

**Economics 5252A**  
**From Disaster Relief to Sustainable Development**  
**A research-seminar class**  
**September – December 2024**  
**(with follow-up opportunities)**

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## **Main Purpose**

- To explore, seek to understand (including through case-based workshops), and to contribute to the growing body of 'lessons from experience' on disasters, disaster analysis, prevention, relief, recovery, and sustainable development projects, programs and policymaking.

## **Topics include:**

- The Social Sciences, Disasters and Relief Aid
- disasters (natural and people-made);
- early-warning, signals and systems;
- prevention, preparation for and mitigation/disaster relief (including humanitarian aid, frameworks, guidelines and protocols for more effective co-operation and response systems);
- sustainable development (including national, responsible environmental, ocean governance, and regional/community strategies);
- project planning, evaluation and management;
- the roles of NGOs, universities, and other organizations (public and private sector) – with lessons from past and current case studies.

Many social and economic policy initiatives (e.g., employment insurance, the Marshall Plan, the European Union, fiscal equalization, the Geneva Conventions, Canadian regional development programs and foreign aid) and many development institutions (e.g., The World Bank, UNICEF and UNHCR, the Red Cross and Oxfam) can be traced back to disasters. Some were natural disasters (including floods, droughts, volcanoes, earthquakes); some were people-made (e.g., wars, internal crises linked to extremes of wealth and poverty, environmental and industrial catastrophes); many were a combination (including some famines, collapsing buildings, refugee challenges, epidemics, forest fires, and floods).

While economic insights and their policy applications will routinely be searched, ideas must also be sought from across disciplines, including, for examples, drawing on social anthropology, history,

international development studies, law and human rights, the natural/environmental/medical sciences, architectures, political science, and broader management, media, and security studies. A selection of tested frameworks for the design and analysis of national, regional and community development plans, policy and project options, as well as ethical and some very specific operational guidelines, will be drawn upon to contribute structural ('building-block') inputs to this course.

## Course Resources

*Projects in Search of Relief with Development* [Ian McAllister, Linus Learning, New York, 2016] including a workshop and discussion questions, will be one 'anchor reading' for this class (available at the Killam Library and Dalhousie Bookstore). It will be complemented by a new book-in-the-making (Ian McAllister, *The University as a Partner in relief and Development*, 2025) to be made available for the class; as well as by a variety of papers, framework notes and articles (to be distributed as class sessions and also to be placed on Brightspace -usually one week or two ahead of each class session).

A number of additional suggested readings will be available (on reserve for this class) at the Killam Library and details will be given to class members at the start of the term.

## Background

The 'pilot version' of this course was launched in 1993. It was designed to provide students (and professionals wishing to rethink their experiences from the field) with the opportunity to explore, share and contribute 'lessons-learned' on natural and people-made disasters, relief, development and contemporary peacekeeping. **Over 400 people** have now successfully completed these classes; various published and otherwise shared outcomes (linked to this course) have also been used by other institutions for their own training and operational purposes in a number of countries. Organizations that have used some of the materials include some National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the (former) Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, Olympic Aid, US AID, the International Ocean Institute, and various universities in Canada and beyond.

As one further outcome of this course, at least fifty Dalhousie graduate theses have now been completed on topics encompassed by the overall themes (including by Irene Knoblen, Patricia Ann Griffiths, Hendrik Spierenburg, Sonia Felix, Christel Herve, Claire Pike, Sarah Erlichman, Ram Shankar, Stephen Kempton, Adam Rostis, Mariette Maillet, Sarah Parker, Jennifer Hiscock, Naa Ode Wilson, Sharaf Sultan, Katie McPherson, Genevieve Drouin, Erla Thrandardottir, Sophie Mathew, Batsuren Eenjin, Lisa Farquhar, Nicole Rosenow, Soula Al Abbasi, Kevin Jager, Michal Sawicki, Ruba Moubarak, Vanessa Jenkins, Ben Perryman, Jamie Charlebois, Julia Hiscock, Jillian Wood). More are in progress. These theses have connected with several Dalhousie graduate programs, including the MDE, MA (IDS), MPA, MBA, MAP, and LLM. Some have then spilled into doctorates and books.

## Summary of Approach for 2024-25 (fall term)

- Weekly Seminars (on campus) – each with one or two ‘key readings’ (often preparatory to the sessions)
- Three Workshops (on campus)/hinged to current or recent crises. [We have recently included Hurricane Fiona, a coup in Romania and an earthquake in Nepal]
- Workshop at EMO headquarters in Dartmouth [TBA]
- Group Discussion Topics – including with guest visitors
- Individual Written Assignments (written for a portfolio)
- Reading Materials (and shared book reviews). Each week one framework will be introduced – to help provide you with a series of practical ‘building-blocks’ e.g. capacity-vulnerability analysis, cost-benefit frameworks etc, etc.
- For 2024, we will be introducing a new book: The University as a Partner in Relief and Sustainable Development.

## Weekly Seminars

The weekly seminars will usually be connected to four main themes:

- **Frameworks for the better understanding and analysis of:**
  - Disasters/prevention/preparedness;
  - Relief/mitigation: from planning to action;
  - Recovery/aid-supported projects;
  - Strategies for longer-term development, including responsible environmental planning, regional/community development/sustainable ocean governance.

All frameworks will be clearly hinged to projects and programs with an emphasis on practical applications.
- **Disaster case experiences/prevention-relief, etc.:**
  - Natural disasters;
  - People-made disasters; and
  - Early warning signals and their effective communication...
- **Towards recovery/sustainable development planning – challenges and experiences:**
  - National/regional/community-level cases, approaches and lessons; and
  - Project and program policy cases with operational ‘lessons learned’.
- **Institutions, lessons-to-be-learned and cases:**
  - International Red Cross/Red Crescent/ICRC;
  - Oxfam/MSF/NS-Gambia/International Ocean Institute/PPC;
  - UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, UNESCO, WHO);

- Development Aid Agencies (World Bank, European Investment Bank, USAID, Canadian aid/including IDRC);
- Universities as Partners in Disaster Prevention, Relief, Regional and International Development. Yes, this will include Dalhousie as well as a number of other institutions – including Harvard, Cambridge and Oxford. (The theme is part of the new book).

## Workshops

There will be three workshops on campus and one 'on site' at the EMO headquarters (TBA). The workshops will be scheduled at regular class seminar times. One will be drawing on a workshop (on ethics and human rights) originally designed for the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and run in Canada and Eastern Europe (the latter with NATO); a second draws on workshops (also run by the author) in the World Bank and also (with the International Red Cross) in several African and S.E. Asian institutions. A third will be in cooperation with the EMO team of the Government of Nova Scotia. Others may also be linked into (e.g. with the Canadian Red Cross, International Ocean Institute, etc.). The situations in Gaza and Ukraine will be monitored throughout.

## Group Discussion Topics

There will routinely be both small group and plenary group discussions (as part of weekly seminar sessions) – building around 'key questions, issues, frameworks and cases.' You are encouraged to 'think and read ahead' for sessions and to share your own views and experiences in a supportive environment. If English is not your first language, do not feel threatened – your insights are going to be welcomed. Try to work in groups that draw upon varied disciplinary and cultural backgrounds. A new 'book-in-the-making', 'The University as a Partner in Relief and Development', will be introduced.

## Individual Assignments

This is intended to be a very practical and stimulating learning process for you. Flexibility is encouraged: this is *not* a 'one size must fit all' class. If you already have working or other kinds of field/cultural experiences, reflect on them and draw upon them as you believe will be most relevant to you and to your colleagues. Bring your backgrounds and insights into the classroom.

Your own ideas will be welcomed in class discussions – whether on small group projects or in plenary sessions. Your insights from outside Canada or from Nova Scotia or other provinces are to be encouraged. Your ideas (whether drawing on other disciplines or from economics) will be greatly appreciated. Most significant issues today demand insights from across disciplines. Economics (in common with many other fields) has sometimes become 'boxed-in' by 'conventional wisdoms' of "long-defunct economists" (Keynes) – and universities have many 'silos,' despite also encouraging more open-minded initiatives.

## Written Assignments

Over the term, you are invited to develop your own written portfolio. Yes, it can include pictures, case anecdotes, etc. While no single structure is required, you might be guided by the following suggestions:

- 1) **One or more book reviews** (perhaps, but not necessarily, from the suggested reading references); Please be sure to follow the format of either the *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, or of *Canadian Public Administration*. [Sample reviews will be distributed and discussed in class.] A number of book reviews linked to this class have now been published. Why not plan to write one yourself for possible publication?
- 2) **The analysis of one or more case studies or evaluation reports**; (several film extracts will be shown to illustrate issues on site and one or more may also be drawn upon/or you might draw from a CBC or other news documentary). You will also have access to a variety of written and other cases to choose from (e.g. from the World Bank, ICRC, UNICEF, UNHCR, the Economist paper etc.)
- 3) **An ‘aide memoire’ critique of class discussions, group discussions, plus any relevant conference, work-experience or workshop you might have attended, etc.** This has generally proved a useful exercise for the writers. **Start from Day One! You are likely to benefit more from this class if you do this. Some previous examples will be distributed for class review to give you guidance.**
- 4) **Critiques (of about 750-1000 words) of at least two ‘frameworks for analysis’**: what each essentially is; how it might be/has been used; key strengths and limitations; (examples will be made available). Frameworks can often be most useful when hinged to one or several others. Your critique might do the same. Do not merely copy frameworks – but analyze them thoughtfully, looking for both strengths and vulnerabilities. (One such framework might be ‘cost-benefit analysis’, another might be ‘capacity-vulnerability’ analysis, etc.)
- 5) **One main paper (no more than 3000 words) built around one or more of the topics or themes introduced over the term; or the equivalent of a ‘take-home exam,’ in which 3 questions are responded to (no single answer normally being more than 1000 words).** You select the questions from a choice of six, thereby contributing to the design of your own ‘take-home’ exam to ensure it relates to your interests. Do not hesitate to ask my opinion should you prefer some other approach. This is intended to be a good learning experience for you.

It is quite possible that you might include the draft section of a thesis or article you are embarking on, within the body of your portfolio, provided the theme is of direct relevance to the class mandate. This could readily become your main paper (item 5 above).

**Above all, the portfolio is to be useful to you and to serve you as a record and building-block for your future work and ideas.** If you already have had relevant experience (e.g., on a UN peacekeeping mission or with the Red Cross/Crescent), then you are encouraged to reflect on that, perhaps substituting your experiential review for item 5 above. These ‘reflections from the field’ critiques have featured very usefully in some portfolios. In the process, explore also how economic concepts did (or might have) made some relevant contributions.

**At the fourth class session (in early October) all class members will be asked to submit a one-page 'study profile,' which indicates the broad purpose and structure of your proposed portfolio.** This is intended to encourage you not to leave your portfolio until the last minute and also to ensure no-one is adrift as to direction. While you are not required to submit drafts of parts or all of your portfolio ahead of the December deadline, you are definitely encouraged to do so for feedback.

It must be noted that a few undergraduate students, normally in their honours year, have been welcomed to this class in some previous years and they have usually been extremely successful - sometimes linking the class to their honours thesis, following it by an internship or connecting it with current/previous work experience (e.g. in the military, teaching overseas or in rural Canada, with the Red Cross, etc.). If you have been admitted as an undergraduate, do not feel intimidated and do not hesitate to ask me for help as you progress. We have been proud to have had Sarah Burns, recently a Rhodes Scholar, among the team. Reading classes have also occasionally been arranged – following up completion of this class – to enable the further exploration of ideas. They may connect with a thesis or research for publication purposes.

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