

Decision Making:

PSY 458, CRN 42026, Summer 2008

Lecture:

Instructor: Adam D. I. Kramer, 346-4924, adik@uoregon.edu

Time: Mon-Fri, 12:00-1:50

Place: Lillis Hall, 255

Office Hours: Monday 2-4 or by appointment

Class website:

<http://www.uoregon.edu/~adik/psy458/>

BLACKBOARD IS NOT USED AS PART OF THIS CLASS.

Course Goals:

- How do we make choices?
- How do we form judgments?
- How do we make decisions?
- What biases these decisions/judgments?
- How rational are we?
- What does “rational” mean?
- How can we improve our decisions?

We make decisions every day. Some of these decisions shape the future course of our lives (e.g., choosing a mate, selecting a career). Other decisions have less impact on our lives (e.g., what to eat for dinner, what laundry detergent to purchase). The field of psychological decision-making, which we will study in this course, examines the mechanisms that underlie these choices, preferences, and judgments, in the interest of improving decision-making processes so that our decisions lead to better outcomes.

In this course you will learn about research and theories in psychology that address the questions raised above. More importantly, you will learn to think more carefully about decisions and judgments that you and other people make, and you will gain insights into the complexities of human choices and judgments as well as increase your awareness of the mechanisms that guide your own behavior.

This 400-level psychology class will involve description, explanation, and exploration of the state of decision-making research as it exists today. Like any topic of current interest, our understanding of these processes is changing and improving even as we take this class.

Learning Adjustments:

Contact Adam as soon as possible if you have been diagnosed with a learning disability (confirmed by the Academic Learning Center) or have some other special needs that may require adjustments for you to learn/understand the material. For more information about disability services, visit their web site: <http://ds.uoregon.edu/>. Evidence of a disability must be provided prior to requesting leniency.

Class Requirements, Activities, and Grading:

1. Readings:

The primary text we will use for this course is Hastie, R. & Dawes, R. M., *Rational Choice in an Uncertain World: The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making* (2001). This is a straightforward common-language description of what we know about judgment and decision-making research, with an emphasis on why "rational" choices are often unintuitive. This book constitutes half the readings for this class; the other half of the readings are primary-source articles, some old and some new, which are due the day they are listed on the schedule (below). PDFs of these readings will be available on the course website.

2. Participation and Attendance:

Attendance is not required, but is essential to learn the material. Missing class may leave you confused or behind. Each day is 6% of the class time and thus you will miss 6% of the lecture content! Do not expect the instructor to repeat any material they already presented in class! PowerPoint slides from lectures will be posted on the course website. Changes to this syllabus may also be announced in class, and not noted elsewhere.

If you cannot attend class or lecture for any reason, it is your responsibility to learn the material presented. If you alert the instructor beforehand, the instructor may be able to help you out, but is not required to do so. Class will usually start on time; being late or leaving early is disruptive and often annoying, and as such is discouraged.

3. Homework

- a) **Reading responses.** You are required to summarize, in 500 words or less, the day's readings. These summaries are due via email to Adam by 11 AM, one hour before class begins. This helps the instructor focus discussion on topics that are hard to understand, and serves as motivation to do the readings in time. Responses are worth 25% of the overall grade, or 0.75% each.
- b) **Homework Assignments.** From time to time, there may be a homework assignment necessary to illustrate course material. Homework will likely be assigned in lecture and due the next day; this is short notice, but is unavoidable in a four-week class. Homework is worth up to 2% of your grade in sum.
- c) **Critiques.** The science of Judgment and Decision-Making requires a straightforward logical approach to understanding cognitive processes. The critique assignment is designed to allow you to show logical straightforward thinking by critiquing or extending an article we read as part of class. A critique is due every **Monday**, before class, in electronic format (**.doc, .pdf, .rtf, and .txt only. DO NOT SEND A DOCX FILE!**). This is in addition to your reading response for that day! There are three critiques due, each worth 15% of your final grade.
 - a. **Critiques should be 4-6 pages long, double-spaced**
 - b. **Critiques should identify a fault in the paper, or should suggest an extension of the paper's results**
 - i. Faults cannot simply be identified; you must also explain why it is a fault. "This paper is flawed because it only examined college students" is insufficient; you **must** explain why this is relevant to the variables in question! This is to say, provide a theoretical reason why you would expect a different result from a different population. Similarly, a study from 1972 is not faulty because it is "old," but if they examine culturally variable variables, it may need replication if the culture has changed.
 - ii. Extensions, similarly, must follow from the paper's **theoretical** bases. If the paper has presented a theory, what would the theory predict, why would it predict that, and how would this test extend our knowledge? Simply stating that it would be cool to replicate the study in a different population is insufficient unless a predicted pattern of results in the new population would teach us something we do not yet know.
 - c. **Critiques should follow the APA style, and include a references section for all cited works**
 - d. **Critiques should be written in a straightforward manner, with clear prose that does not need to be read more than once.**
 - i. Grammar, spelling, and style should be entirely correct.
- d) **Final Paper.** In addition to your three short critiques, there is a final paper due electronically on the last day of class (July 17th). This paper should be between 8 and 12 pages long, double-spaced, in APA format. Final papers may involve an editorial review of a specific topic in JDM, a proposal for a new study (i.e., the introduction and methods section for a possible paper), or an extension of a critique (i.e., a more fleshed out version, in which you describe how to address or correct for the flaw, or how you would extend the theory). Students who wish to do something else for their final paper should speak to Adam. The final paper represents the remaining 30% of your grade.

4. Grading Philosophy

Consistent with the Psychology Department's grading guidelines, grades on all assignments, as well as the course itself, represent the following value judgments:

A+: Mastery. A grade of A+ on an assignment indicates mastery of the subject matter. Such a grade indicates that the student fully understands the material, can apply it to everyday scenarios using plain language in an off-the-cuff conversational context, indicating that the subject matter and methods have been fluidly integrated into the student's understanding of the world. An A+ grade in the course indicates that the student is capable of conducting research in the subject matter, and would be qualified to teach the course. Approximately 1 out of every 300 students is expected to get an A+ grade in this course; do not be offended if you do not get one.

A: Excellent. A grade of "A" on an assignment indicates that the assignment was completed in an excellent manner. Such a grade indicates that the flaws or problems in the assignment are trivial or absent, and that the assignment clearly indicates a full understanding of the material. A grade of A in the course means that you have displayed an excellent understanding of the course material, both conceptually and operationally. Approximately 20-25% of students are expected to receive A grades.

B: Good. A grade of "B" on an assignment indicates that the assignment was completed well. Such an assignment will not contain falsehoods, and will not contain substantial errors. It should indicate an understanding of all material discussed. A B grade for the course indicates that the student has a good understanding of the material, and could discuss the material at hand with someone aware of the literature. B students should be able to apply course topics to real life scenarios, though it may take some time and/or effort to do so.

C: Adequate. A grade of "C" on an assignment indicates that the assignment was completed. The assignment may contain errors or betray misunderstandings, but should simultaneously indicate that the student has read the material and has a basic understanding of its contents. A C grade for the course indicates operational understanding of the subject matter, and have conceptual understanding of the "big bullet point" items.

D: Inadequate. A "D" grade on an assignment indicates that there are enough errors or omissions that the student does not understand the course material, though should still indicate that the underlying material was at least read and that a significant amount of effort was dedicated to the assignment. A D grade for the course indicates that the student completed the reading and assignments, but does not have sufficient understanding to apply the material to real life, or to undertake unguided research or further reading into the topic.

F: Failing. An "F" grade on an assignment indicates that the assignment was not completed, that the student did not read the relevant material, or that the assignment was unreadable. An F grade for the course indicates lack of any meaningful understanding of the material.

5. Lateness and Incompletes

Reading responses will not be accepted late. They are meant to be written as the course material is read, which is before the material is discussed. If the assignment is not completed, the material was not read at a deep enough level to participate in class discussion for that day. Once the material is discussed, a reading response is no longer meaningful or educational to write, and so will receive no points.

Homework assignments may not be turned in late except by permission of the instructor. Critiques (including the final critique) lose 10% the first day late and 10% the second day late. Critiques turned in more than two days late will not be graded until after the class is over, and will result in an incomplete (I) grade until then. Late critiques will always be worth 80% of their original value.

Any student who does not complete all three critiques or the final paper will receive an incomplete grade until they have completed the assignment. Students who turn in papers late or after the end of class should expect four weeks' delay in grading. University policy dictates that incomplete grades become F grades after one year.

6. Cheating:

Cheating consists of the uncited quoting or copying of any words, tables, or formulae not generated by the student. Papers should be written entirely by the student. Students may ask others, including other students in the class, to proofread their critiques or final paper for clarity, but not content. Reading responses must be written without any assistance; showing another student a reading response is cheating.

What is NOT cheating? Collaborative learning; that is, discussing the content of the course, lecture slides, or reading materials with others. Meeting to compare notes on readings or lectures can help everyone do well. Anything you write, however, must be your own work.

7. Class Etiquette & Norms:

- If you are expecting a phone call, need to read a book or newspaper, need to talk to or text your friend, or need to surf the internet, feel free to do so **outside** of the classroom.
- Warn the instructor if you have to leave early or show up late.
- Treat your fellow students and your instructors with respect and a degree of formality.
- Ask questions aloud if you have them. If you have a question, it is likely that others would benefit from the answer.

Tentative Course Schedule:

	Assigned Reading	Topic(s):
Week 1: Probability and Why it's Hard	June 23: none June 24: Appendix; Tversky & Kahneman, 1982 June 25: Chapters 1 & 2 June 26: Chapter 5; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974	June 23: Introduction, Syllabus, Overview, Probability, Frequencies June 24: Conjunction, Disjunction, Randomness June 25: Bayes' Law, Expected Utility June 26: Heuristics and Biases
Week 2: Reasons, Framing, and Stories	June 30: Chapter 3 July 1: Chapter 6; Shafir, Simonson, & Tversky, 1993 July 2: Chapter 7, Pennington & Hastie, 1988 July 3: Shafir, 1993; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984	June 30: Judgment July 1: Reasons July 2: Stories July 3: Framing
Week 3: Determining Values and Probability	July 7: Chapter 11; Hodges & Wilson, 1993 July 8: Chapter 4, Mulford & Dawes, 1994 July 9: Chapters 12 & 13 July 10: Kahneman & Tversky, 1979 (read it twice!)	July 7: Attitude Construction July 8: Attitude Recall July 9: Normative and Descriptive Theories July 10: Prospect Theory
Week 4: Emotion, Situation, and Adaptive Rationality	July 14: Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003; Ariely & Loewenstein, 2006 July 15: Lerner, Small, & Loewenstein, 2004; Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003 July 16: Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996; Simon, 1986 July 17: Chapter 14; Edwards, 1954	July 14: Visceral states July 15: Emotions July 16: Pragmatic and Adaptive Rationality July 17: Review: Is it hopeless?