Decisions & Judgment

PSY4930: Special Topics in Psychology
Fall 2019, Class # 24075, Section 136F
Meeting room: CHE0316
Meeting times: Tuesday 4:05-4:55 pm
Thursday 4:05-6:00 pm
Instructor: Dr. Peter Kvam
Office: 216 Psychology Building
Office hours: Tuesday / Wednesday 2:00-3:00 p.m. or by appointment
Email: pkvam@ufl.edu

Course Description

This course explores how people make decisions and how we study the psychological processes underlying their choices and judgments. The first part of the course will cover traditional theories of choice and how we “should” make decisions and judgments, as well as the mental shortcuts (heuristics) and biases that lead us astray. The second part will examine how we use experiences and affective information to learn to make better choices over time as well as the cognitive processes that are affected in different disorders and how they affect decisions. The final part of the course will examine social and strategic decisions, such as voting, as well as the neural underpinnings of decision processes. Students will read primary source articles (provided) to learn about the various sources of experimental data used to study decision processes and how researchers use models to predict and explain the choices that people make.

Suggested text. This course does not have required reading material – anything that is necessary will be provided on eLearning / Canvas. However, the following textbook may be helpful to many students in understanding the material and covers many of the same topics we will in class:


Objectives

The goal of this class is to provide a background in the theory and practice of behavioral judgment and decision-making research, cover experimental research methods used to study cognition, and provide insights and tools that students can use to improve their own decisions. Students will also explore how work in this area connects to important social issues like the psychology of substance use and voting.

Structure

This course will consist primarily of three modules as outlined in the description. There will be three exams – one at the end of each module. The final exam will be cumulative, featuring content not just from the third module but the first and second as well.
Readings should be completed before the corresponding class in order to facilitate discussion during the class period.

**Grading**

Grades will be determined based on completion of in-class activities (mostly discussion questions and surveys) and discussion, assignments, and exams. This is the breakdown of the contributions:

- **In-class quizzes & discussion:** 20%
  - Usually 1-2 quizzes / week. Lowest 2 can be dropped.
- **Assignments:** 25%
  - Assignment #1 [Methods of deciding]: 5%
  - Assignment #2 [Personality & preference]: 10%
  - Assignment #3 [Voting methods]: 10%
- **Exams:** 55%
  - Exam #1 [9/19]: 15%
  - Exam #2 [10/24]: 15%
  - Final exam [12/13, 12:30 PM]: 25%

**Absences**

The lowest 2 in-class activities (quizzes) will be automatically dropped – allowing students some flexibility for unplanned absences. Additional in-class activities can be made up in special circumstances by completion of a short (~2 page) paper based on the material missed. **To qualify for a make-up paper, you must email the instructor ahead of the schedule class time and/or provide proof of the reason for absence.** For these make-up papers, you must (1) review the lecture slides/notes and assigned paper from the missed class, (2) write a summary of the material covered during the missed class session (minimum of 300 words), (3) complete any in-class activities that were given during the missed session, providing written responses to the assignment questions, and (4) email these to the course instructor as soon as possible but no more than 14 days after the missed class session.

In general, acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to participate in class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences), military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays, and participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) will be excused. Other reasons also may be approved by the instructor.

**Respect and non-discrimination**

Respect for fellow students and instructors is expected of all class attendees. Intentionally disruptive or disrespectful conduct affecting other students may result in removal from the class session or from the course altogether.

**Sexual Harassment.** Sexual Harassment is not tolerated in this class, in the Department of Psychology, or at the University of Florida. Sexual harassment includes: the inappropriate
introduction of sexual activities or comments in a situation where sex would otherwise be irrelevant. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and a violation of state and federal laws as well as of the policies and regulations of the university. All UF employees and students must adhere to UF’s sexual harassment policy which can be found here: https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/. Please review this policy and contact a university official if you have any questions about the policy. As mandatory reporters, university employees (e.g., administrators, managers, supervisors, faculty, teaching assistants, staff) are required to report knowledge of sexual harassment to UF’s Title IX coordinator. You can also complete a Sexual Harassment Complaint Form (Title IX) here: https://titleix.ufl.edu/title-ix-complaint-form/.

Accommodation for Disabilities. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, https://disability.ufl.edu/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Other notes

There will be some math involved in this course, including probability theory and functions. The exams may be difficult and require students to invest a significant amount of time outside of class in order to understand the material and perform well in the class. The instructor will be available during office hours and by appointment to answer questions and assist in understanding the material, but cannot guarantee that this will result in a satisfactory grade.

Studying together is permitted, but all assignments turned in must be original and written in your own words. The University and instructors reserve the right to penalize any student who is guilty of academic misconduct, including but not limited to plagiarism, collusion, cheating, or discrimination or harassment in study groups. Outside resources (cell phones, laptops, notes, etc) are not permitted during exams except as approved beforehand (e.g., assistance for disabilities).

Honor Pledge

“UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Course feedback

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/.
Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/](https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at [https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/](https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/).

### Course schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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| 1    | (8/20) Course overview  
(8/22) Introduction to decisions | Syllabus  
Hastie & Dawes (2010), Ch. 2 |
| 2    | (8/27) Goals, utilities, and preferences  
(8/29) Risk, probability, and loss | Hastie & Dawes (2010), Ch. 1  
Tversky & Kahneman (1981) |
| 3    | (9/3) Biases  
(9/5) Simplifying heuristics  
(9/10) Fast & frugal heuristics  
(9/12) Bounded rationality | Janiszewski & Uy (2008)  
Tversky & Kahneman (1974)  
Gigerenzer & Todd (1999)  
Schurz & Hertwig (2019) |
| 4    | (9/17) Review  
(9/19) EXAM 1 | Homework #1 [Deciding] DUE |
| 5    | (9/24) From heuristics to cognition  
(9/26) Decisions from experience  
(10/1) Learning in decision-making  
(10/3) Memory and decision making  
(10/8) Delays and impulsivity  
(10/10) Disordered decision making  
(10/15) Emotion  
(10/17) Neuropsychiatry | Newell (2005)  
Hau, Pleskac, Hertwig (2010)  
Gonzalez, Lerch, Lebiere (2003)  
Bickel & Marsch (2001)  
Bechara et al (1994)  
Lerner et al (2015)  
Rahman et al (2001) |
| 6    | (10/22) Review  
(10/24) EXAM 2 | Homework #2 [Preference] DUE |
| 7    | (10/29) Strategic decision-making  
(10/31) Game theory & social dilemmas  
(11/5) Judgments in context  
(11/7) Multi-alternative choice  
(11/12) Wisdom of the crowd  
(11/14) Voting | Axelrod (1980)  
Tversky & Simonson (1993)  
Tversky (1972)  
Hertwig (2012)  
Regenwetter & Grofman (1998)  
Bartels & Johnson (2015)  
| 8    | (11/19) Consumer choice  
(11/21) Neuroeconomics | None – come with questions |
| 9    | (11/26) Behavioral research & careers  
(11/28) NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING  
(12/3) Catch-up  
(12/5) Reading day - Review | None – come with questions |

**Final Exam: (12/13) 12:30 2:30 pm**

**THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT THE DISCRETION OF THE INSTRUCTOR. PLEASE CHECK THE COURSE WEBSITE FOR UPDATED INFORMATION AND CURRENT VERSION.**