

COMMUNICATION 3333: Crisis Communication

Journalism Building Room 251

Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:10 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. Fall 2025

Instructor: Lanier Frush Holt, Ph.D.	Office hours: 1:30 p.m.– 2:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays via Zoom and in person (3168 Derby Hall), and via Zoom. If you'd like to meet via Zoom, especially at a different time, just send a Zoom link.
TA: Joana Videira e- mail: Videira.1@osu.edu	Office hours: 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Wednesday and Friday. If you'd like to meet in person, just send me an email and we can set up a time that works for you. If you'd like to meet via Zoom, just send a Zoom link.
Best way to reach me: e-mail: holt.341@osu.edu	Phone: Please e-mail to arrange a zoom meeting.

Course Description

As you read this, some company is hiding money, lying to investors, or engaged in some sort of malfeasance for which they will have to answer to the public, via the media through a spokesperson. Some celebrity is likely engaged in something that is off brand, improper, or they would not like known, but will become known and will require effective crisis communication to manage.

Crisis Communication is the APEX of the strategic communication/public relations pyramid. Intro to strat. comm/PR involves just learning about the subject matter, principles deal with learned concepts and hopefully applying them; risk communication is basically a contingency plan put in place just in case the concepts are not adhered to, or the problem goes awry. Crisis Communication is what happens after all of the things you have learned up to this point go sour, and if you fail at crisis communication there is no coming back; millions to billions of dollars are lost, reputations are irreparably harmed and the person(s) involved either lose their job or lose the livelihood that brought them into the public eye in the first place. Everyone deals with crisis

communication. You can either learn it here or deal with it in the professional world. As alluded to, if you learn it and fail it in the professional world, there is no safety net, and your life too is irrevocably changed.

How do you manage it? Well, let's begin...

Course Learning Goals and Outcomes

This course is designed to give you hands-on, real-world, theory-driven ability and knowledge of how to handle crises effectively. Although the aforementioned crises are at the forefront of the public's consciousness, every day, something happens in the world of business, economics, or in the lives of celebrities that involve crises. These range from the little known, like the dating scandal at NASA, to well-known incidents like Tiger Woods' affair and the Catholic church's ongoing fiascos.

Strategic communication and PR are the most popular, most-hired from field within communication and Crisis Communication is at the apex of the discipline. Most people can write press releases or work in industries during times of tranquility. Crises are when communicators show companies their worth. Notably, when communications fail during crises, communicators are fired and that is when companies fail literally (e.g., Enron) and images of clients suffer (e.g., Tiger Woods) often irreparably. Hence, what you learn here is practical, it is real, and it is important. This class will challenge you. Be prepared. Not everyone can do what you will be asked to do.

Mode of Delivery

This course will be taught in person every Tuesday and Thursday (except where noted on the syllabus), assuming the pandemic does not force us to move classes online. **The slides from the course will NOT be shared with you.**

How this course works

There is no standard textbook for the course. All of the readings will come from scholarly communication and relevant media articles (*all of which will be provided to you via Carmen/Canvas*) and contemporary news articles relating to the topic being discussed that day. If you have difficulty receiving or understanding the materials, please contact me immediately. That is why you pay your money to attend OSU, and why I am here.

Any changes in the course for any reason, COVID-19 or otherwise, will be announced in the course, via message, or announced on Carmen.

Course Website

Check the homepage on Carmen regularly for announcements, course changes, or other matters related to the course.

Course Requirements

Students are required to be active participants in discussions and to answer questions when called upon.

Here is a synopsis of the assignments and point values for the semester:

Point Values per Assignment

Assignment	Point Value	Maximum Semester Points
In-class Press Briefing	20 points	20 points
Emergency Preparedness Plan	100 points	120 points
Midterm	50 points	170 points
Press Conference	100 points	270 points
Final Exam	100 points	370 points

Maximum amount of semester points: 370

Course Policies

There are very few course policies, but they are firm: tests, extra credit work, and missed debates/classes **cannot** be made up unless there is a verifiable reason **in advance**. If you miss an assignment, test, or other graded element, you must have documentation to make up the assignment, examples of which include a signed doctor's note, the program from the event you are attending, or **prior permission** from the instructor, Dr. Holt. If you are late, miss a test, or miss class for any reason, **do not** expect me to catch you up or tell you what you missed. As you will hear several times, **your education is your responsibility**. Welcome to adulthood. On a related note, if you are planning to miss class, **never** ask me if you're going to miss something by not coming to class. That is the purpose of classmates. Also, if you are going to miss class, you need not send me an e-mail letting me know why. **I literally cannot conceive of a way to care less.**

Tests/Final Exam: Students will initialize an assurance that they are not using notes, readings, or other outside resources (e.g., web based or otherwise) not explicitly allowed by the professor at the beginning of each examination.

Press Conferences and other Presentations

During the course, we will have a series of press conferences. **All students are required to attend each press conference and presentation regardless of if they are presenting or not out of respect for their classmates.** As such, attendance will be taken on Press Conference Days. As college students, you are preparing for your profession; in much the same way that you would not miss a meaningful day of work, you should not miss the press conference. **Students should dress professionally for the press conference ONLY on the days in which they are presenting and will be evaluated as such in much the same way that you are evaluated during a job interview and in your occupation based on the degree to which you appear professional.** **Students who do not attend each day of all press conferences and presentations – even if they are not presenting – will receive a ZERO on the assignment regardless of if they have participated in their group's presentation or not. Students who do not attend class when groups are decided will be forced into a group of the professor's choosing. Also, students cannot do this assignment alone. This is non-negotiable.**

Students who are not in class will NOT have spots saved for them in groups of their choosing unless they have prior authorization from the professor for medical or family emergencies or are absent due to athletic responsibilities as determined by The Ohio State University athletics department. No exceptions.

PLEASE TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF (Mental Health Statement)

THIS ENTIRE COURSE IS A TRIGGERING EXPERIENCE. It is not called CRISIS COMMUNICATION by accident. Be advised.

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing.

If you are or someone you know is suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614--292--5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766.

If you are thinking of harming yourself or need a safe, non-judgmental place to talk, or if you are worried about someone else and need advice about what to do, 24-hour emergency help is also available through the Suicide Prevention Hotline (Columbus: 614-221-5445 / National: 800-273-8255); or text (4hope to 741741); or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Current events

As citizens of an ever-changing cultural world, students are **required to read a daily news source and speak/pose questions on current events at the start of each class**. Questions on topics discussed during the “Current Events” portion of each class period will be tested on the exams, therefore incentivizing you to participate and engage in current event discourse and to attend class.

Trigger warning

Be advised, this course deals with controversial and hot-button topics that may cause you anger, frustration, guilt, and a host of other emotions that you may not normally experience in an educational setting. If you feel you are experiencing any of these emotions, please let me know and also seek help from a medical or mental health professional. Sharing such information with me will not be made available to the class and will not adversely affect your grade.

Academic Integrity

All students at The Ohio State University are bound by the code of student conduct (see http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asap). Any evidence of academic misconduct will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct in accordance with The Ohio State University Code of Student Conduct and the rules of faculty governance. Academic misconduct is any activity that compromises the academic integrity of the institution or subverts the educational process. Examples of academic misconduct can be found on the above website. **Also note, although exams are online, they are NOT open book. Cheaters will be dealt with in accordance with university policies.**

Reasonable Accommodations

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at (614) 292-3307 in 098 Baker Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Grades

Be advised, grades are not discussed immediately after an assignment is returned. Students must wait until the next class period to discuss their grades. All grades are

final after one academic week. **Professor Holt has the final say on all grades and grade appeals in this course.**

Penalties

The instructor and fellow classmates have the right to expect that students act respectfully. This includes focusing on lecture and discussion material during class time by silencing and not using cell phones, only using personal computers/tablets for taking notes.

This course deals with hot button topics, topics that can be controversial, and at times this course can be combative. As such, students are asked to treat each other with decency and respect. Although students can speak with candor, and are indeed encouraged to do so, students should not belittle or berate their classmates, or use excessive profanity.

Penalties (re. social media especially): Initially I am allowing students to bring their laptops and cell phones to class, as there will be times when students are called upon to look for material beyond the assigned readings online during class. However, students found using their devices for purposes beyond what is called for in class will be **docked 20 points for each instance**. Should this problem become prevalent throughout the semester, an individual or ALL students' right to bring laptops, cell phones, etc., will be revoked for the semester. Students may **NEVER** text during class. **Violators will be kicked out of class for the day** and lose 20 points for every subsequent offense. In the event that your cell phone rings in class, I can either answer it and/or you can answer it and leave with it. If my cell phone rings in class, a student will get to answer it. *There will be some special times in which I will allow students to have their cell phones on in class. I will often let you know at the start of class when this is the case.* **The determination about what counts as directly and not directly related to course work will be made solely by me.** Students having problems with this issue should not just consider but also actually drop this course immediately.

Also, side conversations are to be kept to a minimum unless they relate to the topic discussed in class.

Grading Scale:

A	93-100%	C+	77-79.9%
A-	90-92.9%	C	73-76.9%
B+	87-89.9%	C-	70-72.9%
B	83-86.9%	D+	67-69.9%
B-	80-82.9%	D	60-66.9%
		E	59.9% and below

Extra credit points: It is solely at the discretion of the instructor to award extra credit points. At this time, there are no extra credit points, but some may arise as the semester progresses.

Attendance, participation, and discussions

Credit hour and work expectation

This is a 3-credit-hour course. According to Ohio State policy, students should expect around 3 hours per week of time spent on direct instruction (instructor content and Carmen activities, for example) in addition to 6 hours of homework (reading and assignment preparation, for example) to receive a grade of (C) average. [ASC Honors](#) provides an excellent guide to scheduling and study expectations.

Faculty feedback and response time

I am providing the following list to give you an idea of my intended availability throughout the course. (Remember that you can call **614-688-HELP** at any time if you have a technical problem.)

Grading and feedback

For large weekly assignments, you can generally expect feedback within **7-10 days**.

E-mail

I will reply to e-mails within **24 hours on school days**.

Discussion and communication guidelines

The following are my expectations for how we should communicate as a class. Above all, please remember to be respectful and thoughtful.

- **Tone and civility:** Let's maintain a supportive learning community where everyone feels safe and where people can disagree amicably. Remember that sarcasm doesn't always come across online. I work very hard to provide a positive learning experience. Keep this in mind and remain civilized and respectful in your email and discussion board communications.

- **Citing your sources:** When we have academic discussions, cite your sources to back up what you say. (For the textbook or other course materials, please use APA style. For online sources, be sure to include a link.)

Course technology

For help with your password, university e-mail, Carmen, or any other technology issues, questions, or requests, contact the OSU IT Service Desk. Standard support hours are available at <https://ocio.osu.edu/help/hours>, and support for urgent issues is available 24x7.

- **Tests:**
 - All tests will be given online via CarmenCanvas. Unless prior changes have been announced, the exam will open on the date listed for the exam on the syllabus. Students can take the exam at any point on the date (Eastern Standard Time) the exam opens. However, students **will NOT** have the entire day to do the exam. Exams will only be open for the time allotted – usually 80 **continuous** minutes for regular exams, with extra time added for those with verified needs from OSU for time extensions – for the exam. **The allotted time starts the moment the exam is opened online.** Meaning, if a student not requiring extra time opens the exam at 1 p.m. EST, for example, the exam will shut off at 2:20 p.m. EST. When exams close, they will not be reopened without permission from Professor Holt. Also remember, exams cannot be made up if they are missed.
- **Carmen:**
 - Carmen, Ohio State's Learning Management System, will be used to host materials and activities throughout this course. To access Carmen, visit [Carmen.osu.edu](https://carmen.osu.edu). Log in to Carmen using your name.# and password. If you have not setup a name.# and password, visit my.osu.edu.
 - Help guides on the use of Carmen can be found at <https://resourcecenter.odee.osu.edu/carmen>
 - **This online course requires use of Carmen (Ohio State's learning management system) and other online communication and multimedia tools. If you need additional services to use these technologies, please request accommodations with your instructor.**
 - [Carmen accessibility](#)
- **AI Notification:**
 - Students caught using AI or turning in work that is not their own, not researched by them, falsifies sources, or in any way presents information that is not done by themselves or their group will fail the assignment and/or be turned into university officials with the goal of seeing if they can be given a failing grade for the entire semester due to academic

misconduct. You are in a field so important that the framers of the Constitution that it was the first they could agree on, thus making it the First Amendment; do not abuse it, or you will be abused for doing it.

Necessary equipment

- Computer: current Mac (OS X) or PC (Windows 7+) with high-speed internet connection
- Web cam and microphone

Necessary software

- Word processor with the ability to save files under .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf. Most popular word processing software programs including Microsoft Word and Mac Pages have these abilities.
- OSU students have access to Microsoft Office products free of charge. To install, please visit https://osuitsm.service-now.com/selfservice/kb_view.do?sysparm_article=kb04733

COVID-19 and Illness Policies

University COVID policies

Student illness or absence

If *you* are too ill to participate in this course due to COVID-19 or another illness, please contact me as soon as you are able and provide evidence (e.g., an image of the COVID results with your name on a screen shot for example) of a positive COVID test or need to quarantine from being exposed to the virus or someone who is infected. Alternate assignments or extensions might be arranged.

Instructor illness or absence

If the *instructor* is too ill to teach the course for a period of time, the designated backup for this course will step in. You will be notified via email from the School of Communication.

Course Schedule

Note: All readings should be done BEFORE the date listed on the syllabus, (i.e., the September 14th readings should be done prior to class on September 14th), as that is when material related to the readings will be discussed. Also, be advised the readings will not be discussed in detail during the class. Readings augment what is discussed in class and are **not** merely rehashing the topic.

As mentioned earlier, whenever possible, a link or the actual reading(s), will be made available to you via Carmen/Canvas. However, in some instances you may have to look up some materials on your own. I will discuss how to find such readings in class as it will be an invaluable tool should you move on to graduate school.

The list of readings and dates they will be discussed is tentative and may be changed depending on the speed in which we get through the material and events that transpire in the real world (e.g., if the Urban Meyer controversy had broken during the semester, we would talk about it rather than what is listed on the syllabus). Also, readings may be added to, and deleted from, the syllabus as the semester progresses. Changes will be announced either via electronic medium(s) or in class.

TENTATIVE Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Tuesday, August 26 th	Course expectations detailed		Bring syllabus
LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Managing crises during catastrophes both nature and human-made		THEORIES USED: Agenda-setting, framing, intergroup threat theory	
Thursday, August 28 th	Otherworldly threats: Communicating during potential crises and when the public is terrified: What you could be doing if today's headlines become real		

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Tuesday, Sept. 2 nd	Pandemic lectures: Messages from the past and from where did this come?	Wolf – Dollars vs. Death is the Sickening Choice Created by the Coronavirus <i>The Guardian</i> – Spanish Minister says Older People found ‘Dead and Abandoned’	
Thursday, Sept. 4 th	Pandemic Lectures: What mistakes were made and how did we get here today?		
Tuesday, Sept. 9 th	Potential nuclear holocaust: Communicating during potential crises and when the public is terrified: What you could be doing if today’s headlines become real		
Thursday, Sept. 11 th	American Hellscape: Sept. 11 th The ‘new’ reality more than 20 years later		
LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Listening to science and communicating the worst to even the unbelieving		THEORIES USED: Attribution Theory, Crisis Clusters, and Crisis Response Strategies	
Tuesday, Sept. 16 th	Earthquake preparedness America’s West Coast and places you wouldn’t expect	The Big One – Williams (2025) The Really Big One – Schulz (2015) Earthquake Scientists are learning warning signs of the ‘big one.’ When should they tell the public? – Bush (2024)	Assignment 1 (20 points)

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Thursday, Sept. 18 th	Image Repair: Dow Corning's Breast Implant Fiasco and repairing corporate respect		
Tuesday, Sept. 23 rd	Press Briefings Day 1 Video Presentations start (5 minutes of Q&A per group; 1 spokesperson determines entire grade. 20 points) Mandatory Attendance		
Thursday, Sept. 25 th	Press Briefings Day 2 Video Presentations start (5 minutes of Q&A per group; 1 spokesperson determines entire grade. 20 points) Mandatory Attendance		
LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Learning to manage when crises hit home and knowing when and how to leave		THEORIES USED: Spiral of Silence, Social Dominance Orientation	
Tuesday, Sept. 30 th	Surviving Ohio State		
Thursday, Oct. 2 nd	Surviving Ohio State		
Tuesday, Oct. 7 th	The Lies We Tell Teens: Ohio State football and The Urban Liar		
Thursday, Oct. 9 th	Midterm Review Session		
Tuesday, Oct. 14 th	Midterm Exam (50 points, and no, you cannot take it early)		
Oct. 16 th – Oct. 17 th	Fall Break		
LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understanding how to communicate when human errors and nature combine to make worst case scenario events worse		THEORIES USED: Cascading Activation, Priming, Framing	

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Tuesday, Oct. 21 st	Hurricane Katrina: America's Nightmare; How and Why It Happened	The Politics of Disposability – Giroux (2006) Hurricane Katrina II: The Blame Game – (National Review, Sept. 26, 2005)	Emergency Disaster Preparedness Plan Assignment given (100 points)
Thursday, Oct. 23 rd	Video: The onset of Katrina from those who survived		
Tuesday, Oct. 28 th	Lessons not learned: Hurricane Ida		
Thursday, Oct. 30 th	Failing to protect the vulnerable, yet strong. USA Gymnastics	Larry Nassar and the USA Gymnastics scandal continued	Emergency Preparedness Plan Assignment DUE AT THE START OF CLASS (Hardcopy and e- mail)
Tuesday, Nov. 4 th	Dow Corning and the implant crisis		
Thursday, Nov. 6 th	Honeywell: managing crisis communication during a merger/acquisition (a first-hand account).	Deutsch & Holson: "Allied Signal and Honeywell to Announce Merger Today" Tharp – Bonsignore Out at Honeywell	Press Conference topics given (In- class workday)
Tuesday, Nov. 11 th	Veteran's Day		
Thursday, Nov. 13 th	In-class workday		
Tuesday, Nov. 18 th	Press Conferences and/or Debates (5-6 people per group; 7 groups presenting; 7-10 minutes each) Midterm Press Conference: Maximum of 100 points Mandatory Attendance		

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Thursday, Nov. 20 th	Press Conferences and/or Debates (5-6 people per group; 7 groups presenting; 7-10 minutes each) Midterm Press Conference: Maximum of 100 points Mandatory Attendance		
Tuesday, Nov. 25 th	Press Conferences and/or Debates (5-6 people per group; 7 groups presenting; 7-10 minutes each) Midterm Press Conference: Maximum of 100 points Mandatory Attendance		
Nov. 26 th – Nov. 28 th	Indigenous People's Day Break		
Tuesday, Dec. 2 nd	Tylenol: The textbook case on how to handle crisis communication		
Thursday, Dec. 4 th	Tiger Woods: A textbook example of crisis communication being done wrong		
Tuesday, Dec. 9 th	Final Exam Review Session		
Monday, Dec. 15 th	Final Exam (50 points) - Online - <i>And no, you cannot take it early.</i>		

About your professor: Dr. Lanier Frush Holt is an award-winning professor having earned the Donald Ecryod Award from the National Communications Association, recognizing him as the Top Communications Educator in the entire field; both the Ohio State University Distinguished Alumni Teaching Award from the administration, and the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teacher of the Year award from the students. All of these awards are earned by a professor only once in a career, and Dr. Holt is the only professor at OSU to have earned all three. He has also been named the national runner-up for the top journalism educator in the nation as well.

Holt teaches Crisis Communication, Crime and Media, Media Law & Ethics, and Intercultural Communication. He previously taught public relations at Butler University, business writing in the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University, and several journalism, writing, and public relations courses at IU.

Dr. Holt earned his master's in journalism, specializing in political communication, and a Ph.D. in Mass Communication, examining the effect media messages have on the perceptions of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups, from Indiana University. He earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Minnesota where he also ran track.

In addition to teaching, Holt earned the Top Faculty paper award in the Electronic News division at a national American Educators for Journalism & Mass Communication conference for a paper that examines if public attitudes toward the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy moved in lockstep or discordant with the media's coverage and political elite's opinion of the issue.

Prior to his return to academia, Holt was an award-winning newspaper reporter. He has worked as a staff reporter for the Rochester *Post-Bulletin*, worked at the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Indianapolis Star* newspapers. He has been quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, interviewed by ESPNU, WOSU, and a host of other media outlets. He has also worked at World Headquarters for Honeywell Inc., the company's aerospace business unit Sensor & Guidance Products, and done public relations for the Minneapolis NAACP.

He hails from Ford Heights, Illinois, which is located south of Chicago roughly between the city's south side and Gary, Ind.