

GES 139: University Seminar

Wildfire: Disasters, Environment, and Society

Prof. Stentor Danielson

Office: Advanced Technology and Science Hall, Room 327 (enter through the Geography main office, Room 319, and go straight back then take a right)

Phone: 738-2564

Email: stentor.danielson@sru.edu

Office hours: Official office hours are Monday and Wednesday 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., and Thursday 2:00-4:00 p.m. My door is always open when I am in the office, and I welcome students anytime I'm in.

About this course

Recent wildfires in California and Brazil have dominated the news, but fire is a major force shaping landscapes all around the world. In this class, you will get a global perspective on the role fire plays in ecosystems and human societies. We will examine the ecological effects of burning and suppression, cross-cultural differences in the use of fire, the relationship of wildfire to climate change, and measures to promote fire safety from the household to the national level.

University Seminar serves as the entry point to the Slippery Rock University general education program. With its small seminar setting and strong faculty-student interaction, the course promotes intellectual inquiry, critical and creative thinking, and academic excellence. Through varied content, the course introduces students to academic discourse and information literacy while exploring topics such as diversity and inclusion and global awareness. This course will set students along the path to becoming engaged with issues and scholarship important to a 21st century education while they learn about themselves and their place in the world.

Course outcomes

At the completion of this course, successful students will be able to:

- C1: Explain the science behind why fires burn and how they affect various ecosystems
- C2: Describe the history of human use and management of fire in the USA and around the world
- C3: Analyze the role of cultural differences in shaping responses to fire
- C4: Evaluate contemporary fire management and fire safety policies, in light of changing settlement patterns and global climate change
- C5: Make discriminating use of information from academic literature, news media, social media, remote sensing, and historical records to understand wildfire

At the completion of the University Seminar, students will be able to:

- U1: Demonstrate a commitment to intellectual rigor and academic excellence.
- U2: Produce ideas in written, digital, and spoken forms.
- U3: Engage with topics of diversity and inclusion.

U4: Make local and global connections.

U5: Evaluate information sources, distinguishing unsupported opinions and beliefs from researched claims and evidence.

U6: Understand the interdisciplinary nature of the University Seminar, and how the course relates to the Rock Studies program, students' chosen (or intended) majors, and lifelong learning.

These outcomes connect to the outcomes of the Rock Integrated Studies Program:

LS1: Demonstrate knowledge of human cultures, diversity, and the physical and natural world

Demonstrate knowledge of the sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts.

LS2: Demonstrate intellectual and practical skills:

Apply the processes of inquiry and analysis; Think critically; Think creatively; Develop and express ideas in writing; Develop and express ideas orally; Apply quantitative reasoning skills; Apply information literacy skills; Solve problems; Extract and make meaning from written texts

LS3: Practice personal and social responsibility:

Demonstrate intercultural knowledge and competence; Engage in ethical reasoning; Utilize foundations and skills for lifelong learning; Engage in global learning; Practice civic knowledge and engagement – local and global; Engage in self-care and well-being

LS4: Engage in integrative and applied learning

Assignments

1. Class Participation

Class participation is an important part of mastering the course content. I expect you to be in class as often as possible, but I also understand that other things can come up that interfere. When you are in class, I expect you to be prepared and engaged with the material, bringing your best effort. Your class participation grade will be based on the quality of your contributions to the class, not simply the quantity of time that you attended. Your participation will be graded twice (once at the halfway point of the semester and once at the end), and in each case you will submit a short writeup indicating what grade you think you deserve for your participation and explaining why. I will factor your arguments into my decision about the quality of your participation.

2. Current Events

At the beginning of each class period, there will be an opportunity to share current news stories related to wildfire with the class. When you share a story, you should describe for the class the events being reported, and explain how it connects to any activities, readings, or lessons we've had in the class. Then you will propose one discussion question to your classmates based on the events in the article. Current events will be graded twice (once at the halfway point of the semester and once at the end), and you will need to earn at least 5 points during each grading period to get full credit. Presenting an article to the class is worth 2 points, and giving an answer to a discussion question is worth one point.

3. Reflection Journal

Studying at the college level is not just about learning things. It's also about examining your own learning process. At the end of each week, you will have to make an entry in your reflection journal with two components. First, you will respond to a reflection prompt that I provide, incorporating the material and concepts from that week's classes into your answer. This portion of your journal should be at least 500 words. Then, you should pose a question that the week's activities raised for you, and which you would be interested in learning the answer to. I will select one or more of the questions from each week's journals to discuss in class the following week. You will have 14 journal entries to do, but I will drop your worst 2.

4. Final Exam

The final exam will be held during the normally scheduled final exam slot. During the final week of classes, the class will work together to develop the exam questions. This is not an "easy A," but rather a chance for you to show off everything that you have learned this semester.

6. Extra Credit

Throughout the course, you may earn extra credit by creating memes relevant to each week's lesson. These memes should be posted to the designated discussion board on D2L no later than the start of class on the Tuesday following the week whose lesson you are meme-ing. Anyone who submits at least one meme during the course of the semester will earn an additional 2% credit on their final grade. I will also choose the two memes that I like best, and their creators will earn a further 2% (4% total).

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Participation	20%
Current Events	10%
Reflection Journal	60% (5% each)
Final Exam	10%

Your grades will be available through D2L, and your final grade will be based strictly on the points you earn from each assignment – I will not adjust or curve grades at the end of the class. However, I will accept arguments as to why you think my grading of a particular assignment was incorrect.

Attendance and Preparation

Wildfire is a complex subject. I expect all students to attend every class, because class lectures, discussions, and activities will be key to learning the material. You should come prepared to talk about any assigned readings or homework you are given between classes. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate to get caught up on all class material and announcements that you missed. Once you have done this, I will be happy to answer additional questions you may have about the class – but I cannot re-do the entire lesson for you because you were absent.

I assume that all members of this class are adults who have chosen to take this class because you are interested in learning about wildfire. Therefore, behavior that is disruptive to your own learning or that of others will not be tolerated, and you will be asked to leave. Such behavior includes: eating, smoking,

sleeping, working on work for other classes or personal business, and talking about topics other than wildfire.

I encourage you to bring a portable electronic device such as a laptop, smart phone, or tablet to class each day, because many of our class activities will require accessing information online. However, I expect you to use these devices responsibly and for class activities only. If your device becomes a distraction, I may ask you to put it away.

Special Needs

Your ability to master the class material should not be hindered by anything other than your own effort. If you have a disability, health issue, outside responsibility, or other concern that may affect your ability to succeed in this class, do not hesitate to contact me or the university's Office of Disability Services (738-4877, 105 University Union), and we will work together to find an accommodation for you.

Slippery Rock University and its faculty are committed to assuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to meet this commitment and to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and guidance from the Office for Civil Rights, the University requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the University's Title IX Coordinator. The only exceptions to the faculty member's reporting obligation are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a University-approved research project. Faculty members are obligated to report sexual violence or any other abuse of a student who was, or is, a child (a person under 18 years of age) when the abuse allegedly occurred to the person designated in the University protection of minors policy. Information regarding the reporting of sexual violence and the resources that are available to victims of sexual violence is set forth at: <http://www.sru.edu/offices/diversity-and-equal-opportunity/sexual-misconduct-and-victim-resources>.

I hope to create a space where students have the opportunity to bring all aspects of their selves into the classroom in order to fully engage in this course. I support people of all gender expressions and gender identities and encourage students to use the name and set of pronouns which best reflect who they are. In this spirit, I welcome and expect all students to also use the correct name and pronouns of their classmates. I will do my best to respect and use the language you use to refer to yourself and will encourage other members of our classroom community to do the same. Please inform me if my documentation reflects a name or set of pronouns different from what you use, and if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me after class, by email, or during office hours.

Changes

While I do not expect much to change about this syllabus, I reserve the right to make changes and will notify students of them in class and/or by email.

Desire2Learn

I will use the D2L system to distribute assignments, to record grades, and to send messages about the class. Students should make sure that they are able to log in to the class's D2L site as well as the electronic reserves for this class on the library website. It is your responsibility to contact ITS or the library if you have a problem. You are also responsible for checking your SRU email account daily, as I will be sending class emails through D2L to those addresses.

Academic Honesty

Cheating (any method for getting the correct answers other than knowing the material yourself) and plagiarism (representing others' work as your own) will not be tolerated, and I will be alert for signs of both. In your papers, any idea that you take from any person other than yourself must be properly cited, and any words or phrases that you take from others must be clearly marked as quotations. You may discuss ideas with your classmates, or get help proofreading, but all of the writing must be your own. On the first instance of cheating or plagiarism, you will receive a zero for that assignment. On the second instance, you will receive a zero for the course. Review the section in your Student Handbook on Academic Honesty for a more detailed explanation of the university's procedures for handling cheating and plagiarism.

Schedule of Topics

Week 1: Aug 27 & 29 – Anatomy of a Disaster: Black Saturday

JOURNAL: How might understanding wildfire be useful to someone in my major? How might someone in my major contribute to our understanding of wildfire?

Week 2: Sept 3 & 5 – How Fires Burn

JOURNAL: Think about your hometown, or about the town of Slippery Rock. What areas do you think would be most at risk if a fire started nearby, and which areas would be least at risk?

Week 3: Sept 10 & 12 – Ecosystems and Fire

JOURNAL: Choose an article from the journal *Fire* (<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/fire>) that looks interesting to you. Read it, then explain in your own words what the authors found.

Week 4: Sept 17 & 19 – Fire Regimes

JOURNAL: Do you think expanding logging would be a good or a bad thing from the point of view of fire safety? Why or why not? Use evidence from at least one reliable source that we did not look at in class.

Week 5: Sept 24 & 26 – Indigenous People and Fire

JOURNAL: How should mainstream fire management incorporate indigenous and traditional fire practices? Make an argument for dismissal, learning, co-management, or sovereignty.

Week 6: Oct 1 & 3 – Fire History

JOURNAL: What is the most interesting similarity, and the most interesting difference, in the history of fire between the US and Australia?

Week 7: Oct 10 – Arson and Incendiarism

JOURNAL: If you could make one change to the way arson is addressed in this country, what would it be, and why do you think that change would make a positive difference?

NOTE: Last day for Current Events for the first half of the semester, and Participation writeups for the first half of the semester due.

Week 8: Oct 15 & 17 – Global Fire

JOURNAL: What one thing do you recommend that the international community should do in response to major fires in the Amazon rain forest? Who do you think would disagree with your approach, and how would you respond to them?

Week 9: Oct 22 & 24 – Community Fire Safety

JOURNAL: Do you think the US should adopt the “stay or go” policy? Why or why not?

Week 10: Oct 29 & 31 – Fire and Gender

JOURNAL: How would you suggest that Forest Service leadership respond to accusations of sexism in their firefighting staff?

Week 11: Nov 5 & 7 – The Wildland-Urban Interface

JOURNAL: Do you think the WUI is likely to expand in the coming decade? Why or why not?

Week 12: Nov 12 & 14 – Climate Change and Fire

JOURNAL: Some advocates argue that the media should put more emphasis on the connection to climate change when reporting on major wildfires. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Week 13: Nov 19 & 21 – Contemporary Fire Policy in the US

JOURNAL: Describe one important policy reform you would make in the US wildfire management system.

Week 14: Nov 26 – Making Fire Policy

JOURNAL: Describe the strategy that you pursued in your role as a Senator, and evaluate your success. Then reflect on the policy that the class chose, from your own point of view. Do you think it was a good outcome?

Week 15: Dec 3 & 5 – Anatomy of a Disaster: Mendocino Complex

Week 16: Dec 10 – Final Exam, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm