



Course: 01504401 - Public Policy

Description: 2 credits, graduate level course for Public Policy with a specialization in Disaster Management

Instructor: Michal Linder Zarankin, PhD, Lecturer, Medical & Health Sciences Department, Tel Aviv University

Email: michallinder@tauex.tau.ac.il

Session: Fall 2023

PROBLEM-SOLVING SCENARIOS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL
VULNERABILITY

Overview:

As C. Wright Mills noted, sociology can be both terrible and magnificent. Terrible in the sense that many of the problems we face are deeply rooted in social structures and processes. Magnificent in the sense that we now know where to begin our search for solutions. As sociologists argue, natural events do occur; but there are no natural disasters. Disasters are uniquely human with social dimensions that impact different populations (e.g., lower income, elderly, disabled, those without transportation) in different ways. Not surprisingly, some communities and populations are at significantly greater risk and bear a disproportionate burden of the impacts when disasters occur. An understanding of social vulnerability to hazards and disasters can assist organizations in the development of a workforce that is better trained to help high-risk communities avoid, prepare, and recover from disasters.

In recognition of this, the National Science Foundation-funded [CONVERGE facility](#), located at the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado Boulder, has developed a series of free, online training modules designed to quickly background individuals on fundamental research findings, theory, and methods in the multi-disciplinary hazards and disaster field. For this assignment, you will be required to complete either the **CONVERGE Social Vulnerability and Disasters Training Module** or the **Public Health Implications of Hazards and Disaster Research Training Module** (it should take you less than an hour), score higher than 80% on the quiz at the end, and submit your certificate of completion in Brightspace.

Instructions:

1. Go to the [CONVERGE website](#).
2. Click on 'Resources' and select 'Training Modules'.
3. Click 'Register Here'. Register and Log in.
4. Select the training module you will complete.
5. At the close of the module, you will have the opportunity to take a 10-question quiz. If you get 8 out of 10 questions correct, you will receive a certificate of completion.
6. Submit your certificate of completion in Brightspace.



.....

After completing the module, students will be divided into groups of 2 to 3 and presented with hypothetical policy problems or crises (related to public health and vulnerability) and tasked with proposing immediate solutions that integrate the material covered in the module (theory and practice). This exercise promotes critical thinking, application skills, and quick decision-making abilities. Two example scenarios are provided below.

Public Health Policy Dilemma: Vaccine Hesitancy in a Pandemic

Scenario: In the midst of a global pandemic, a significant portion of the population in a particular region is hesitant or refuses to get vaccinated against the virus. Despite extensive public health campaigns, misinformation and mistrust towards vaccines have led to a substantial portion of the population being under-vaccinated or unvaccinated. This has resulted in ongoing transmission of the virus and increased strain on healthcare systems.

Policy Problem: The government is tasked with developing a comprehensive public health policy to address vaccine hesitancy and increase vaccination rates in the population. The policy should aim to combat misinformation, build trust in vaccines, and ensure equitable access to vaccination for all communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by the virus. Additionally, the policy should consider strategies for addressing logistical challenges such as vaccine distribution and allocation, as well as addressing socioeconomic factors that may contribute to vaccine hesitancy.

Disaster Vulnerability Crisis: Coastal Community Resilience to Rising Sea Levels

Scenario: A coastal community is facing increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, particularly rising sea levels and more frequent and severe storms. The community relies heavily on fishing and tourism industries, both of which are threatened by coastal erosion and the loss of infrastructure due to flooding. Additionally, many residents in low-lying areas are at risk of displacement and loss of livelihoods.

Policy Problem: Local authorities are tasked with developing a resilience plan to address the impacts of rising sea levels and enhance the community’s ability to withstand and recover from disasters. The policy should incorporate strategies for coastal protection, such as the construction of seawalls or natural buffers, as well as land-use planning measures to minimize exposure to flood risk. Additionally, the policy should include provisions for community engagement and capacity-building initiatives to ensure that socially vulnerable populations are included in decision-making processes and have access to resources and support in times of crisis. Balancing the economic interests of industries reliant on coastal resources with long-term environmental sustainability and community resilience will be a key challenge for policymakers.

