

POLS 405
Capstone Seminar
The Politics of the End
Claire P. Curtis
Office: 114 Wentworth, #206
Office Hours: M/W 1-3
Phone: 953-6510
e-mail: curtisc@cofc.edu



This Capstone has grown out of my sabbatical book project. That book uses post apocalyptic fiction, fiction about the end of the world, as a new setting for the state of nature and the social contract that emerges from it. What I am interested in this class is how we think about the possibility of such events in our actual lives. We are not (yet) living in the pages of a novel about an approaching comet, but we do encounter warnings about potentially catastrophic events and occurrences. This is a particularly salient topic for a capstone seminar. The capstone provides a culminating experience for political science majors. It offers you a chance to pull from the classes you have taken and the interests you have to look at an issue that cuts across the subfields of the discipline. Finally the capstone includes an ongoing research project where you will be able to delve more deeply into an aspect of our class work.

There are three questions that will organize this class. The course is divided into three parts with each of the three topics (nuclear war, global warming and pandemic disease) as a focus for one question. I am not an expert in any of these particular areas – what I do bring to this class is a curiosity about how we think about these issues – how thinking about the catastrophic impacts the way that we think about politics.

- How do we come to terms with the very idea of such world changing events?
Lawrence O. Gostin, *The AIDS Pandemic, Complacency, Injustice and Unfulfilled Expectations* (2004)
- How do we prepare for the possibility of such events?
George H. Quester, *Nuclear First Strike: Consequences of a Broken Taboo* (2006)
- How have we politicized the very issues that could bring about such radical change?
David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith, *Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy* (2007)

The other books ordered for the class will be used in thinking through all three questions from differing perspectives. These readings will be supplemented with articles and further readings chosen by the group presenters (see below).

Required Books

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*
Lawrence O. Gostin, *The AIDS Pandemic, Complacency, Injustice and Unfulfilled Expectations*
John Hersey, *Hiroshima*
Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the face of Cultural Devastation*
George H. Quester, *Nuclear First Strike: Consequences of a Broken Taboo* (2006)
David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith, *Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy*
Cass Sunstein, *Worst Case Scenarios*

Course Requirements:

Research Project	25%
Presentation	25%
Class participation plus response papers	20%
Exams (3)	10% each

Schedule of Readings:

August 27: Introduction

Part One: Coming to Terms: Thinking and Failing to think about the End

September 1: John Hersey, *Hiroshima*
September 3: John Hersey, *Hiroshima*

September 8: *Worst Case Scenarios*, Intro, ch 3
September 10: *Worst Case Scenarios*, ch 4

September 15: *AIDS Pandemic*, Forward and Preface and Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*
September 17: *AIDS Pandemic*, Part One, “AIDS in the Courtroom”

September 22: *AIDS Pandemic*, Part Two, “Rights and Dignity”
September 24: *AIDS Pandemic*, Part Three, “Policy, Politics, and Ethics” and Ch. 17 (from Part Five)
September 29: TBA
October 1: Presentation

Part Two: Preparing for the End: Thinking about a Response

October 6:	<i>Worst Case Scenarios</i> , chs 5-6
October 8:	<i>Nuclear First Strike</i> , Ch 1
October 13:	Fall Break, No Class
October 15:	<i>Nuclear First Strike</i> , Chs 2-3
October 20:	<i>Nuclear First Strike</i> , Ch 4
October 22:	<i>Nuclear First Strike</i> , 5-6
October 27:	Bruce Ackerman “The Emergency Constitution” <i>Yale Law Journal</i> March 2004
October 29:	SUS, no class
November 3:	TBA
November 5:	Presentation

Part Three: Politicizing the Possibility of Catastrophe

November 10:	<i>Worst Case Scenarios</i> , Chs. 1-2 and <i>Radical Hope</i> (read throughout this section)
November 12:	<i>Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy</i> , Chs 1-2
November 17:	<i>Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy</i> , Chs 3-4
November 19:	<i>Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy</i> , Chs, 5-6
November 24:	<i>Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy</i> , Chs, 7-8
November 26:	Thanksgiving Break, No Class
December 1:	<i>Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy</i> , Chs 9-10
December 3:	TBA
December 8:	Presentation

Presentations

The class will be divided into three groups, one for each of the sections of the course. As you will see each section ends with a presentation, given by the designated group. These presentations are very open ended – but here are some questions to get you started:

- 1) What do you think people should know about the issue at hand?
- 2) How do the issue and the particular question (thinking about how I have framed the syllabus) overlap?

- 3) How does this issue overlap with the other questions?
- 4) What are the ways in which we as a society are encouraged to think about this issue?
- 5) What would it mean to be fully informed or prepared for this possible catastrophe

Groups are to take ownership over particular sections of the course – this does not mean that they are the only ones to be participating in the discussions during their section, but it does mean that the group gets to take the lead on thinking about what it is that we need or want to know that we do not yet know. Who do they want to talk to? What other resources would they like to have? The class period before the presentation gives a one class opportunity for the group to assign a reading or bring in a guest speaker or show a film and the presentation is to be thought of as communicating to a group wider than just the class. The class is your first audience, but I want you to think of these presentations as potentially appropriate for a larger audience.

Research Projects

The Capstone seminar is particularly a place for you to do your own research project. There are a variety of research topics that you might take up in this class. There are many issues that we are not considering. My focus here is largely on the United States, but you could research catastrophic events in other countries. I have not assigned any reading on religious views about the end of the world or any millenarian movement, but there is a huge literature about that. I also do not want to restrict you to a traditional research project if you are interested in doing something either more active or more creative. We will talk more in class about the variety of projects and where people want to go with this part of the class.

Exams

There will be an exam for each section of the course. There will be both a take home and an in class portion of this exam.

Participation and Response Papers

I expect active participation in this class. That participation can take the form of talking in class or of sharing ideas and comments with students outside of class (we will talk the first day about the variety of ways in which you can do this). I also expect you to write short responses to the readings. These responses can include questions for discussion, further information that you think is of interest, reactions to the reading...there are many different kinds of responses. Initially these can be e-mailed to me, but we will discuss the other ways in which you might want to submit these papers. You will need to hand in at least one response paper every week (either for Monday or for Wednesday) and those responses must be in by 2pm the day of class.