Critical speaking seminar: When Disaster Strikes-the Fault Lines of Humanitarian Aid
University of Pennsylvania
Anth 232: 401/ Soci230:401
Fall 2011

Instructor: Catherine van de Ruit Mayer
Class venue: Van Pelt FLMCR (Film Studies Class Room) 4th floor, room 425
Class time: Wednesdays 2-4.50 pm
Office Hours and location: Mondays 2-4 pm Van Pelt Library (Weigle Commons) or by appointment
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Japan’s earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis, Hurricane Katrina, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the subprime mortgage crisis: global phenomena that have produced catastrophic human suffering and trauma. In this seminar we will explore the central paradox of emergency aid: how the ethical urgency to reduce universal suffering collides with resource scarcity thus limiting the scope and potential of humanitarian relief. The course will consider the underlying social, political, economic and cultural conditions that magnify disasters, and critically examine how disasters expose the fault lines of social inequality embedded in society. Additionally, we will attend to ways in which disasters are presented and represented visually; exploring the repercussions of the 24 hour news cycle that consign disasters to the level of public spectacle and overlook recovery efforts. This course will offer students the opportunity to improve their public speaking skills as they analyze cases of disasters and their aftermath in a variety of speaking assignments including multi-media presentations. Classroom discussions and debates about topics such as the ethics of emergency aid and expert versus local problem solving strategies will provide additional speaking practice.

The seminar meets once per week on Wednesdays for from 2 – 4:50 pm. All students must come to each meeting prepared to discuss the week’s readings in detail. Class sessions will be highly participatory. The critical speaking seminar strives to improve public speaking and critical communication skills and a large portion of the assignments are formal oral presentations that are video recorded. Additionally each student works with a CWiC advisor to rehearse their presentations skills prior to their presenting their assignment.

Course objectives

Public speaking is a journey. Good communication involves a combination of technical input (voice, posture, and visual aids), mastery of their subject matter, careful listening, and self confidence. This course will not turn you into a brilliant orator over night but it will strengthen various aspects of your communication repertoire including:

1. Reading texts closely and critically to identify a scholar’s argument and to determine the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments;

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2. Assessing the quality of the research: the richness of the data and the credibility of social science analyses and interpretations;
3. Constructing oral presentations that are lucid, polished, and well organized;
4. Developing critical listening skills with the aim of learning how to ask content appropriate questions and providing fellow students with fair and measured feedback about their presentations;
5. Because each student will bring different levels of experience of public speaking to this seminar, students will identify their own communication goals and work towards achieving those goals; for some students greater self confidence might be their primary goal, while others will aim to improve technical components such as working with visual aids.

Assignments

This seminar is affiliated with Communication within the Curriculum (CWiC). Most assignments will be oral, and will include group and individual presentations. An undergraduate speaking advisor will be assigned to assist you with the oral presentation assignment. Your advisor has been trained in public speaking. Note that she/he will not tutor you in the course subject area; you should meet with your instructor for assistance with course material. Rather, your advisor will help you to clarify your message. He/she may focus on your thesis statement, organization, and visual aids, for example, as warranted. You will be required to meet with your advisor (outside of class) for two - one-hour sessions, but your advisor will meet with you more often if you like. The more prepared you are for the rehearsal, the better. Your CWiC advisor will attend a class in order to introduce her/himself, explain what to expect from the advising session, and direct you to CWiC’s online scheduler. http://www.sas.upenn.edu/cwic/. These two mandatory meetings with your speaking advisor will count toward 5% to each of your oral presentation grades. More information about the assignments will be discussed during the seminar.

Evaluation

Class participation 20% of grade
  • Attendance and presentation of workshop
  • Informal presentations
Oral presentations 60 % of grade
  • Build in meeting with CWiC advisors (10 % of grade)
Written report 20 % of grade

Course expectations/policies/code of conduct

  • Attendance

Excellent attendance is the basis for success in this seminar. Therefore if you miss more than two classes I will have to lower your grade by a third (i.e., from an A to A-). Attendance for the two assigned presentations is mandatory.
• Code of Academic Integrity
Students are required to abide by the Code of Academic Integrity, which can be found online at http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html and is reproduced below: Since the University is an academic community, its fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Essential to the success of this educational mission is a commitment to the principles of academic integrity. Every member of the University community is responsible for upholding the highest standards of honesty at all times. Students, as members of the community, are also responsible for adhering to the principles and spirit of the following Code of Academic Integrity.

Academic Dishonesty Definitions
Activities, that have the effect or intention of interfering with education, pursuit of knowledge, or fair evaluation of a student’s performance are prohibited. Examples of such activities include but are not limited to the following definitions:

A. Cheating: using or attempting to use unauthorized assistance, material, or study aids in examinations or other academic work or preventing, or attempting to prevent, another from using authorized assistance, material, or study aids. Example: using a cheat sheet in a quiz or exam, altering a graded exam and resubmitting it for a better grade, etc.
B. Plagiarism: using the ideas, data, or language of another without specific or proper acknowledgment. Example: copying another person’s paper, article, or computer work and submitting it for an assignment, cloning someone else’s ideas without attribution, failing to use quotation marks where appropriate, etc.
C. Fabrication: submitting contrived or altered information in any academic exercise. Example: making up data for an experiment, fudging data, citing nonexistent articles, contriving sources, etc.
D. Multiple submission: submitting, without prior permission, any work submitted to fulfill another academic requirement.
E. Misrepresentation of academic records: misrepresenting or tampering with or attempting to tamper with any portion of a student’s transcripts or academic record, either before or after coming to the University of Pennsylvania. Example: forging a change of grade slip, tampering with computer records, falsifying academic information on one’s resume, etc.
F. Facilitating academic dishonesty: knowingly helping or attempting to help another violate any provision of the Code. Example: working together on a take home exam, etc.
G. Unfair advantage: attempting to gain unauthorized advantage over fellow students in an academic exercise. Example: gaining or providing unauthorized access to examination materials, obstructing or interfering with another student’s efforts in an academic exercise, lying about a need for an extension for an exam or paper, continuing to write even when time is up during an exam, destroying or keeping library materials for one’s own use., etc.
* If a student is unsure whether his action(s) constitute a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity, then it is that student’s responsibility to consult with the instructor to clarify any ambiguities. (Source: Office of the Provost, 1996)

• Eating
Eating and drinking is permitted during the seminar. However out of respect for fellow students while they present their oral assignments ask that you not bring food into the classroom on the two days allocated to student presentations.

Communication within the Curriculum (CWiC): http://www.sas.upenn.edu/cwic/
• **Blackboard**
  
The seminar will have a Blackboard site. The articles we will read and ongoing class discussions will be posted on Blackboard. Anyone unfamiliar with Blackboard should make sure they have access to the site and learn to use it right away.

• **Resources**
  
  o Weingarten Learning resource center (statement on disabilities):  
    [www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc)  
  o Writing center:  [http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/help](http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/help)

**Required texts**


Class schedule and reading assignments
*Texts marked with an asterisk will be made available on blackboard.

Week 1: September 7 First meeting

Week 2 September 14: Why are we so prone to disaster?
Selections from the following available on blackboard
Create space

Case studies of disasters and crises

Week 3 September 21: The 1995 Chicago Heat wave
  Klinenberg: Heat Wave

Week 4 September 22: The 1992/93 Venezuelan Cholera Epidemic
  Briggs and Mantani Briggs: Stories in the time of cholera

Week 5 October 5: Chernobyl
  Petryna: Life exposed

Week 6 October 12: The subprime mortgage crisis
  Lewis: The big short: inside the doomsday machine

Media representations

Week 7 October 19: Picturing disaster
  *Malkki, L (1996) Speechless emissaries
  *Treichler, P (1999) How to have theory in an epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS. Durham

  Film: Belly of the Basin:A Sisters’ Eye on Media Production

Communication within the Curriculum (CWiC): http://www.sas.upenn.edu/cwic/
Theorizing disasters and their aftermath

Week 8 October 26: The problem of Humanitarian AID
  
  Group presentations

Week 9 November 2: Global Expertise and local knowledge
  
  Engel Merry: Human Rights and Gender Violence

Week 10 November 9: Corporations and humanitarianism
  
  Klein: Shock Doctrine

Week 11 November 16: Living in high risk societies
  
  Perrow: Normal Accidents

Week 12 November 23: Social organization and risk
  
  Vaughan: Challenger launch decision
  Watch Reagan’s speech and Peggy Noonan's chapter about preparing the speech ("What I Saw at the Revolution").

Week 13 November 30: Social suffering, structural violence and the inevitability of disaster
  
  * Farmer - Pathologies of Power
  *Scott – Seeing like a state

Week 14 December 7: Last class
  
  A Disaster summit – student presentations

December 16 – 6 pm: Due date for written paper