

# Communication 3331: Communication & Decision-Making Spring 2016

## Instructor

Sarah Thomas

## Email

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## Office Location & Hours

Derby Hall 3047

Tuesdays and Wednesdays 9:00-11:00 AM

By Appt.

## General Information

**Class time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:20-3:40

**Location:** Journalism Building Room 216

## Course Description

How do we make decisions? What factors influence the process of judging whether, when, and how we should act? This course will provide an overview of the psychological processes that determine decision-making, with a focus on communication contexts. We will review literature and research in communication and social psychology to understand how cognitive, affective, and motivational factors influence how we perceive meaning and (sometimes) influence how we construct our preferences. Course grades will be determined based on a combination of student participation in class activities, reading quizzes, short writing assignments, and exams meant to increase student awareness of, and ability to communicate about, judgment and decision-making.

## Course Goals

Students should end the course with:

1. An increased understanding of the cognitive and affective factors that influence decision-making.
2. An appreciation for the role of these factors in behavior and decision-making in students' own personal and professional lives.
3. The ability to critically analyze and evaluate decisions before, during, and after making them.

## Course Materials

### Required Text

- Plous, S. (1993). *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, Inc.
- Additional readings to be provided as digital copies on Carmen.

## Course Expectations

### Reader Survey – 2%

In the beginning of the book, there is a brief questionnaire. This survey covers lots of examples from classic psychology experiments in decision making. Complete this survey by the end of the first week of class. You will be expected to bring this survey with you each day to class to discuss your answers and compare them with others.

### In-Class Activities – 10%

Occasionally, you will be asked to complete assignments or discuss class content in small groups (or individually) while in class. Often, they will not be announced/scheduled in advance and instead are “pop-up” opportunities for you to earn points. Guidance for these brief assignments will be provided through the Powerpoint slides. These activities serve several goals:

- encourage content elaboration
- encourage exchange and connections among students, interpersonal and online
- practice teamwork
- inform the instructor how the content is processed/approached/understood

It is important to note that these activities cannot be made up outside of class. Illness, doctors' appointments, etc., are not grounds for making up an In-class activity. If you are having issues with making it to class regularly, it is best to talk to me individually. Do not count on "making up" these activities outside of class time. The lowest two scores will be dropped.

### **Reading Quizzes – 20%**

All assigned readings are expected to be completed prior to class time. The assigned readings will aid your understanding of the concepts and allow you to arrive to class with at least the base knowledge needed to participate in the day's discussion and activities. Supplemental readings will be provided on Carmen at least one week prior to the class period for which they are assigned. Reading quizzes will open on Monday of each week and be due by 2:20 PM on Fridays. The content covered on a reading quiz can consist of any content covered *after* the last quiz up to content due on the quizzes' due date. This means quizzes will *typically* cover two weeks' worth of material.

### **Writing Assignments\* – 30%**

Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments are due by **2:20 PM** on their listed due date. **Please submit BOTH a digital copy on dropbox and a hard copy in class.** The breakdown of each written assignment is as follows:

#### **Decision Journal – 5%**

In the first week of class you will document three choices that you personally make in the course of your week. You will write about a decision to ACT (a decision about behavior) a decision to REACT (a decision made about how to respond to react to some information or stimulus), and a decision to INTERACT (a decision about how to engage with others). For each of these decisions, briefly describe what factors or context(s) led you to make the choice you did. This assignment will be used to launch our discussion of judgment and decision-making by encouraging you to reflect critically on your own judgment and decision-making processes.

#### **Reflection Papers – 10%**

Four writing prompts will be posted on Carmen throughout the semester. You will choose **two** prompts and, you will write concise (approximately 400 to 500 words) reflection papers on the material covered in class and in the readings. These reflection papers will provide you with an opportunity to thoughtfully discuss how the concepts we discuss in class might be applicable to your own personal and professional life, and how you might incorporate your new knowledge to better your own decision-making. Reflection papers will be graded for content, clarity, grammar, and syntax. Specific prompts will be provided for each reflection paper. These prompts will be announced in class and posted on Carmen.

#### **Choice Analysis – 15%**

Your final assignment for the term will be to pick a social issue or crisis in the news to which your knowledge of judgment and decision-making can be applied. You will briefly describe a relevant choice that someone might make about how to act, interact, or react in relation to that issue. Then, you will fully describe and evaluate that choice using your knowledge of judgment and decision-making gained

over the course of the term. What cognitive, affective, contextual, and social factors might be influencing such a choice, and how? Several weeks prior to the due date, you will email me your topic of interest (or, if you are unsure of your final choice of topic, a list of several options). This will allow me to provide you with some feedback and direction, as necessary. Your Choice Analysis paper should not exceed 6 pages including citations.

**\*A Note on Formatting:** Should you choose to do additional research for any of these papers, all references and citations should be formatted according to the style manual of the American Psychological Association (6<sup>th</sup> edition). Resources to assist you in the research and formatting process are available through the OSU Library system ([library.osu.edu/find/resources/](http://library.osu.edu/find/resources/)).

### **Exams – 38%**

We will have two exams this semester, consisting of multiple choice and short answer questions. The exams will cover the material discussed in class and the readings. Examinations are not cumulative. Exams are to be taken on the designated exam dates. It is your responsibility to note the day/time of exams/assignments NOW and make sure you will be able to attend all the exams and complete the assignments. If you have any schedule conflicts, you should either rearrange your schedule so that you can complete all of the work or drop the class. No make-ups are allowed except in the case of an emergency. Having more than one exam on a particular date does not qualify as an emergency.

\*\*\*In the rare event that an emergency arises, it is the student's responsibility to 1) inform the instructor prior to the exam time, and 2) provide the instructor with written documentation of the emergency (e.g., medical note from certified physician) or an explanatory statement for absence form (available at <http://www.shc.osu.edu/posts/documents/absence-excuse-form.pdf>).

**Extra Credit** – You will have opportunities during the semester to earn extra credit by participating in research studies. You may not earn more than 3% extra credit on your overall grade.

### **Grade Scheme**

Grades for all components of the course will be converted to percentages and averaged using the weights given above. Your final grade will be computed using the OSU standard grading scheme summarized below.

E	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A
<60%	≥60%	≥67%	≥70%	≥73%	≥77%	≥80%	≥83%	≥87%	≥90%	≥93%

### **Additional Information and Resources**

#### **Communications:**

I will post class updates, extra credit opportunities, and/or additional materials as announcements on Carmen and/or to your OSU email. Please check Carmen and read your email regularly (at least 2-3 times per week) because you are responsible for this information, just as you are responsible for information in class.

## Late Assignment:

Assignments must be submitted as indicated below (see Written Assignments) *no later than 2:20 p.m.* on the assigned due date. Assignments may be accepted late via email but will receive a grade penalty based on the following: Note that any time an assignment is submitted as “late” it counts as one day late. This means if an assignment is submitted ten minutes late or 23 hours and 59 minutes late, it still counts as one day.

Assignment submission date	Maximum grade (% of total possible points)
1 day late	80%
2 days late	70%
3 or more days late	No credit

## Classroom Decorum

This course will often expose students to other experiences and points of view. At all times tolerance of different backgrounds, ideas and viewpoints is encouraged and expected. Showing and receiving respect is a life skill to be practiced throughout the semester.

## Challenging a Grade

I am happy to discuss a grade with you, but never over email or during class time. Personal grade discussions are not a productive use of class time. If you wish to challenge a grade you must follow these steps: 1. Read the accompanying comments and think about their validity. 2. Email within one week of receiving the grade to make an appointment. 3. Bring along the assignment in question and a written explanation of why the grade should be altered. The resulting review of the grade may result in the grade being raised or lowered.

Challenging an in class assignment grade should consist of emailing me and explaining why you think your grade is wrong. The only answer I will accept for challenging an in class assignment grade is that you were in class during the ICA, and I missed your name on the paper. This **must be done within one week of when the ICA grade is posted on Carmen.**

## Academic Misconduct

The Ohio State University’s *Code of Student Conduct* (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: “Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process.” Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University’s *Code of Student Conduct* is never considered an “excuse” for academic misconduct, so I recommend that you review the *Code of Student Conduct* and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct. If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that you have violated the University’s *Code of Student Conduct* (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me.

Other sources of information on academic misconduct (integrity) to which you can refer include:

- The Committee on Academic Misconduct web pages (<http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>)
- Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity (<http://oaa.osu.edu/coamtensuggestions.html>)

## Disability Services

**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 room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.**

## Mental Health

A recent American College Health Survey found stress, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, interpersonal concerns, death of a significant other and alcohol use among the top ten health impediments to academic performance. Students experiencing personal problems or situational crises during the quarter are encouraged to contact the OSU Counseling and Consultation Services (614-292-5766; <http://www.ccs.ohio-state.edu>) for assistance, support and advocacy. This service is free and confidential.

## Winter Weather

As a commuter, I understand that sometimes the weather does not always make it possible to make it to campus in a safe and timely manner. However, I am expected to hold class unless the university deems it unsafe to hold classes. The decision on whether or not to come to class on these days is up to you. However, I do not anticipate giving make up opportunities for any in class activities given during snowfall.

## Final Note

This syllabus, like most, is tentative. Things come up: we may get behind, we may get snowed out or we may really like a topic and want to keep going. Any changes to the syllabus or schedule will be posted on Carmen and emailed to the class.

## Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Due	Assignment Due
1 <i>Introduction</i>	1/12	Introduction to Decision-Making		
	1/14	Tools of Choice Architecture	Newell, Lagnado & Shanks ch. 1	Reader Survey
2 <i>Contexts</i>	1/19	How problems shape decisions	Plous ch. 5	Decision Journal
	1/21	Framing	Plous ch. 6	Reading Quiz 1
3 <i>Processing</i>	1/26	Dissonance	Plous ch. 2	
	1/28	Bias	Plous ch. 3	Reflection Paper Option #1
4 <i>Heuristics</i>	2/2	Representativeness	Plous ch. 10	
	2/4	Availability	Plous ch. 11	
5 <i>JDM Models</i>	2/9	Expected Utility Theory	Plous ch. 7	
	2/11	Descriptive models of decision making	Plous ch. 8 & 9	Reading Quiz 2
6	2/16	Risk Assessment	Plous ch. 12;	Reflection Paper

<i>Risk</i>			Plous ch. 13	Option 2
	2/18	Exam #1		<b>Exam #1</b>
7 <i>Cognition</i>	2/23	Cognition: Attitudes, beliefs, and values	Plous ch. 14	
	2/25	Attribution Theory	Plous ch. 15 &16	Reading Quiz 3
8 <i>Affect</i>	3/1	The role of emotion	Schwarz, 2000	
	3/3	Risk as feelings	Slovic et al (2004)	
9 <i>Perception</i>	3/8	Influence of affect on risk perception		
	3/10	The influence of context	Plous ch. 4	Reflection Paper Option 3
10 <i>Spring Break</i>	3/15			
	3/17			
11 <i>Comprehension</i>	3/22	Political Decision Making	<b>TBA</b>	
	3/24	Crisis & issue communication	Li, 2000	Reading Quiz 4
12 <i>Comprehension (con't)</i>	3/29	Numeracy	Peters et al., 2006; Reyna & Brainerd, 2007	
	3/31	Exam #2		<b>Exam #2</b>
13 <i>Health/Social Influence</i>	4/5	Making Healthy Decisions	Sarge & Knobloch- Westerwick, 2013	
	4/7	Social influences	Plous ch. 17	
14 <i>Social Influence</i>	4/12	Social norms	Schultz et al., 2007	
	4/14	Group Judgements and Decisions	Plous ch. 18	Final paper topic (email by 11:59 PM on 4/14)
15	4/19	Overconfidence	Plous ch. 19	Reflection Paper Option 4
	4/21	Self-fulfilling prophecies / Behavioral Traps	Plous ch. 20 & 21	Reading Quiz 5
	<b>4/26</b>			<b>FINAL PAPER DUE @ 2:20 pm</b>