

# **Communication 3331: Communication & Decision-Making**

## **Spring 2017**

**Instructor**  
Stefanie A. Best

**Email**  
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**Office Location & Hours**  
Journalism Building 326  
Mondays & Fridays 9:30 – 11:30  
or by appointment

### **General Information**

**Class time:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:35 AM – 10:55 AM

**Location:** Denney Hall 238

### **Course Description**

How are decisions made? 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, social psychology, and cognitive science to understand how cognitive, affective, and motivational factors influence how we perceive meaning and influence how we construct our preferences. Course grades will depend primarily on student participation in discussion and short writing assignments 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 affective and cognitive 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.

### **Readings**

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.

## Assignments

Additional information about each assignment will be posted to Carmen well in advance of the assignment's due date. Please refer to Carmen for further details on specific assignments.

### Reading Quizzes

Starting in week 2, weekly mini-quizzes will be given in class. These quizzes will test your comprehension of the reading materials. Each quiz will be worth 4 points. At the end of the semester, the 3 lowest quiz grades will be dropped. Quizzes cannot be made up at a later time for any reason.

### Discussion Board Posts

Each week, you will participate in a discussion thread on the week's readings by posting high quality comments or questions about the reading(s) on the Carmen discussion board. A comment or question will be considered "high quality" if it demonstrates that you have read the material and are attempting to engage with and comprehend the material. A discussion thread will be started for each *class period*; you are expected to participate in the thread at least once *per week*. Posts **must** be posted by 11:59 PM the night before the class. Assigned readings for each class period can be found in the course schedule listed below.

### In-class Discussion

While most of our class time will be dedicated to lectures, we will regularly engage in small-group and class discussions of the material covered in lectures and readings. At the end of each of these discussions I will ask you to respond in writing to that day's discussion, either with your opinions or with questions you have about the class material or the discussion. These will serve as a tool for me to gauge your comprehension of, and engagement with, the discussion even if you choose not to speak at length that day. These written responses will also allow me to monitor the entire class's progress; if I notice that a number of people are particularly challenged by a concept, I will be able to revisit it in the following lecture to provide clarification.

A total of **5 points** will be awarded for each week's discussion participation.

### Writing Assignments\* – 50%

Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments are due by the **beginning** of class on their listed due date.

**Decision Journal** – 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 or 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** – At four points throughout the term, you will write concise (700-750 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 cover 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.

**Peer Review** – Twice throughout the term, you will have the opportunity to review a reflection paper written by another student and offer objective, constructive feedback. You will write a brief (250-300 words), honest, and specific evaluation of another student's writing, which will be submitted to me and to the other student. These evaluations will help you to improve your writing by subjecting your writing to objective criticism. Providing this insight to others will also help you to evaluate and improve your own work, as well. Peer reviews will be graded for content, clarity, grammar, and syntax. Specific assignments of the paper you will review will be provided to you privately via email by the instructor.

**Choice Analysis** – Your final assignment for the term will be to pick a topic to which your knowledge of judgment and decision-making can be applied. You will do external research to find a real-world example of judgment and decision-making. 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 2000 words.

**\*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/)).

## 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%

## Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Due	Assignment Due
<b>1</b> <i>Introduction</i>	1-10	Introduction to Decision-Making		
	1-12	Choice architecture: constructed preferences	Newall, Lagnado & Shanks ch. 1	Student Introduction
<b>2</b> <i>Contexts</i>	1-17	How problems shape decisions	Plous ch. 5, 6	
	1-19	Bias	Plous ch. 3	Decision Journal
<b>3</b> <i>Heuristics</i>	1-24	Availability	Plous ch. 11	
	1-26	Dissonance, Representativeness	Plous ch. 2, 10	
<b>4</b> <i>Expectations</i>	1-31	Self-fulfilling prophecies	Plous ch. 20	Reflection Paper #1
	2-2	Expected Utility Theory	Plous ch. 7	
<b>5</b> <i>JDM Models</i>	2-7	Descriptive models of decision making	Plous ch. 8 & 9	
	2-9	Risk Assessment	Plous ch. 12	
<b>6</b> <i>Risk &amp; Probability</i>	2-14	Risk Assessment, con't		
	2-16	Cognition: Attitudes, beliefs and values	Plous ch. 13	Peer Review #1
<b>7</b> <i>Cognition</i>	2-21	Cognition, continued	Plous ch. 14 & 16	
	2-23	Correlation, causation, and control	Plous, ch. 15	
<b>8</b> <i>Perception</i>	2-28	Motivation	Ekman, ch. 2	Reflection Paper #2
	3-2	The influence of context	Plous ch. 4	
<b>9</b> <i>Affect</i>	3-7	Emotional influences	Newall, Lagnado & Shanks, ch. 13	
	3-9	Risk as feelings	Slovic et al (2004)	
<b>10</b>	3-14	<b>SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES</b>		
	3-16			
<b>11</b> <i>Comprehension</i>	3-21	Influence of affect on risk perception	Johnson & Tversky (1983)	Reflection Paper #3
	3-23	Numeracy	Peters et al (2006)	
<b>12</b> <i>Comprehension (con't)</i>	3-28	Numeracy (con't)		
	3-30	Numeracy in context	Zikmund-Fischer et al (2013)	
<b>13</b> <i>Social Influence</i>	4-4	Health literacy		Peer Review #2
	4-6	Social influences	Plous ch. 17	
<b>14</b> <i>Making Decisions</i>	4-11	Group decision-making	Plous ch. 18	Final paper topic (email by 11:59 PM on 4/10)
	4-13	Social norms	Kallgren et al (2000)	Reflection Paper #4
<b>15</b>	4-18	Behavioral traps	Plous ch. 21	
	4-20	Overconfidence	Plous ch. 19	
<b>Final Exam Period: Monday, May 1 8:00 AM – 9:45 AM – Meet to discuss final papers</b> <b>FINAL PAPER DUE 6:00 PM on MONDAY, MAY 1</b>				

## **Additional Information and Resources**

### **Email Policy**

You should only use email as a tool to set up a one-on-one meeting with me if my office hours conflict with your schedule. Use the subject line “Meeting request.” Your message should include at least two times/dates when you would like to meet and a brief (1-2 sentence) description of the reason for the meeting. **Emails sent for any other reason will not be considered or acknowledged.** I strongly encourage you to ask questions about the syllabus and assignments during class time. For more in-depth discussions (such as guidance on assignments) please plan to meet in person. This policy is not designed to limit or inhibit communication; rather it is designed to promote student independence and meaningful interaction. Our conversations should take place in person rather than via email, thus allowing us to get to know each other better and fostering a more collegial learning atmosphere. Accommodations to this email policy will **only** be made for **documented** disabilities or emergencies which would limit your ability to physically travel to my office.

### **Late Assignment Policy**

Late assignments will be accepted up to 48 hours after the listed due date and time. A **maximum** of 50% credit will be available for late assignments.

### **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.

### **Technology Policy**

The use of cellular phones during class time is not permitted. Laptop computers or tablets may be used but for note-taking or translation purposes **ONLY**. If you feel you cannot refrain from email, social networking, etc. it may be best to put the device away. I reserve the right to ask you to stop on the first offense, to put it away on the 2<sup>nd</sup> offense and to ask you to leave class for the day on the 3<sup>rd</sup> offense.

### **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.

### **Extra Credit**

At any point in the semester while classes are in session, you may earn 1 extra credit point by reading a selection from the “Readings of Interest” section on the Content page of the Carmen site for this class, and writing a paper (700-750 words) summarizing the reading, and

expressing your opinion on its strengths, weaknesses, and overall value to understanding decision-making. These readings are not required for the course but will provide you with an opportunity to gain a more nuanced understanding of the course content. Additional extra credit opportunities may be provided at my discretion; however, a **maximum** of 3 extra credit points can be earned.

### **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/coamensuggestions.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.

### **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.