In the years 2020-22, the world was in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet there is a much more devastating disaster on the horizon: the global environmental crisis. Some of its consequences are apparent already, including fire and flooding (and the proliferation of pandemics). This course will consider these two crises – and disasters in general – from the standpoint of knowledge and action. Put differently, how aware are we about looming disasters, how do we assess them, and what do we do about them. That is, the course is about knowledge, risk, and action (or ignorance, denial, and inaction).

All the readings will be available electronically, but no electronics in the classroom, please.

Requirements

Participation (20%)
Examination (40%)
Final project (40%)

Schedule

30 August: Introduction

6 September: Pandemics Past
Alex de Waal, New Pandemics, Old Politics, 2021, chaps.1-3

13 September: The Covid-19 Crisis
de Waal, chap.6

20 September: The Global Environmental Crisis
David Wallace-Wells, The Uninhabitable Earth, 2019

27 September: Knowledge and Science
Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 1991, chaps.1-2

4 October: Knowledge and Relevance
Immanuel Wallerstein et al., Open the Social Sciences, chaps.3-4
11 October: Risk and Disaster
Frank H. Knight, Risk, Uncertainty and Profit, 1921, chaps.6-7

18 October: Risk and Responsibility
Judith N. Shklar, The Faces of Injustice, 1990

25 October: Interregnum

1 November: Understanding Action
Max Weber, Economy and Society, 2019 (orig. 1922), chap.1

8 November: Living the Present, Anticipating the Future
Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, 1954 (orig. 1922), chap.3

15 November: PRESENTATION

29 November: EXAMINATION

2 December: PROJECT DUE