

# COMMUNICATION 3402: Crime and News

## Ramseyer Hall Room 100

**Wednesdays and Fridays: 3:55 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.**  
**Spring 2026**

<b>Instructor:</b> Lanier Frush Holt, Ph.D.	<b>Office hours:</b> 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays in person in 3168 Derby Hall or via Zoom.
Best way to reach me: <b>e-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:holt.341@osu.edu">holt.341@osu.edu</a>	

### Course Description

The most common news story of the day, the story that leads the news, and the thing you most know and the fear when you leave home is all the same topic: Crime. It is what sold newspapers, what captures eyeballs on television, and what entire networks, (e.g., CourTV, Lifetime, and Investigation Discovery), base the entirety of their coverage around every day. Yet, what you read, what you see, and what you hear about crime is often different than what is portrayed in the media. Yet, and still, most people are fascinated by it and it captures our attention. Perhaps the most common adage in all of media coverage is, “If it bleeds it leads.” In this course, we will examine the topic of crime, what it means, how it’s covered, why we’re obsessed with it, and who are the people – both media and criminals – who make us hold our breath while consuming every detail. Be advised, this course is not for the squeamish, sensitive, or those who are easily triggered. We will get into the theory and the reality of the most pervasive issue in media today and every day: crime. Be prepared.

# Course Learning Goals and Outcomes

This course is designed to give you hands-on, real-world, theory-based knowledge and understanding of how the media shape your impression of crime, who commits it, and its role in your life.

## How this course works

There is no standard textbook for the course. All of the readings will come from scholarly texts and relevant media articles (*all of which will be provided to you via Carmen/Canvas*). If you have difficulty receiving or understanding the materials, please contact me immediately.

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

## 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
Paper 1	10	10
Test 1	80	90
Paper 1	20	110
Test 2	80	190
Final Exam	100	280*

Total number of semester points: 290

## Course Policies

There are very few course policies, but they are firm: tests, extra credit work, and papers 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 an assignment, 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 do not care why.

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.

## PLEASE TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF (Mental Health Statement)

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](http://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](http://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 posed 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](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.

## 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. Appeals should first be made to the teaching assistant who will then have a say on whether the grade moves on to the instructor. **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 and interacting over Zoom, only using Zoom Chat to communicate with the entire group (refraining from side conversations with individuals) and respecting other students' views and opinions.

**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 5 points on their second offense and 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 myself and the teaching assistant and is not up for debate with the student(s).** Students having problems with this issue should not just consider but also actually drop this course immediately.

This course deals with sensitive 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.

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.

### **Student participation requirements**

The following is a summary of everyone's expected participation:

- **Attending lectures during each of the assigned class meeting times (unless a different arrangement is made on a case-by-case basis)**
- **Asking questions in class.**
- **Office hours:** I am available to help you to learn, understand, and grow as individuals. If your question is something that you believe may be of interest to others in the class, ask it.

### **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**.

## **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. The instructor and TA both work very hard to provide a positive learning experience. Please keep this in mind and remain civilized and respectful in your email and discussion board communications.
- **Citing your sources:** When we have academic discussions, please 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.

- **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](https://my.osu.edu).
  - Help guides on the use of Carmen can be found at <https://resourcecenter.odee.osu.edu/carmen>
- **Carmen Zoom:**
  - Office hours will be held through Ohio State's conferencing platform, Carmen Zoom. A separate guide to accessing Carmen Zoom and our office hours is posted on the course Carmen page under Files.
  - Students may use the audio and video functions if a webcam and microphone are available. If not, there is still a chat function within Carmen Zoom for the student to live chat with the professor or TA in the virtual office hours room.
  - [Carmen Zoom](#) help guide
- **Self-Service and Chat support:** <http://ocio.osu.edu/selfservice>
- **Phone:** 614-688-HELP (4357)
- **Email:** [8help@osu.edu](mailto:8help@osu.edu)

- **TDD:** 614-688-8743

## **Necessary equipment**

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

## **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](https://osuitsm.service-now.com/selfservice/kb_view.do?sysparm_article=kb04733)

### **Course Schedule**

**Note:** All readings should be done BEFORE the date listed on the syllabus, (i.e., the September 2nd readings should be done prior to class on September 2<sup>nd</sup>), 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. We 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 Jan. 6 insurrection took place during the semester, or other issue related to this course, the syllabus will change to incorporate it.). 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
Wednesday, Jan. 14 <sup>th</sup>	Course expectations detailed		Bring syllabus
	<b>Unit Topic:</b> The role of media in shaping perceptions of crime and who are criminals.	<b>Learning Expectations:</b> Understanding the nature of the media, crime, and attitudes about fear and safety.	
Friday, Jan. 16 <sup>th</sup>	Media and the Construction of Crime	Gerbner & Gross – Living with Television: The Violence Profile  Chiricos, et al. – Crime, News, and Fear of Crime	Personal Reflection Paper: <b>DUE TUESDAY</b> (10 points; 2 pages, max: What is your personal experience with crime?)
Wednesday, Jan. 21 <sup>st</sup>	How Television, and the Media in general, keep you afraid	Jamieson & Romer – Violence in Popular U.S. Prime Time TV Dramas and the Cultivation of Fear: A Time Series Analysis (pp. 31-34; 37-38)	
Friday, Jan. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	The War of Drugs, but the Opioid War is Different	Netherland et al – The War on Drugs that Wasn't	
Wednesday, Jan. 28 <sup>th</sup>	Crack. Cocaine. Corruption & Conspiracy (Video)		
Friday, Jan. 30 <sup>th</sup>	Discussing the disparity between the Opioid Epidemic and The War on Drugs		Finishing Crack. Cocaine. Corruption & Conspiracy (Video)

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
	<b>Unit Topic:</b> The Nature of Crime versus the illusion of how it's portrayed on television	<b>Learning Expectations:</b> Understanding the intertwined nature of media race depictions, perceptions of criminality, and fear	
Wednesday, Feb. 4 <sup>th</sup>	White collar crimes White gloved treatment by the Media?	Robinson – the Construction and Reinforcement of Myths of Race and Crime	
Friday, Feb. 6 <sup>th</sup>	Bernie Madoff, American Greed, and the Like	Remizowski – Victims Frustrated by New Attention to Madoff  Yang & Kay – Bernie Madoff Died in Prison after Carrying out the Largest Ponzi Scheme in History – Here's How It Worked	
Wednesday, Feb. 11 <sup>th</sup>	Home grown, Hardened Domestic Terrorists and Why Aren't the Media Calling Them Such	Ray – Why is it So Hard to Designate Domestic Terrorism Hate Crimes?  Sullivan & Benner – Top Law Enforcement Officials say the Biggest Domestic Terror Threat Comes from White Supremacists  O'Harrow Jr., et al. – The Rise of Domestic Extremism in America	
Friday, Feb. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Arm They Neighbor: The Perception of Safety and Stand Your Ground Doctrine	Bushman, et al – Gun Violence Trends in Movies	
Wednesday, Feb. 18 <sup>th</sup>	Covering Crime: The Reality and What You See on TV		

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Friday, Feb. 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Test 1 Review Session</b>		
Wednesday, Feb. 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Test 1</b>		
	<b>Unit Topic:</b> The Nature of Crime and the Criminals (TRIGGER WARNING: Graphic content may be discussed and/or seen in class).	<b>Learning Objectives:</b> Understanding what types of people commit crimes, why we are fascinated by them, and how and why criminals use the media	
Friday, Feb. 27 <sup>th</sup>	Nature vs. Nurture. Trying to understand the monsters the media cover		
Wednesday, March 4 <sup>th</sup>	Sociopaths versus Psychopaths: How they differ? And should we cover either?	Bonn – What Drives Our Curious Fascination with Serial Killers?	<b>Paper 2 Assigned (15 points)</b>
Friday, March 6 <sup>th</sup>	The Media's Coverage of Jeffrey Dahmer	Biography – Jeffrey Dahmer  Schram – Why I Killed Jeffrey Dahmer	
Wednesday, March 11 <sup>th</sup>	BTK and the Media's Role in his Resurfacing		<b>Paper 2 DUE</b>
Friday, March 13 <sup>th</sup>	David Berkowitz – The Son of Sam and How He Set off a Tabloid War that Still Rages	Drell – How Son of Sam Changed America	
<b>Classes March 18<sup>th</sup> and March 20<sup>th</sup></b>			
<b>Spring Break</b>			
<b>No Class -</b>			

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Wednesday, March 25 <sup>th</sup>	D.C. Snipers and the Media's role as both Tool & Weapon		
Friday, March 27 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Test 2 Review session</b>		
Wednesday, April 1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Test 2</b>		
Friday, April 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Coloring the Image of Crime and of Whom You Should Fear	<p>Dixon – Who is the Victim Here? The Psychological Effects of Overrepresenting White Victims and Black Perpetrators on Television News</p> <p>Dixon – Crime News and Racialized Beliefs: Understanding the Relationship Between Local News Viewing and Perceptions of African Americans and Crime</p>	
Wednesday, April 8 <sup>th</sup>	Attitudes about Black Lives Matter and is it really Anti-Police?	<p>Holt &amp; Sweitzer – More Than a Black and White Issue: Ethnic Identity, Social Dominance Orientation, and Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement</p> <p>Holt – Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model to Explain to Whom #Black Lives Matter... And to Whom It Does Not</p>	

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Friday, April 10 <sup>th</sup>	Social media and Race and Crime Perceptions	Fox & Holt – Fear of Isolation and Perceived Affordances: The Spiral of Silence on Social Networking Sites Regarding Police Discrimination	
Wednesday, April 15 <sup>th</sup>	The Media, the Authorities and Rape Coverage (TRIGGER WARNING: Sensitive content)	<i>Columbia Journalism Review</i> – Is the Media Complicit in Spreading Rape Culture? Reporting on Sexual Violence: Tips for Journalists	
Friday, April 17 <sup>th</sup>	Stalkers: A documentary on a problem	I Am a Stalker (video)	
Wednesday, April 22 <sup>nd</sup>	The Reality of Covering Crime. Hint: It's not like CSI (any location).		
Friday, April 24 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Final Exam Review session</b>		
Thursday, April 30 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Final Exam (Cumulative)</b> <b>4 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.</b>		
<b>Unit Topic: Types of Crimes and the Media</b>		<b>Learning Expectations:</b>	

**About your professor:** Dr. Lanier Frush Holt is an award-winning professor having earned both the Ohio State University Distinguished Alumni Teaching Award and the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teacher of the Year Awards – both the highest honors awarded in teaching in the entire OSU system (the former awarded by the administration and the latter by students). The faculty award is only earned by up to 10 faculty out of the university system's 3,000 professors. The student award recognizes Dr. Holt as the top professor amongst more than 1,000 eligible faculty members on OSU's main campus. Both awards are given to a professor only once in his career. He has been named the national runner-up for the top journalism teacher in

the entire country and nominated for the top communication educator in the country 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 prestigious 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.

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 ESPN, 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.