

**COMMUNICATION 3333: Crisis Communication**  
**Journalism Building 270**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:45 p.m. – 2:05 p.m.**  
**Spring 2020**

<b>Instructor:</b> Lanier Frush Holt, Ph.D.		<b>Office hours:</b> 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, and by appointment; 3080 Derby Hall
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**Course Description:** The most popular major in both journalism and communication courses across the country is public relations/crisis communication for two reasons: first, this field accounts for most of the jobs in the profession; and second, successful public relations handling of crises is often the difference between companies remaining financially solvent (e.g. Tylenol) or becoming euphemisms for failures in industry (see Enron).

Every day, something happens in the world of business, economics, or in the lives of celebrities that involve crises. These range from little known, like the riot in Charlottesville or sex scandals at NASA, to well-known incidents like Tiger Woods' affair and the United Airlines passenger fiasco.

Companies and well-known individuals know the value of good crisis communication professionals. For example, Target has been sued for discriminating against the blind and dumping toxic waste yet is known as a good corporate citizen, while Wal-Mart is widely known for its' lawsuits and episodes of corporate malfeasance. This difference in perception is crisis communication. In sports, Urban Meyer was suspended for trying to cover up a domestic abuse incident involving one of his coaches. Penn State tried to cover up child sex abuse involving a coach for more than a decade, and former OSU running back Ezekiel Elliott was suspended for six NFL games for what he did at Ohio State, which was BEFORE he ever stepped onto an NFL field. So why do you think some companies and some players get less negative coverage than others who have committed similar crimes, or worse? There are several reasons, but most will be discussed here in Crisis Communication.

In this course, you will examine theories and concepts that lie at the intersections of communication, business, social psychology, and interpersonal relationships. We will also address historic and contemporary examples of crises in order to give you both a theoretical and hands-on approach to crisis communication, and an understanding of how it relates to your daily world.

This course will be a challenge, and you will have to work. Be prepared.

**Required Text:** There is no standard textbook for the course. All of the readings will come from scholarly communication articles (*all of which have been provided for 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 the instructor or the teaching assistant immediately. That is why you pay your money to attend OSU, and why we are here.

**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
Test 1	50	50
Test 2	50	100
Press Conference	50	150
Final Exam	100	250*

Total number of semester points: 250\*

**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, not the teaching assistant. If you are late, miss an assignment,

or miss class for any reason, **do not** expect me, or the teaching assistant, 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 us 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 the teaching assistant, or myself, an e-mail letting us know why. Also, if you are kicked out of class (for whatever reason) on a day in which we have an exam, you will **not be able to make up the exam** unless expressly given permission by Dr. Holt, who has the final say on such matters.

**Press Conferences:** During the course, we will also have a series of press conferences. **all students are required to attend each press conference regardless of if they are presenting or not out of respect for their classmates**. 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 the press conference will receive a ZERO on the assignment regardless of if they have participated in their group's press conference presentation or not. Students who do not show up 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):**

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](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Current events: As citizens of an ever-changing cultural world, students are **required to speak on current events at the start of each class and to read a daily news source before the start of each class.**

**Trigger warning:** Also, 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 (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 myself and the teaching assistant.** 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.

#### **Course Schedule**

**Note:** All readings should be done BEFORE the date listed on the syllabus, (i.e., the August 13<sup>th</sup> readings should be done prior to class on August 13<sup>th</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 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, Jan. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Course expectations detailed		Bring syllabus
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b> Understand crisis communication: How to do it, how not to do it, and why it is necessary		<b>THEORIES USED:</b> Priming and Agenda setting	
Thursday, Jan. 9 <sup>th</sup>	Communicating during potential crises and when the public is terrified: What you could be doing if today's headlines become real		
Tuesday, Jan. 14 <sup>th</sup>	Asteroid: The value of communication/public relations in crises		
Thursday, Jan. 16 <sup>th</sup>	The Lies We Tell Teens: Big-time college athletics and the crises of the Big 10 (including The Ohio State University).		
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b> Learning how to handle culturally and racially sensitive issues; also, what to do when your organization is considered racist		<b>THEORIES USED:</b> Cultivation and Framing	

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Tuesday, Jan. 21 <sup>st</sup>	Crisis Communication on Racial Issues	<p><i>Slate</i>: How Trump Has Cultivated the White Supremacist Alt-Right for Years”</p> <p><i>Fortune</i>: Donald Trump’s Social Media Ties to White Supremacists</p> <p>Holt, Ellithorpe, &amp; Ralston: So Why Do You Think That Way?: Examining the Role Implicit Attitudes and Motivation Play in Audience’s Perception of a Racially Charged Issue.</p>	
Thursday, Jan. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	South Carolina, the Confederate flag, how did we get here, and what does this have to do with my future employment?	Holt, L.F. Bringing Their Tomorrow into Today: Why it’s Essential to Teach Diversity in Advertising Education.	
Tuesday, Jan. 28 <sup>th</sup>	Crisis Communication: When Disasters hit! (Hurricane Katrina)	<p>Giroux – The Politics of Disposability</p> <p>The National Review – The Blame Game</p>	
Thursday, Jan. 30 <sup>th</sup>	Volkswagen Crisis: Dirty Money and the ‘Clean’ Diesel Problem		Video: Hard NOx
Tuesday, Feb. 4 <sup>th</sup>	Car troubles: Toyota’s brake and floor pad controversies	Heller & Darling – Toyota in Crisis: Denial and Mismanagement	
Thursday, Feb. 6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Test 1 Review Session</b>		
Tuesday, Feb. 11 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Test 1: (25 questions: 50 points; 2 points per question)</b>		



Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b> Understanding the real world and value of communication and public relations during crises		<b>THEORIES USED:</b> Coomb's Situational Crisis Management theory; Benoit's Image Restoration Typology; Cognitive-Neoassociation; Crisis Decision Theory	
Thursday, Feb. 13 <sup>th</sup>	Rumors: How to handle what people say your organization is believed to have said	Alexander: Crash Course in Managing Rumours  Doorley & Garcia – Rumor Has It  Dilenschneider – Rumor has It: The Art of Managing Speculation	
Tuesday, Feb. 18 <sup>th</sup>	Image Repair: Dow Corning's Breast Implant Fiasco and repairing corporate respect	Brinson & Benoit: Dow Corning's Image Repair Strategies in the Breast Implant Crisis	
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b> Learning how media messages can positively or negatively influence the image of your client(s).		<b>Theories USED:</b> Framing, Neo-cognitive Association, and Priming	
Thursday, Feb. 20 <sup>th</sup>	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	<b>Press Conference Topics Announced</b>
Tuesday, Feb. 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Groups sign-in day</b> ( <i>In-class work day</i> )		
Thursday, Feb. 27 <sup>th</sup>	<i>In-class work day</i>		
Tuesday, March 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Press Conferences and/or Debates (5-6 people per group; 10 groups presenting; 7-8 minutes each) Midterm Press Conference: Maximum of 50 points <b>Mandatory Attendance</b>		

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Thursday, March 5 <sup>th</sup>	Press Conferences and/or Debates (5-6 people per group; 10 groups presenting; 7-8 minutes each) Midterm Press Conference: Maximum of 50 points <b>Mandatory Attendance</b>		
March 10 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup>	<b>SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES</b>		
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b> Understanding the role of media, what they do, how to handle them and how not to handle them		<b>Theories USED:</b> Neo-cognitive Association and Cultivation	
Tuesday, March 17 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Student Development Day</b>		
Thursday, March 19 <sup>th</sup>	Dealing with an Angry Public: Handling crisis after your organization has done wrong	Berkowitz: On the Formation and Regulation of Anger and Aggression	
Tuesday, March 24 <sup>th</sup>	Tiger Woods: A textbook example of crisis communication being done wrong		
Thursday, March 26 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Test 2 Review Session</b>		
Tuesday, March 31 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Test 2: (25 questions: 50 points; 2 points per question)</b>		
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b> Understanding what happens when you work for institutions the government regulates and those regulations fail the public		<b>THEORIES USED:</b> Fink’s Stage Theory; Benoit’s Image Restoration Theory	
Thursday, April 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Target vs. Wal-Mart: is it just public relations or are they really different companies (ethically)?		

Date	Topic	Readings	Responsibilities/ In-class work
Tuesday, April 7 <sup>th</sup>	Big Pharma and the Crisis of Unethical Dealings		Video: The Drug Short
Thursday, April 9 <sup>th</sup>	Takata Airbags: Today and Tomorrow's Problem	Yan - Can Takata Survive After Airbag Scandal?  Isidore - Takata Airbag Recall is Worse than We Thought	
Tuesday, April 14 <sup>th</sup>	Immediate Crisis Situations in Higher Education		
Thursday, April 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Final Exam Review session</b>		
Thursday, April 23 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Final Exam (Cumulative: 100 points; 50 questions)</b> <b>2 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.</b> <i>And no, you cannot take it early.</i>		

**About your professor:** Dr. Lanier Frush Holt is an award-winning professor having earned the College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award – the only totally student-nominated award at The Ohio State University – in his first year at OSU. The award recognizes Dr. Holt as the top professor amongst more than 1,000 eligible faculty members at OSU. He has also been recognized for teaching excellence at both Butler University and Indiana University, where he taught prior to coming to OSU.

Holt teaches Crisis Communication, 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 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 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.