How We Learned How to Stop Worrying and Love Global Suicide! Scientific, Moral, and Cultural Perspectives on Weapons of Mass Casualty/Destruction (WMC/WMD)

Prof. Lou Messerle
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Lecture: Wednesday 3:30-5:20, E203 Chemistry Building
Course credit: 1 semester hour
Office hours: Monday 2:30-3:30; Tuesday 9:15-10:30; Wednesday 9:15-10:00;
Wednesday 1:45-2:45; alternate times can be arranged by appointment; held in CB E427
Course Reserves: A significant number of interesting books on WMC/ WMD, including a folio-size photoessay showing pictures of all US above-ground nuclear tests, and books on cultural aspects of the arms race, weapons scientists and their motivations, and the cold war have been placed on reserve at the Sciences Library, which is located behind the old Biology Building with access from Iowa Avenue via a green area between the foreign languages (Phillips Hall) and biology buildings. These books can be checked out for several days. More will be added during the semester after evaluation of each by Prof. Messerle.
Course Description
Weapons of mass casualty (e.g., chemical, biological, radiological weapons) and weapons of mass destruction (thermonuclear weapons, strategic firebombing with conventional weapons) transformed ancient, 20th century, and modern warfare and have dramatically altered geopolitics and security in the contemporary era. What are the scientific (biochemical, chemical, nuclear, physical) bases for these weapons? What are the environmental implications of their possible use and the environmental legacies from their production? Is it ethical for scientists and engineers to envision and develop such weapons, for political leaders to authorize and support their production, for citizens to financially support their existence and possession by their own government, and for military leaders to deploy and employ these weapons against civilian and/or military adversaries? Or is the use of WMC/ WMD any different fundamentally from that of conventional armaments in warfare? Why in many cases were such weapons employed against an adversary’s population and/or military without warning, instead of demonstrations of their destructiveness on strategically unimportant targets? Why were such weapons not employed in cases where they would have provided the first user with a major tactical or strategic advantage? How has the existence of modern WMC/ WMD impacted contemporary culture? What are the implications for nations of the acquisition and potential use of such weapons by non-state actors (e.g., terrorists) for whom deterrence is ineffective?
Students in this course will actively participate in exploring these and related topics by way of class meetings, several office hour discussions between individual students and Prof. Messerle, in- and outside-class viewing and discussion of movies, readings of printed and web-based resources, and written assignments of mutual interest to the student and instructor. Grades will be based on the degree of student participation in course activities and several short writing assignments.
Course Objectives and Academic Expectations
The objectives of this course are to introduce students to a continuing contemporary issue of major, even ultimate, importance to humanity and life’s existence and to becoming a member of an informed citizenry, to increase student’s scientific literacy, to explore the ethical aspects of scientific research, and to learn more about intellectual inquiry at the college level.
Students are expected to set high academic standards for themselves, in order to get the most from the college experience at the University of Iowa. You will have to work with dedication in order to achieve academic success. There is a tremendous feeling of accomplishment as you rise to the intellectual and academic challenges and pressures of college. One of Prof. Messerle’s goals, at the direction of the Provost’s Office, is to provide that challenge. The University of Iowa’s tradition and guidelines for classwork are that each semester hour of class time entails two hours per week of preparation outside of class for the average student. The IOWA Challenge (http://thechallenge.uiowa.edu/meet/excel.html) as described to entering students bears repetition, as it is more than a group of slogans:

**Excel**  Academic excellence means setting and meeting high standards for yourself as a student. Faculty, staff and other students will ask you to work hard and push yourself intellectually. We expect a lot of you; you should expect only the best from yourself and the University.

**Stretch**  At The University of Iowa, you will find a diversity of people, ideas, opportunities, and experiences. That diversity is one of the benefits of being an Iowa student. Step away from the familiar, try new ideas, experience new cultures, and learn from people different from yourself.

**Engage**  You will be a more successful student and enjoy yourself more if you spend your time and energy on activities that matter. The University of Iowa offers almost limitless opportunities and the resources to help you become a leader in and out of the classroom. Take advantage of them.

**Choose**  Every day you make decisions that affect your education and your future. Take your choices seriously and use your freedom wisely. Your University of Iowa education is what you make it. Make it something you and your university can be proud of.

**Serve**  As a University of Iowa student you are a member of many communities, on and off campus. You have the opportunity and responsibility to be a good neighbor and citizen and to serve the community. Make your community a great place to live.’’

In terms of this course, class attendance and participation is expected. Poor attendance will result in grade reduction, except for documented cases of illness, family emergencies, mandatory religious obligations, and authorized University activities (e.g., participation in intercollegiate sports, when accompanied by a request from the Athletics Department). Assignment deadlines count and should be adhered to, with allowances made only for documented cases of illness, family emergencies, mandatory religious obligations, and authorized University activities. Please contact Prof. Messerle (chem-course-messerle@uiowa.edu) before or immediately after the missed class or missed assignment.

Please do not hesitate to come to office hours with any questions or concerns, no matter how small in your estimation. Faculty are here (and enjoy, as we learn and grow ourselves during the process of teaching active learners) to engage you intellectually and help you to help yourself grow as a person. Excerpted from the RISE (Research on Iowa Student Experiences, on academic engagement) Report (http://www.education.uiowa.edu/crue/publications/documents/RISE_Brief_Academic_Engagement.pdf): “When asked about advice they would give to prospective or new UI students, most (UI) seniors offered some form of ‘‘Get to know your professors’’ and ‘‘Go to office hours so they know you care.’’ Across the board, however, students asserted that positive, meaningful interactions with faculty had to be initiated by students, something that most—but particularly first-year students—described as difficult and intimidating.’’

Refuse to be intimidated!
**Course Grading:**
Written assignments 60% Classroom, office hour participation 40%
+/ - Grading system will be used. Based on guidance from the Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), the final grade distribution may not correspond to a standard grade distribution as defined by CLAS for an introductory class, given the class size and the preclusion of exams and objective grading criteria typical for a science class. Any questions about grades and scores received for course assignments should be directed to Prof. Messerle. Federal privacy rules mandate that individual scores and grades cannot be publicly posted.

**Tentative Lecture Schedule (subject to change)**

**Wednesday August 24**
Course overview and purpose; definitions of WMC/ WMD; ethical concerns; Does it matter how one kills another person or many people, assuming one is forced or driven to do so? What about the pursuit of/ fixation on technological advances in weaponry and superweapons: nonlethal “magic’’ bullets, “‘wonder’’ weapons, laser weaponry, millimeter-wave crowd control, psychoactive chemical weapons; crackpot ideas and the military-industrial complex

**Wednesday August 31**
Biological weapons – history of use, biomedical aspects of how they “‘work’’

**Wednesday September 7**
Biological weapons – the threat in an era of molecular biology and biotechnology; weaponizing the truly nasties: hemorrhagic fevers such as Ebola virus

**Wednesday September 14**
Chemical weapons – history of use, classes of chemical weapons chemical weapons – their threat; more or less humane? NIMBY and their destruction

**Wednesday September 21**
Chemical weapons – Are they easy to make? Easy to deploy? Easy to decontaminate? What does it mean to be “‘persistent’’ ?

**Friday September 23**
INITIAL MIDTERM PAPER DUE, 5:00 PM, CB E435

**Wednesday September 28**
Nuclear and thermonuclear weapons – history of development and use of bombs and superbombs; How do nuclear/ thermonuclear weapons work from physics and chemistry standpoints? What does William Shatner have to say about them?

**Wednesday October 5**
Nuclear and thermonuclear weapons – demonstrations of radiation and fission; “‘touching’’ a piece of trinitite from Alamogordo, NM; “‘dirty’’ (radiological), suitcase, and neutron bombs; environmental legacies of nuclear weapons production; of “‘nuclear winter’’ : what would be the environmental impact of nuclear weapon detonations in a world war? What did we learn from Chernobyl? What are we learning now from Fukushima? Threads (1984)

**Wednesday October 12**
NO CLASS

**Wednesday October 19**
FINAL CLASS: nuclear and thermonuclear weapons – biomedical aspects of their use; Did the US have to bomb Hiroshima? Nagasaki? WMC/ WMD in popular culture – what has changed over the decades?
Armageddon/ Götterdammerung: Where does the world go from here, particularly in an era of terrorism? Have there been disarmament successes?

**Wednesday October 26**
FINAL PAPER DUE, 5:00 PM, CB 435
Course Administration
Please go to the Chemistry Center, E225 CB, for drop/add signatures. M–F, 8:00 AM-12:00, 1:00-5:00 PM (F, 4:30 PM). Manager: Lin Pierce (335-1341, lin-pierce@uiowa.edu).

Complaints
Complaints and appeals regarding the course and instructor can be filed with the Departmental Executive Officer (DEO, Prof. Mark Arnold) at the Department of Chemistry administrative office, Room E331 CB (335-1350). Students are encouraged to first meet with Prof. Messerle with their concerns about course aspects, lectures, or assignments.

Miscellaneous
Please feel free to discuss with Prof. Messerle any aspect of the course that is of concern or causing you problems. DON’T HESITATE to come to office hours to ask questions that are not covered during class. If you require course adaptations or accommodation because of a recognized disability, please contact Prof. Messerle who will make every effort to accomodate your needs.

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Administrative Home of the Course: The administrative home of this course is the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), which governs academic matters such as add/drop deadlines, second-grade-only option, academic fraud, and other related issues. Different colleges might have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall or see the CLAS Student Academic Handbook: http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/

Electronic Communication: University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their standard University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Students should check their account frequently and use this account for their correspondence with Prof. Messerle. Please send your correspondence to the course email address: chem-course-messerle@uiowa.edu.

Student Classroom Behavior: The ability to learn is lessened when students engage in inappropriate classroom behavior, distracting others; such behaviors are a violation of the Code of Student Life. When disruptive activity occurs, an instructor has the authority to determine classroom seating patterns and to request that a student exit the classroom or other instructional area immediately for the remainder of the period. One-day suspensions are reported to Departmental, Collegiate, and Student Services personnel (Office of the VP for Student Services and Dean of Students).

Academic Fraud/Misconduct: Plagiarism and other activities when students present work that is not their own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is a serious matter and is reported to the Chemistry DEO and to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum. Instructors and DEOs decide on appropriate consequences at the Chemistry Department level while the Associate Dean enforces additional consequences at the collegiate level. See the CLAS Academic Fraud section of the Student Academic Handbook (http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/x/#2).

You are expected to work alone. Cheating will not be tolerated. Prof. Messerle believes strongly in fairness for all students and objective appraisal of individual student performance and understanding of course material. Student assignments will be checked via web-based resources for plagiarism.

Academic misconduct may result in a grade reduction and/or other serious penalties, up to and possibly including expulsion from the University of Iowa.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint: Students have the right to make suggestions or complaints and should first visit Prof. Messerle, and then the Chemistry DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident per CLAS guidelines. See the CLAS Student Academic Handbook (http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/x/#5).
**Accommodations for Disabilities:** A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with an instructor to make particular arrangements. See [www.uiowa.edu/~sds/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/) for more information.

**Understanding Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment at [www.uiowa.edu/~eod/policies/sexual-harassment-guide/index.html](http://www.uiowa.edu/~eod/policies/sexual-harassment-guide/index.html) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

**Reacting Safely to Severe Weather:** In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the UI Public Safety web site [http://www.uiowa.edu/~pubsfty/intlinks.htm](http://www.uiowa.edu/~pubsfty/intlinks.htm)

**Resources for Students:**
- Writing Center: 110 English-Philosophy Building (EPB), 335-0188, [http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/)
- Speaking Center: 12 EPB, 335-0205, [www.uiowa.edu/~rhetoric/centers/speaking](http://www.uiowa.edu/~rhetoric/centers/speaking)
- Mathematics Tutorial Laboratory: 314 MacLean Hall, 335-0810, [www.uiowa.edu/mathlabTutor](http://www.uiowa.edu/mathlabTutor)
- Tutor Referral: Campus Info Center, IMU, 335-3055, [http://imu.uiowa.edu/cic/tutor_referral_service](http://imu.uiowa.edu/cic/tutor_referral_service)
- College of Engineering Tutoring Program: [www.engineering.uiowa.edu/sdc/tutoring.php](http://www.engineering.uiowa.edu/sdc/tutoring.php)
- Supplemental Instruction: [cde.uiowa.edu/index.php/si.html](http://cde.uiowa.edu/index.php/si.html)
- University Housing Tutoring: [housing.uiowa.edu/departments/reslife/academic_initiatives.html](http://housing.uiowa.edu/departments/reslife/academic_initiatives.html)