Course Purpose and Objectives:
Sadly, there are no shortages of humanitarian disasters in the world. Indeed, the past year has witnessed the continued refugee crisis coming out of Syria, the earthquake in Nepal as well as Ebola outbreaks in West Africa, just to name a few. This purpose of this course is to provide you with the analytic tools to examine and critically assess these crises as well as the ways in which we respond to them. Specifically, we will examine the multiple facets of humanitarian action, including the nature of complex political emergencies, the primary actors that respond to these emergencies, the results of these interventions (for better or worse), and ways in which such interventions can be improved and reformed.

Thus after taking this course, you will be able to

- Identify key concepts, analytic frameworks, and dilemmas related to humanitarian action.
- Examine changes in the nature of conflicts and their implications for humanitarian action.
- Assess problems inherent in humanitarian action, including coordination difficulties as well as shortcomings with evidence.
- Apply and evaluate crises related to food security, as well as the public health concerns often inherent in crises.
- Appraise reform efforts in the humanitarian sector.

Required Readings:

Unless indicated otherwise all other readings are available in the Canvas site for the course.

Course Structure and Requirements:
NOTE: the below grade weightings are for PSC 285 students.

This course will be structured around six main modules, each of which will cover a group of issues related to humanitarian action, and (with one exception) will take place over the course of two weeks. While you are certainly free to read ahead, each module goes “live” on Monday of the day listed on the syllabus, and will proceed in this general fashion:

-Starter question (6% of total grade): this is a “warm up” to be completed before doing the readings. Its main purposes are to gage your initial thoughts and assumptions on some of the topics that will
be covered. This will be due within a day of receiving the module. You will receive a participation grade for this response (100 for participating, 0 otherwise).

- **Readings and quiz (six quizzes; 48% total):** The first part of the module -- to be completed the first week -- will consist of completing the readings and taking a quiz on them. The readings are listed in the syllabus. I will provide some background commentary related to the readings. These are intended to provide you with the broader context surrounding the readings, or to point out common themes and issues addressed in the readings. It is advisable to read my comments, as they are intended to facilitate your enhanced understanding of the readings. That being said, this is not a substitute for the assigned readings, and you are expected to do all readings listed in the syllabus. The main purposes of the quizzes are (a) to make sure that you completed the readings and (b) to gage your understanding of them. The format for the quizzes will vary, though it will generally be either multiple choice or short answer.

- **Discussion activities:** Each module will also include one or two discussions or active learning exercises related to the topics covered in the readings. Each of you will complete the following:

  a. **Original posting (30% total):** in light of your knowledge of the previous readings, provide a thoughtful response to the question(s) posed, or the given activity (video, news article, etc). Everyone is required to submit an original posting, and you will not be able to see everyone else’s postings until you have submitted one. Each original posting should be about 200-300 words in length (roughly a double-spaced page). To get a score of at least 80%, a posting will meet the following criteria:
    1. submitted on time
    2. proper length
    3. incorporates at least two specific points from the readings.

Characteristics of successful postings (one that gets a higher grade) include:

1. Relating ideas in this module to those in earlier modules.
2. Relating of information to personal experience, current events, or even pop culture.
3. Show some level of critical thought and originality, rather than just reciting facts from the readings – assume that we all know what the article states and don’t need to hear it again!

Keep in mind that the main purpose of these postings is to generate thoughtful discussion, and thus higher-level learning, on concepts and issues of contention related to the course. In terms of writing, while I won’t grade strictly on writing style/grammar, effective writing and argumentation is definitely a plus. While I won’t lower your grade for missing an occasional comma, if I can’t tell what you’re trying to argue you will not receive a good grade for the posting! Also while the postings involve the course readings, if you use any type of external sources please provide a citation (at the least a web-link).
b. **Replies (16% total)**: you should complete at least two replies in each discussion. Replies should (a) discuss at least one particular point of contention (that is something you agree or disagree with) and (b) be at least 100 words in length – don’t just say “I agree!” Also keep in mind that proper etiquette is to be maintained at all times. Please avoid the use of personal insults, as I do NOT want our discussions to resemble drunken Facebook/Twitter arguments!

NOTE: Please keep in mind that – as this is an online course – participation in online discussions is an integral part of the course experience and is definitely NOT optional. However, I will drop your lowest “Original Posting” and two lowest “Replies” grades.

**For PSC 385 Students:**
In addition to the requirements listed above, you also need to complete the below assignment to get upper-division credit for the course. Assignments and weightings are listed below:

- Starter Questions (6%)
- Quizzes (48%)
- Original Discussion Postings (27%)
- Replies (14%)
- Book Review (5%)

Writing an analytical review that deals with some aspect of humanitarian action. Reviews should be approximately 800-1,000 words in length, and must contain (a) a summary of the book as well as (b) at least two paragraphs that critically assess the book in light of the course concepts. I will provide a list of possible books, though you are free to make your own suggestion (subject to my approval). The book review is due no later than Aug 9.

**Other course policies:**

*Make-up policy for online courses:*
Given the nature of this class, I am not able to allow anyone to make up missed discussions or replies. However, I will allow for make-up quizzes in case of either (a) a travel conflict – arranged in advance – in which you will be “off the grid” for a period of time or (b) a documented illness or medical emergency. In these circumstances make-up quizzes can be taken during finals week (Aug 6-12).

*Instructor Availability:*
As this is an online course I will not have office hours – if there is some burning reason that you feel necessitates a personal meeting it can be arranged, though that is certainly not “plan A.” In general I reply to any email queries within a 24-hour period (must often much sooner) so don’t freak out if
you email me and don’t hear back for an hour or two! If I am going to be inaccessible for an extended period of time I will let everyone know in advance.

**Academic Dishonesty:**
Any type of academic dishonesty will result in severe disciplinary action on the part of the instructor. Cheating and plagiarism will be grounds for receiving an “F” on the assignment/examination or an “F” for the course, depending on the severity of the offense. UAB policy regarding academic dishonesty is outlined in [https://www.uab.edu/students/academics/honor-code](https://www.uab.edu/students/academics/honor-code) (Links to an external site.)

**Students with Disabilities:**
If you are registered with Disability Support Services, please let me know as soon as possible if you will need any accommodations. If you have a disability but have not contacted Disability Support Services, please call 205-934-4205 or visit DSS at 1701 9th Ave. South.

**Modules and Readings***

*NOTE:*
- may be subject to change
- “HI” = *Humanitarian Intervention*
- “HB” = *Humanitarian Business*

Module 1 – Intro to Humanitarian Action and Complex Political Emergencies (May 9-May 20)

Objectives:
- Outline course contents and expectations.
- Identify key concepts related to the study of humanitarian action.
- Assess some of the key dilemmas related to humanitarian action.
- Apply these concepts to a specific case study.
- Review some of the key international laws surrounding humanitarianism.

Readings:
- HI, Introduction and Chapter 1
- HB, Introduction, pp. 18-29.
ICRC. 2014. *International Humanitarian Law: Answers to Your Questions* (read answers to questions 1-3, 5, 7, 8, and 15; skim the rest)

Module 2 – Historical Foundations and Current Dilemmas (May 23-June 3)

Objectives:
- Describe the major historical perspectives on humanitarian action.
- Understand the major epochs of humanitarian strategy.
- Appraise the different schools of thought on humanitarianism.
- Examine the challenges presented by “new wars.”
- Assess the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) doctrine and its implications.

Readings:
- HI, Chapters 2-4.
- HB, pp. 29-55; Chapter 5

Module 3 – Issues and Analytic Frameworks (June 6-June 24)

Objectives:
- Identify and evaluate some of the key ethical issues and challenges associated with humanitarianism.
- Appraise the concept of neutrality as it applies to humanitarian actions.
- Examine problems related to the security of humanitarian workers, including the gendered nature of some of the threats to security.
- Assess the many coordination problems associated with humanitarian interventions.
- Identify and examine some of the key dysfunctions in the “market” for humanitarian actions, such as rent-seeking behavior and the negative externalities that may be created by assistance.

Readings:
Module 4 – Frameworks and Issues in the Practice of Humanitarian Action (June 27-July 8)

Objectives:
- Discuss the evidence problems commonly associated with humanitarian action.
- Review trends in evidenced-based approaches in this area.
- Apply these issues and approaches to food security crises.
- Examine the proximate and underlying causes of famine.
- Assess the livelihoods approach to humanitarian action.

Readings:
Module 5 – Health Implications of Humanitarian Emergencies: Conflict Sensitivity; Reform Efforts (July 11-July 22)

Objectives:
- Delineate key public health concerns inherent in humanitarian emergencies.
- Critically examine sensitivity to conflict situations in humanitarian actions.
- Define and assess the SPHERE standards for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- Appraise reform efforts in the humanitarian sector, particularly proposals for its professionalization.

Readings:

Module 6 – Reforms (continued); The Future of Humanitarian Action; Response and Reflection (July 25-Aug 9)

Objectives:
- Delineate ways in which the global and regional context of humanitarian action may shift in the future, and outlines ways in which the sector can better meet these changes.
- Discuss and evaluate proposals for the reform of the humanitarian sector.
- Analyze the implications of remote management for humanitarian operations.

Readings:
- HI, Chapter 5
- HB, Chapter 6