

## Session No. 30

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**Course Title: Social Dimensions of Disaster, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition**

**Session 30: Media in Disaster**

**1 hr.**

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### **Objectives:**

- 30.1 Explain three roles of the media
- 30.2 Discuss and illustrate four predictable patterns in media coverage of disasters
- 30.3 Discuss a case example of media responses
- 30.4 Discuss the media as friend and foe of emergency managers
- 30.5 Discuss at least ten techniques for planning media relationships
- 30.6 Describe at least four strategies for surviving a press conference.

### **Scope:**

This session introduces students to the research literature pertaining to media responses to disasters, their impacts, and planning approaches and strategies for emergency managers.

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### **Readings:**

#### *Student Reading:*

Wilkins, Lee. 2000. "Searching For Symbolic Mitigation: Media Coverage of Two Floods." Pp. 80-88 in *Floods* (Vol. 1) edited by Dennis J. Parker. London: Routledge.

#### *Professor Readings:*

Rodrique, Christine M. 2003. "Representation of the September 11<sup>th</sup> Terrorist Attacks in the Online Edition of the *Los Angeles Times*." Pp. 521-558 in *Beyond September 11<sup>th</sup>: An Account of Post-Disaster Research*. Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, Public Entity Risk Institute, and Institute for Civil Infrastructure Systems. Special Publication No. 39. Boulder, Colorado: Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center, University of Colorado, pp. 528-529.

Telg, Ricky. 2000. *Getting the News Out in Times of Disaster*. Gainesville, Florida: Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. (accessed 3/24/03 [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/body\\_wc034](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/body_wc034)).

Auf der Heide, Erik. 1989. *Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination*. St. Louis, Missouri: C.V. Mosby Company (Chapter 10 entitled: "The Media: Friend and Foe," pp. 215-150).

*Background References:*

Easton, Geoff. 1997. "Media Management and the Port Arthur Tragedy." *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 12 (Winter):2-4.

McKay, Jennifer M. 1996. "Reflecting the Hazard or Restating Old Views: Newspapers and Bushfires in Australia." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 14:305-319.

Scanlon, T. Joseph and Suzanne Alldred. 1982. "Media Coverage of Disasters: The Same Old Story." *Emergency Planning Digest* 9:13-19.

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Otway, Harry. 1991. "The Media and Crisis Management." Pp. 133-147 in *Chernobyl: A Policy Response Study* edited by Boris Segerstahl. Berlin, Germany: Springer-Verlag.

Fischer, Henry W., III. 1998. *Response to Disaster: Fact Versus Fiction and It's Perpetuation*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc. (Chapter 3 only: "Why Do We Believe the Disaster Mythology," pp. 37-87).

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**General Requirements:**

Use Overheads (30-1 through 30-10 appended).

Use Student Handout (30-1 appended).

See individual requirements for each objective.

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**Objective 30.1 Explain three roles of the media.**

**Requirements:**

Use Overheads 30-1 and 30-2.

## Remarks:

### I. Introduction.

#### A. Session overview.

1. **Display** Overhead 30-1; “Session Overview: Media In Disaster.”
2. **Review** each topic briefly.
3. **Explain**, student reading assignment, i.e., Wilkins 2000, will be the focus of an exercise related to topics two and three on the Overhead.

B. **Ask students:** “Based on your reading and your general experiences, what key roles do the media play during a community response to a disaster?”

C. **Record** student responses on the chalkboard.

### II. Three media roles.

A. **Explain:** Lee Wilkins (1993), author of assigned student reading, previously documented **three key roles** performed by media organizations.

B. **Display** Overhead 30-2; “Three Media Roles.”

C. **Illustrate** each role and **integrate** with student generated examples.

#### 1. **Warning role** (adapted from Wilkins 1993).

- a. Weather related events are covered extensively (p. 121).
- b. Slow-onset hazards are under reported, if reported at all (p. 122).
- c. Impact is neutralized or reduced if behavior is deeply ingrained, e.g., sexual behavior and Aids risk, numerous near-misses in floods or hurricanes (p. 123).
- d. Less criticism during warning phase (p. 123).

#### 2. **Evacuation role.**

- a. Journalists typically assume a “command post” vantage point (p. 123).

- b. Crisis conditions lower the standard of fact checking (p. 124).
- c. Reluctant partners (p. 126).
- d. **Example:** “Hazards management officials are also wary of the media because of the evaluation function itself. No one who has done his or her very best to save lives and minimize property damage enjoys having individual or organizational efforts criticized in the public forum media accounts provide. Indeed, some community hazards planners have omitted cooperation with local media outlets from their hazards planning, in part because they anticipate that critical coverage will be forthcoming no matter what they do.” (p. 126).

### 3. Expectations role.

- a. Cumulative effects are not differentiated.
- b. **Example:** “. . . while the average American may associate the word Chernobyl with a nuclear power accident, what the average person knows about such an accident is just as likely to have come from viewing entertaining films as it is from remembering and understanding news reports.” (p. 128).
- c. Risk perceptions are impacted.
- d. **Example:** “Americans believe that they are more likely to be struck by lightning (a statistically unlikely event) than to be seriously injured in an automobile accident (which one has a one in three chance of occurring during the average American’s lifetime).” (p. 128).

### Supplemental Considerations:

The key **objectives** of this section are: 1) to provide an **integrative** framework and 2) to enhance the **depth** of student understanding about the functioning and impacts of the **media**. Some professors may wish to **expand** the discussion by showing a series of **news clips** from print or electronic media sources. Others may wish to start the session with discussion of the **types of media organizations**, e.g., print vs. electronic or television, versus magazines and newspapers. In such discussions issues of **deadline differences**, growth in **media concentration**, and such could be used to challenge student analysis of media roles in disaster.

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**Objective 30.2 Discuss and illustrate four predictable patterns in media coverage of disasters.**

**Requirements:**

Use Overhead 30-3.

Use Student Handout 30-1.

Start this section with student exercise and proceed with lecture material below.

**Remarks:**

I. Introduction.

A. **Exercise.**

1. **Remind** students of exercise procedures.
2. **Divide** class into four groups and assign roles.
  - a. Chair.
  - b. Reporter.
  - c. Timer.
3. **Announce** time limit: 5 minutes.

B. **Display** Overhead 30-3; “Workshop Tasks.”

1. Group 1 – What were the locations and key features of the two disasters studied by Wilkins (2000)?
2. Group 2 – What four predictable patterns in media coverage of disasters did Wilkins (2000) document?
3. Group 3 – What differences in national versus local media responses did Wilkins (2000) document?
4. Group 4 – What are the implications for emergency managers of Wilkins’ (2000) research?

C. **Start** discussion.

D. **Stop** discussion.

- E. **Explain** that reports from Groups 3 and 4 will be presented later in the session.
- II. Patterns in media coverage of disaster.
- A. Group 1 report: 2 minutes.
- B. **Supplement**, as necessary, with such points as these.
1. 1993 floods (adapted from Wilkins 2000, p. 82).
    - a. **Intensity:** 50 to 500 year flood, depending on location.
    - b. **Location:** nine Midwestern states, Iowa and Missouri experienced greatest impacts.
    - c. **Impacts:**
      - 1) **Deaths:** 52 plus others in flash flooding.
      - 2) **Damages:** \$12 billion.
      - 3) **Relief costs:** U.S. Congress authorized \$6.2 billion; excluded funds from Red Cross and other relief agencies.
  2. 1997 floods (adapted from Wilkins 2000, pp. 80-81).
    - a. **Intensity:** 75% of two communities under water.
    - b. **Location:** Red River Valley; hardest hit were Grand Forks, North Dakota and East Grand Forks, Minnesota (directly across Red River).
    - c. **Impacts:**
      - 1) **Deaths:** none specified.
      - 2) **Damages:** not specified, except by reference to large-scale, lengthy evacuations; 500 bridges closed, fire in downtown area of Grand Forks while flooded.
      - 3) **Relief costs:** \$8 billion federal assistance (often much delay).
- C. Group 2 report: 2 minutes.

D. **Supplement**, as necessary (adapted from Wilkins 2000, pp. 82-84).

1. **Routinization of the unexpected**, i.e., transformation into discrete events.
2. **Stripping context**, i.e., “. . . a flood becomes news only when the water laps above the river bank.” (p. 83).
3. **Focus on impact phase**.
4. **Dominant visual frame**, e.g., “. . . focus on areas of heavy devastation.” (p. 83).

III. Scanlon-Allred sequential model (1982).

A. **Background**.

1. Scanlon (1981) assessed media organization responses to several hostage taking and terrorist events.
2. Scanlon (1981) formulated a 10 step sequential model of media responses.
3. Scanlon and Allred (1982) confirmed the model through analysis of media responses to the eruption of Mount St. Helens.

B. **10 step model** (Scanlon-Allred 1982).

1. **Distribute** Student Handout 30-1; “Sequential Model of Media Responses To Disaster.”
2. **Briefly review** and illustrate each step as required.
  - a. The media will hear of an event; try to obtain more information; use its files to add to the story; dispatch reporters to the scene.
  - b. As information becomes available it will be reported and will spread from medium to medium. The media will attempt to fit the news into a framework.
  - c. To give the news form and structure the media will demand official news conferences at which official statements can be recorded.

- d. The various media—radio, television, and print—will act differently.
  - e. Despite these differences the foreign press tend to support each other and often antagonize local media.
  - f. The media will make demands on communications, transportation, and other local resources.
  - g. The media will operate in cycles focusing on news highs, then searching for less dramatic material to fill in less spectacular periods.
  - h. In a truly major incident almost all reporters will share what they have.
  - i. The media—whatever techniques they use to obtain information—will not publish it if they decide it would be harmful.
  - j. The media will also cooperate with official requests that certain information be withheld.
3. **Emphasize:** the steps of the model are **illustrations** of the **predictability** of media organization responses.

### **Supplemental Considerations:**

The **key message** of this section is that the responses of media organizations are **predictable**. Students should also be able to **describe** at least four examples of this **patterning** in media organization responses. Some professors will choose to **expand** this section greatly through class exercises wherein students may **review** print or electronic media **coverage** of a disaster and provide further documentation of the **types of regularities** documented by Wilkins (2000) and/or Scanlon and Alldred (1982). Others may focus discussion on **alternative research designs** that could be used by students in future research projects, e.g., a senior thesis.

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### **Objective 30.3 Discuss a case example of media responses.**

#### **Requirements:**

Use Overhead 30-4.

#### **Remarks:**

I. Case example of media response: Red River flooding.

A. National vs. local media responses.

1. **Explain** that the Wilkins (2000) chapter is a typical case example of an analysis of media organization responses. As such, students will be expected to discuss this case example by illustrating and describing the four themes specified in the exercise (see Overhead 30-3; Workshop Tasks”). The first two of these were discussed as part of Objective 1 (above).
2. Group 3 report: 2 minutes.
3. **Supplement**, as required (adapted from Wilkins 2000, pp. 85-86).

a. **National media.**

- 1) No mention of mitigation.
- 2) No mention of prior flooding in this area.
- 3) No mention of geography or patterns of human habitation of this area.
- 4) Focus on desire of residents to rebuild.

b. **Local media.**

- 1) Converse is deeper and broader in scope.
- 2) Mitigation issues are discussed, but focused on specific events.
- 3) Lack of linkage of commonalities with other events, e.g., warning failures.
- 4) Human interest focus rather than policy analysis.

B. Implications for emergency managers.

1. Group 4 report: 2 minutes.
2. **Supplement**, as required (adapted from Wilkins 2000, p. 86).
  - a. **Focus on visuals** of damage.

- b. **Minimal discussion of mitigation.**
- c. **Lack of comparisons** to similarities with other events.
- d. **Lack of temporal** comparisons regarding policy impacts, e.g., prior mitigation efforts.
- e. **Risk communication** must be a two-way process.
- f. **Risk communication** must be a continuing conversation.

II. Case example of media response: World Trade Center attacks.

A. Rodrique (2003).

- 1. **Media selected:** on-line edition of *Los Angeles Times*.
- 2. **Time period:** followed for 12 weeks after bombing.
- 3. **Method:** content analysis of 558 front screen stories (the home page or front page) (p. 527).
- 4. **Conclusion:** The stories reflected 10 principal categories (p. 528).

B. **Display** Overhead 30-4; “Ten Main Themes.” (Adapted from Rodrique 2003, pp. 528-529 and pp. 536-537).

- 1. **Context** (1%), e.g., cultural and geopolitical background, workings of Al-Qaeda network, etc.
- 2. **Diplomacy** (7%), e.g., efforts to build a multinational coalition.
- 3. **Impact** (6%), e.g., human toll in lives.
- 4. **Investigation** (10%), e.g., investigations identifying suspects.
- 5. **Military** (19%), e.g., airstrikes in Afghanistan.
- 6. **Mitigation** (4%), e.g., heightened security measures.
- 7. **Reactions** (10%), e.g., grief of victim families.
- 8. **Reconstruction** (2%), e.g., rebuilding plans.
- 9. **Response** (4%), e.g., SAR operations.

10. **Restoration** (3%), e.g., reopening of airports.

C. **Explain:** percentages listed were based on codings of 558 stories; included 14 codings listed as “other”, (3%) and “unrelated” (32%) of the total.

D. **Implications for emergency managers.**

1. **Story content**, i.e., cross-event comparisons have not yet been made to document similarities and differences among news coverage of events involving different disaster agents.
2. **Changes over time** (adapted from Rodrique 2003, pp. 536-537).
  - a. **Military**, only category obtaining 10% or more of total for entire study period.
  - b. **Reactions**, dominated the first three weeks.
  - c. **Diplomacy**, most salient during third and fourth weeks.
3. **Three “metastories”** reflected temporal shifts in coverage (p. 538).
  - a. **“The disaster story”** (27%), dominated first three weeks.
  - b. **“The war story”** (30%), dominated during weeks four through six and nine through twelve.
  - c. **“The crime story”** (11%), highest during week one, then continued throughout with varying emphasis from 16% to 5%.
  - d. **“Unrelated story”** (32%), low during initial three weeks, then continual rise in emphasis to 60% of all stories during week eleven.
4. **Public perceptions**, views of events, impacts, and official actions will be reflected in media coverage.
5. **Independent resource**, emergency manager must view as a community resource, but one independent of governmental control.

### **Supplemental Considerations:**

The **key message** of this section is that the responses to disaster by **media organizations** can be studied **scientifically**. While such research is only **beginning**, numerous case examples can **inform emergency managers** of broad patterns. Although most professors will wish to keep this section **brief**, others may wish to **expand** it through the inclusion

of **additional case examples**. These could be reviewed through lecture or built into case study exercises. **Potential studies** include **Otway** (1991) (media responses to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster [April 1986] in seven European countries and **McKay** (1996) (media responses to 1994 Bushfire disaster in New South Wales, Australia). The professor also may wish to review the research by Fischer (1998) which was discussed in Session 8 (“Sources of Disaster Myths”; Objective 8.4, II). Additional media studies by Fischer (1998) are summarized in Chapter 3 (“Why Do We Believe the Disaster Mythology”).

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### **Objective 30.4 Discuss the media as friend and foe of emergency managers.**

#### **Requirements:**

Use Overheads 30-5 and 30-6.

#### **Remarks:**

- I. Introduction.
  - A. **Ask students:** “Based on your reading in this course thus far, what examples could you provide that illustrate ways in which media personnel may serve as a “friend” to emergency managers? And, what about as a “foe”? What would be examples of this?”
  - B. **Record** student responses on the chalkboard under the headings of “friend” and “foe”.
- II. Media as a friend.
  - A. **Display** Overhead 30-5, “Media as Friend”.
  - B. **Review**, illustrate, and integrate points listed with student generated examples (adapted from Auf der Heide 1989, pp. 217-224).
    1. **Disaster warnings**, e.g., information to the public, with or without official requests.
    2. **Disaster information**, e.g., officials watch tv coverage in EOC; information to public regarding pre-impact preparations.
    3. **Stimulation of donations**, e.g., citizens in other communities initiate disaster fund drive.
    4. **Stimulation of mitigation**, e.g., alert public to potential hazards.

5. **Victim status information**, e.g., may reduce injury and trauma for family; reduce injuries of others by keeping them away from disaster site.
6. **Withholding and delaying decisions**, e.g., if viewed to be dangerous to public, media will delay or withhold broadcast of information.

III. Media as foe.

A. **Display** Overhead 30-6; “Media As Foe.”

B. **Review**, illustrate, and integrate points listed with student generated examples (adapted from Auf der Heide 1989, pp. 217-224).

1. **Demands for resources**, e.g., media personnel require transportation into and out of impact areas.
2. **Demands for facilities**, e.g., media personnel require work areas, access to fax, Internet hookups, etc.
3. **Demands on officials**, e.g., requests for interviews, information updates, etc.
4. **Distortion of facts**, e.g., perpetuation of disaster myths, exaggeration of disaster impact.
5. **Interference with operations**, e.g., exaggerated or inaccurate reports require official effort to correct, may distract from other priorities; search and rescue may be delayed due to use of transportation of media, e.g., airspace crowded with helicopters.

**Supplemental Considerations:**

This section may be very brief and **limited** to the material on the overheads which will **enhance** student understanding of the pluses and minuses of media personnel activities during a disaster response. Some professors may wish to pursue these matters in more depth through **case study examples** wherein the points listed might be illustrated. Depending on the **context** of the course, other professors may assign more time to the reasons why the media operate as non-governmental organizations and the safeguards that such **structural separations** ensure, i.e., freedom of the press. Others may use this topic as a **research site** and through guided discussion help students understand **alternative research designs** that could expand the knowledge base in this area.

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**Objective 30.5 Discuss at least ten techniques for planning media relationships.**

## Requirements:

Use Overheads 30-7 through 30-9.

## Remarks:

- I. Introduction.
  - A. **Ask students:** “Based on your reading in this course, what approaches or techniques can you think of for planning relationships with media organizations? What specific things should emergency managers try to do?”
  - B. **Record** student responses on the chalkboard.
- II. General techniques.
  - A. **Display** Overhead 30-7; “General Techniques for Planning Media Relationships.”
  - B. **Review**, illustrate, and integrate points listed with student generated examples (adapted from Auf der Heide 1989, pp. 235-236).
    1. **Disaster education**, e.g., workshop for media personnel regarding disaster history, community hazards and response realities, e.g., precise information on deaths immediately after impact is an unrealistic expectation.
    2. **Involvement**, e.g., request media organizations to select representatives who can be appointed to disaster planning committees.
    3. **Survival**, e.g., plans for backup contingencies in case media organizations are impacted can make the relationship with emergency managers more reciprocal.
    4. **Single point of contact**, e.g., be aware that all information going to media personnel can not be centralized, but advise if a single point of contact for all emergency agencies.
    5. **Pool reporters**, e.g., encourage selection of limited reporters for site inspections, EOC contact, victim information, etc.
    6. **Communication equipment**, e.g., have Internet sites positioned, simultaneous contact capability via phone, fax and e-mail to media representatives.

7. **PIO**, e.g., prepare for use of professionally trained public information officers to be available.

### III. Recommendations for PIOs.

#### A. Telg 2000 (adapted from p.1).

1. **Event:** wildfires, Spring 1998.
2. **Location:** throughout Florida; 2,300 blazes.
3. **Impacts:** 300 homes destroyed; 500,000 acres burned.
4. **Responders:** 10,000 firefighters, who represented 47 states; 150 aircraft.
5. **Study procedure:** “Questionnaires were sent to public information officers (PIOs) in the Florida Fire Chiefs Association and to reporters, representing newswire agencies, newspapers, and television and radio stations that were in areas impacted by the wildfires.” (Neither the number sent nor returned was specified).
6. **Recommendations:** were formulated by researchers upon review of questionnaire responses.

#### B. **Display** Overhead 30-8; “Recommendations For PIOs: Pre-Event”.

#### C. **Review** and illustrate recommendations for actions prior to a disaster (adapted from Telg 2000, pp. 2-3).

1. **Designate a PIO**, e.g., each emergency department and relief organization; local government official may have a county or city PIO who will coordinate with others so that “one voice” reaches the public.
2. **Brainstorm**, e.g., use a series of “what if” scenarios.
3. **Communication plan**, e.g., a specific plan will allow for a proactive, as opposed to a reactive, stance.
4. **Assign roles**, e.g., who will field telephone calls, arrange interviews, prepare press releases, etc.
5. **Training**, e.g., all PIOs and members of the crisis communication team must be trained.

6. **Web page development training**, e.g., “Reporters and the general public are becoming more adamant about getting almost immediate, online information” (p. 3).

D. **Display** Overhead 30-9; “Recommendations For PIOs: Response.”

E. **Review** and illustrate recommendations for actions during a disaster response (adapted from Telg 2000, pp. 3-4).

1. **Categorize information**, e.g., record “facts” separate from “rumors”; deal with rumors quickly.
2. **Local over national**, e.g., cater to local reporters who will meet needs of local citizens.
3. **Recognize information needs**, e.g., reporters have deadlines and needs for visuals.
4. **Consider pool coverage**, e.g., arrange media tours to damage sites.
5. **Designate contact point**, e.g., provide 24/7 cell phone, fax, and e-mail address.
6. **Provide resources**, e.g., cell phones and laptop computers will be required by PIOs and emergency information updates should be available on a 24 hour telephone hotline.
7. **Stay “on the record”**, e.g., don’t make any comment that you don’t want in print; avoid use of “no comment,” rather reply that an answer will be forthcoming when information is available.
8. **Document**, e.g., maintain a crisis communication inventory.

### **Supplemental Considerations:**

The **key message** of this section is that much can and should be done to establish good **media relations** prior to a disaster. Specific **planning techniques** could be discussed in more detail, depending on course context. Preparation of a **press release**, for example, could be developed as a student exercise. Some professors may wish to review a specific case study like that prepared by **Easton** (1997) who served as the PIO for the Tasmanian Police Department during the Port Arthur tragedy. This event could be used as a case study for class discussion with **points of tension** highlighted, e.g., media contacts with hostage takers, restrictions on photo areas and timing of publication, etc.

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**Objective 30.6 Describe at least four strategies for surviving a press conference.**

## **Requirements:**

Use Overhead 30-10.

## **Remarks:**

- I. Introduction.
  - A. **Ask students:** “All of you have watched local officials during press conferences. Some have gone better than others. What advice would you offer to an emergency manager who is holding a press conference a few days after a disaster?”
  - B. **Record** student responses on the chalkboard.
- II. Press conference techniques.
  - A. **Display** Overhead 30-10.
  - B. **Review**, illustrate, and integrate points listed with student generated examples (adapted from Auf der Heide 1989).
    1. Be prepared.
    2. Be wary of “off-the-record” comments.
    3. Be honest.
    4. Manage ambiguity.
    5. Relate to the audience.
    6. Take the initiative.
    7. Use a team approach.
    8. Make special presentations for television.
    9. Prepare for telephone interviews.
    10. Remember the interviewee’s Bill of Rights.
- III. Session wrap-up.
  - A. **Display** Overhead 30-1; “Session Overview: Media In Disaster.”

- B. **Review** each topic listed; supplement as required to integrate session with examples from each of the six topics.

### **Supplemental Considerations:**

This section may be very **brief**. The key **message** is to introduce students to the **realities** of a media press conference and a few **techniques** for performance enhancement. Some professors, depending on course context, may wish to **expand** this section and use the press conference material as the basis for a student exercise. A disaster case study (possibly the one the student is using for their course paper) could be presented by a student (event features only). Other students could be encouraged to **role play** as media personnel and challenge the presenter with questions. Such experiences **enhance** student understanding of the **dynamic tensions** between government officials and media organizations.

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### **Course Developer References:**

- I. Auf der Heide, Erik. 1989. *Disaster Response: Principles of Preparation and Coordination*. St. Louis, Missouri: C.V. Mosby Company.
- II. Easton, Geoff. 1997. "Media Management and the Port Arthur Tragedy." *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 12 (Winter):2-4.
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- VII. Scanlon, T. Joseph. 1981. "Coping With the Media: Police-Media Problems in Hostage Takings and Terrorist Incidents." *Canadian Police College Journal* 5:129-148.
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