

PSY 458/558 – Decision Making
Spring, 2019
T/TH, 2-3:20, 245 Straub Hall

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COURSE CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES

This course examines decision making from a cognitive psychology perspective. How do we form judgments? How are values and preferences constructed? How do value and judgement translate or inform our decisions? What factors can influence or bias our decisions? This course will explore both normative (how we should behave) and descriptive (how we actually behave) accounts of decision making. We will cover classic decision-making work as well as some of the latest research from neuroscientific, developmental and social perspectives. We will also explore how to use decision making research to improve decisions by reflecting on decision patterns and designing decision environments appropriately.

My goal is that by the end of this course, you will have a good foundational understanding of major decision theories and current state of decision research. I also hope that you will learn more about your own decision making processes and how you can use the current research to “real-world” benefit. This course will request your participation and you will be making several decisions relevant to the course content.

The content of this course is research-based, meaning that it is mostly derived from empirical research, and, as such, requires you to use your knowledge from PSY 302 and PSY 303. You have basic training as a psychological scientist and this course will require that you “think like a research psychologist”. A core component of psychology research, particularly in the domain of decision science, involves using probability theory. This course will build on your knowledge from statistics and will involve applying quantitative methods to better understand decision processes.

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION

My goal is to provide a learning environment that is supportive of varying learning styles. If you have a documented learning barrier and anticipate needing accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible and request that a counselor from the Accessible Education Center send a letter of verification. If you are a non-native English speaker and think you may have language difficulties in this course, please let me know as soon as possible to make any necessary special arrangements.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings: The optional textbook for this course is Rational Choice in an Uncertain World by Reid Hastie and Robyn Dawes. Readings from the textbook are not required. That is, you will not be tested on textbook content that is not covered in class. Instead, it should be used as a resource to clarify and reinforce content covered in lecture. In addition to the textbook, I will post other suggested readings on Canvas that will complement topics covered in class. Unless otherwise noted, these will also be optional.

Class participation: I will not be keeping attendance and will not be grading for in-class participation. However, it is in your best interest to attend class if you wish to do well in the course. Some topics that will be tested on the exams will only be covered in class. We will also be doing activities in class that will be necessary to complete the homework assignments (described below).

Homework (10% of final grade): Six class periods will end with an in-class activity and a corresponding homework assignment. You only need to complete four out of six of these assignments and each is worth 2.5% of your final grade. There will NOT be opportunities to make up in-class activities. Assignments will be posted on Canvas with a deadline one-week from the in-class activity. You will be responsible for tracking the number of assignments you have submitted.

Participation on Canvas (15% of final grade): I will post polls, questionnaires and discussions over the course of the term on Canvas to collect data, assess learning and stimulate discussion with your peers. Some participation may additionally require reading an article, watching a video or doing an exercise.

Exams (50% of final grade): There will be two exams worth 25% each. These exams will contain both multiple choice and short answer questions, and will require you to go beyond memorization to apply, analyze, and synthesize information. Exam questions will come from material covered in lecture. There will be no questions that ask about information found *only* in the readings. However, the readings can be used as a resource for studying for the exams. The final will be conceptually cumulative; that is, you will be applying concepts and information from the first half of the course in the second half. However, there will not be specific questions from the first half of the class on the final. *Makeup exams are not permitted except in documented emergency situations.*

Writing project (25% of final grade): The goal of this project is to provide an opportunity to demonstrate your learning of the topics beyond examination. There are three options for this project. Given that this is a course about decision making, you will need to make a decision (by Thursday of Week 2) for which of the three options will be the most successful for you to demonstrate your learning. This decision is FINAL (once you have chosen an option you will NOT be able to switch to a different option). I will provide a format for you to declare your choice starting on the first day of class. If you do not explicitly state which option you are choosing, you will be defaulted into Option A.

Option A: Research paper. This is a standard APA-style research paper assignment and should be 6-8 pages in length, including references. You will be expected to read several peer reviewed articles and use the articles to produce a coherent paper on a decision making topic of your choice (but I will offer some topic suggestions). You will need to draw upon your PSY 303 lab experience to write a successful paper. The final paper will be due on the Tuesday of Week 9.

Option B: Research proposal. This is opportunity for you to choose a topic in the course that interests you and design a psychological experiment(s) to test a hypothesis. You will produce a 4-6-page project proposal (15% of final grade, draft due Week 7) and a final draft with the experiment materials (10% of final grade; due Week 9). **Graduate students enrolled in 558:** You are expected to choose this option and craft a research proposal at the intersection of decision making and your field of study. In addition to the written component, you should prepare a brief (5-8min) presentation for the class to be held on 6/4. Please schedule a time to meet with me to discuss your project shortly after submitting your proposal.

Option C: Mini-papers. This option consists of three 2-3-page papers that will be assigned and due periodically throughout the term. You will have one week to complete each paper. The catch is that I will decide the topics of the papers and you will not know the topics before they are assigned. Each assignment will make up a third of 25% of your final grade.

Grading Summary

- Exams: 50% total, Midterm (25%), Final Exam (25%)
- Writing Project: 25%
- Homework: 10% total, 4 assignments worth 2.5% each
- Participation on Canvas: 15%

Grades will be distributed as follows:

		B+	87-89%	C+	77-79%	D+	67-69%
A	93-100%	B	83-86%	C	73-76%	D	60-66%
A-	90-92%	B-	80-82%	C-	70-72%	F	0-59%

I reserve the right to adjust grades *up* (i.e., to curve); grades will never be adjusted downward. Whether grades are rounded up (e.g., whether an 89.5% counts as 90%) will depend on the distribution of scores. Please see the psychology department guidelines for a description of the type of achievement that each grade signifies: <http://psychology.uoregon.edu/courses/departments-grading-standards/>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. Please don't cheat or plagiarize. Doing so will result in serious consequences and will waste a lot of people's time & energy.

It is the official policy of the University of Oregon that all acts of alleged academic dishonesty by students be reported to the Director of Student Judicial Affairs in the Office of Students Life. If you are ever unsure about whether a behavior constitutes cheating, please ask me or a teaching assistant. There is more information about plagiarism at: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>

A quote from the site: *Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's product, words, ideas, or data as one's own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes.*

All writing assignments will be checked thoroughly **with anti-plagiarism software**. By enrolling in this course you grant the instructor permission to do so.

USING CANVAS

The website for this course was constructed using Canvas. There you will find general announcements for the class, all documents for the course (including updates to the syllabus), on-line polls, discussion boards, links to relevant web sites, and more. I hope that this web site will be a useful tool for you in learning the material for this class, and in further exploring topics you find interesting. You can get to the course web site by going to <http://canvas.uoregon.edu>

RESOURCES

Office hours- Please make use of my office hours if you would like clarification or help with the course content or assignments. If you need to schedule office hours by appointment, it is best to contact me at least a week in advance. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays.

The Teaching and Learning Center- The writing project will require you to write in a manner that is clear and concise. The TLC offers drop in writing tutoring to assist you with this. Go to <http://tlc.uoregon.edu/subjects/writing/> for more information.

Psychology Advising- It is easy to become engrossed in classes and learning and forget that graduation is just around the corner! Visit an advisor to check on your degree progress and explore post-grad options. For hours and information, go to: <http://psychology.uoregon.edu/undergraduate/advising/>

Course schedule (subject to revision):

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1	4/2	Introduction	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 1-3	Read syllabus
1	4/4	Dual process models	<i>Thinking Fast and Slow</i> Chapters 1-4	
2	4/9	Anchoring and adjustment	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 4	
2	4/11	Encoding accessibility	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 5	Submit writing project choice
3	4/16	Heuristics & biases 1		
3	4/18	No class – watch TED talk + read Gigerenzer article	Gigerenzer (1991) *required	Watch TED talk: Dan Ariely “Are we in control of our own decisions?”
4	4/23	Heuristics & biases 2		Opt. C paper 1 due
4	4/25	Explanation-based judgments	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 6	
5	4/30	Cause and chance	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 7	
5	5/2	Catching up/Review		
6	5/7	EXAM 1	Material up to 4/30	
6	5/9	Rational decision making	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 8; Appendix	
7	5/14	Expected utility and prospect theory	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 11 & 12	Opt. B proposal and Opt. C paper 2 due
7	5/16	Neuroscience of decision making 1	Hastie & Dawes Chapter 13	
8	5/21	Neuroscience of decision making 2	Schultz et al (2015)	
8	5/23	Decision making across the lifespan	Peters, Finucane, MacGregor, & Slovic (2000); Jacobs & Klaczynski (2002)	
9	5/28	Social & group decision making	Feldman-Hall et al (2014)	Opt. A & B Paper paper due
9	5/30	Special topics 1	TBD	
10	6/4	Special topics 2/Grad student presentations	TBD	Opt. C paper 3 due
10	6/6	Catching up/Review		
11	6/13	FINAL EXAM	12:30pm	