Catastrophe

Introduction:
We do not have to look far into the past to find events which are called “catastrophic”: 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf oil spill, civil wars around the globe, etc. The current tendency to hyperbole tends to make us forget that there are orders of magnitude where catastrophe is concerned when viewed from a global perspective. More deserving of the term would be the Black Death and World War I, for example, but even these events cannot compare with the End Permian Extinction, when 90% of the world’s species perished.

So what are we going to study in this course and why? How does this seminar enhance our experience and understanding of “the liberal arts”? These are the questions we will address out the outset of the class as we formulate our goals and talk about methods of achieving them.

Evaluation:
This course is centered on argument and inquiry, so your grade will depend on several factors:
1) Your preparation for each class and the quality of your participation
2) How thoughtful and well-written your papers are for each class
3) Your end-of-term project and presentation

Textbooks:
The following textbooks are available at the Bookstore. Other readings will be available on e-reserves or sent to you by email.
To access e-reserves, go to the Hub, select Gould Library, e-reserves, Paas, Econ 100, enter course password: Econ

Diedre McCloskey : Economical Writing

Richard A. Clarke and Robert Knake, Cyber War: the Next Threat to National Security and What to do about it.

Madeline Drexler, Emerging Epidemics,

Richard M. Cohen, Blindsided: Lifting a Life Above Illness
Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Week 1
Mon., Sept. 10: Introduction to the Course
   Setting Goals
   William Cronon “Only Connect…” The Goals of a Liberal Education.

Wed., Sept. 12 Catastrophic Risk: How Real Is It?
   Richard Posner, Catastrophe: Risk and Response, Ch. 1
   McCloskey, pps 1-16

Fri., Sept. 14 Catastrophic Risk: Explaining Inertia
   Posner, Ch. 2
   Mc Closkey, pp 20-34

Week 2 : Case I: Pandemics

* Mon., Sept. 17 Drexler: Emerging Epidemics  Chs. 1,2

Wed., Sept. 19 Drexler, Chs 3
   Mc Closkey, pp.35-60

Fri., Sept. 21 Drexler, Ch 4
   Mc Closkey, pp, 60-71
   Discussion of Final Project and Distribution of Assignment

Week 3

* Mon., Sept.24 Drexler  Chs. 5

Wed., Sept. 26 Drexler, Ch. 6, 7
   Mc Closkey, pp 72-79

Fri., Sept. 28 Visualizing a Solution
   Drexler, Ch. 8
   Laurie Garrett, The Coming Plague, Ch. 17
   McCloskey, pp. 80-89
Week 4  Case II: Climate Change

*Mon., Oct. 1  Brian Clegg, Armageddon Science, Ch. 4
  DeVilliers, Ch. 6
Wed., Oct. 3  McKibben, Bill, Eaarth Chs 1,2

Thurs., Oct 4  Film: the Day After Tomorrow
  7PM Library 305

Fri., Oct. 5  Guest speaker: Professor Trish Ferrett

Week 5  Case III: Cyberterrorism *

*Mon., Oct. 8  Clarke, Ch. 1,2

Wed., Oct. 10  Clarke, Ch. 3,4

Fri, Oct. 12  No class

Week 6
Mon., Oct. 15  (Mid-term Break)

*Wed., Oct. 17  Clarke, Chs. 5,6
  Paper Topic Due

Fri, Oct. 19  Clarke, Chs. 7,8

Week 7 Case IV: Asteroid Impact

*Mon., Oct. 22  deVilliers, Ch. 7

Wed., Oct. 24  class meets at 7PM in Library 305 for a screening of
  The Doomsday Asteroid

Fri., Oct. 26 11:00  A& I Convocation: Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauzé
  Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute
  of Technology. Professor Turkle is an expert on the subjective side of human
  relationships with technology; the title of her address will be "Necessary Conversations:
  Technology as the Architect of our Intimacies."

Fri, Oct. 26  Guest Speaker  Sydney Wolfe
  President, Large Synoptic Survey Telescope Corp.
**Week 8 : Case 5 Personal Catastrophe**

Mon., Oct. 29  Individual Response to Catastrophe
            Cohen, Preface,  Chs 1,2,3

Wed., Oct. 31  Cohen, Chs 4,5,6,7 ,8

Fri, Nov. 2    Cohen, Chs 9,10,11,12

**Week 9  Research Project Discussions**

*Mon., Nov. 5  Project Presentations  ( students presenting projects on this day may turn
            in their papers on Wednesday)

Wed., Nov. 7  Project Presentations

Fri, Nov. 9   Project Presentations

**Week 10**

Mon., Nov. 12 Project Presentations

Wed., Nov. 14 Conclusions ( and scones!)
            **Project Papers Due In Class**

**Class Paper Assignments**

The 7 papers for class are to be one or two paragraphs long and should present one idea
you had from the reading (or film )and class discussion,  framed within the general
themes of the course. Short papers are hard to write, but they constitute the majority of
what we do write, so gaining skill in expressing one idea in a succinct, persuasive, clear
way is important. We will be reading McCloskey early in the term and discussing writing
as we go along in the course, so you should try to learn from these discussions to improve
your exposition.

The days on which papers are due are marked with an * in the syllabus. They should be
handed in in paper form.
Themes of the Course

1. What are the components of a liberal arts education?

2. What are the ways in which a liberal education can help us progress from knowledge toward truth?

3. In what ways are catastrophes like other events and how are they different?

4. What light can a multi-disciplinary approach as opposed to that of a single discipline shed on the study of catastrophes and on related public policy?