Week 2: Theorizing Risk 1

Week 3: Theorizing Risk 2

Week 4: Living In The Risk Society

Week 5: Risk, Knowledge, And Uncertainty

Week 6: Management Versus Risk Governance

Week 7: Risk Of Globalization And Globalization Of Risk

Week 8: Vulnerable Systems

Week 9: Studying Disaster Sociologically

Week 10: Technological Disaster: Nuclear Nightmares

Week 11: Disaster Resilience

Week 12: Documentary Screenings

Week 13: Final Review

Course Assessment

CA1 In-class quiz/test : 15%

CA2 Class participation : 10%

CA3 Class presentation : 10%

CA4 Essay : 25%

Final Examination : 40%

Total -----
100%