

**Thinking and Decision Making**  
Psych UN2235 (3 points)  
**Tentative** Syllabus for Spring 2017

Course Information

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:40-3:55pm

Location: 501 Schermerhorn

Instructor Information

**Katherine Fox-Glassman**

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Office Hours: TBD

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TA Information

**TBD**

**Description of the Spring 2017 Course**

This course serves as an introduction to the psychology of judgment and decision making. It will cover normative, prescriptive, and descriptive theories of judgment and choice; models of decision processes and the effects of context, experience, memory, and information on decision making; biases and heuristics that influence decision making; and real-world applications of these topics.

**Prerequisites**

Science of Psychology (1001) or Mind, Brain, & Behavior (1010), or equivalent intro psych course. Students who have not taken one of these courses may register with instructor permission.

**Motivating Questions**

1. How do we make decisions: what are the processes through which we weigh options and make choices, and how might these differ from the “ideal” or “typical” processes suggested by decision theories? When are the “ideal” decision processes not so ideal after all?
2. Can we say that people have *true preferences*, or do most choices in fact show *revealed preferences* that depend on the context of the decision, our ability to remember past experiences when deciding, and even the way the various options are presented to us?
3. How might we make “better” decisions—and, for that matter, how do we even define a “good decision?” Is it one in which we used a sound *decision process*, or one that led to a good *outcome*, or both—or maybe neither?
4. How can an understanding of decision science be applied to understand or influence real-world decisions in domains ranging from marketing and healthcare to public policy and disaster preparedness?

**Course Overview**

All of us make hundreds of decisions every day. Many are simple and almost automatic: how many times to snooze our alarm, what to eat for breakfast, whether to cross the street or not on a blinking “don’t-walk” sign. Other decisions, like whether to carry an umbrella on a cloudy day or to put off an assignment in favor of going out for a drink with friends, require a bit more conscious considering of information. Still others require complicated calculations or deliberation: where to travel for spring break; which college or grad school to attend; whether to begin or end a romantic relationship.

Each of these decisions invokes a set of related cognitive processes, and researchers from several fields (psychology, economics, and neuroscience, among others) study these processes. This course will examine the ways we judge situations, probabilities, and decision options, and how we go

about making choices. We will consider many different sources of evidence, from behavioral observation to cognitive models to the firings of neurons in the brain.

We will discuss different decision modes and decision strategies. We'll consider normative decision models (ones that identify the "*best*" decision to make), prescriptive decision models (those that indicate what people *ought* to do), and descriptive decision models (those that illustrate the ways that people *actually do* make decisions). We'll discuss the differences between studying questions like: "why *don't* people follow the normative or prescriptive model?" vs. "why *do* people follow the descriptive models that they do?" The first approach tends to identify what we call cognitive biases, fallacies, or paradoxes, while the second question more often leads to the development of decision heuristics—we'll talk in depth about many of these heuristics, biases, fallacies, and paradoxes.

We will connect all of these topics by considering their real-world applications. Many different fields require their practitioners to have an in-depth understanding of decision and judgment theory—notably marketing and advertising, which deploy psychology and behavioral economics findings to maximize earnings. Other fields are beginning to realize the benefits of incorporating decision theory into their efforts—the health and disaster preparedness professions, for example, are right now actively working to better understand the ways that people judge and use health or hazard information. These efforts often draw on the concept of "decision architecture," or the way that the format of the options can be altered to "nudge" and (perhaps) improve people's decision processes.

## Course Requirements

### Grading

I don't grade on a curve in this class, so your grade will be determined only by your own work, not by how well you do relative to the other students. There is no pre-determined proportion of students who will receive As, Bs, Cs, etc.—if every student does A-level work, then everyone will receive an A in the course. Your grade will be calculated out of a total of 1000 points, as follows:

|                        |             |                                            |
|------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Class intro survey:    | 25 points   | (due before class on Thursday, January 19) |
| Clicker participation: | 95 points   | (during every class)                       |
| Written assignments:   | 180 points  | (problem sets & decision diary)            |
| Midterms:              | 300 points  | (held in class Feb. 16 & March 29)         |
| Final:                 | 400 points  | (tentatively: Thursday, May 11)            |
| Total:                 | 1000 points |                                            |

The cutoffs for each letter grade are as follows:

|                         |
|-------------------------|
| 990* – 1000 points = A+ |
| 930 – 989.9 points = A  |
| 900 – 929.9 points = A- |
| 870 – 899.9 points = B+ |
| 830 – 869.9 points = B  |
| 800 – 829.9 points = B- |
| 770 – 799.9 points = C+ |
| 730 – 769.9 points = C  |
| 700 – 729.9 points = C- |
| 600 – 699.9 points = D  |
| 0 – 599.9 points = F    |

\*If no students score above 990 points, then the cutoff for the grade of A+ will be lowered. Historically, several students each year have earned more than 990 points overall; the highest score ever was 999.

Class intro survey. You will fill out a decision survey before class starts, and we'll use your (anonymous) responses on this survey to illustrate many of the effects we discuss throughout the course. To receive points for the intro survey, you must complete it before the beginning of the second class meeting (Thursday, January 19, at 2:40pm).

Clicker participation. You will earn your participation grade (95 points out of 1000 total) by responding with your i>clicker to questions during class. These questions will serve several purposes: (1) to give me real-time feedback on what concepts you're understanding and which topics we might want to spend a little more time on; (2) to help you engage with the material and encourage you to be active learners; (3) to help you gauge your own understanding as we go; and (4) to augment the results of the class intro survey with polls and questions that are better asked "live" than in an online survey.

To receive the maximum 95 points for clicker participation, you must respond to at least 90% of the questions posed during at least 19 of the 24 lectures for which we're counting clicker participation (we will use clickers in the first week of class, but we won't start recording participation until the second week). For every lecture for which you responded to at least 90% of clicker questions, you will receive 5 points; for lectures during which you responded to more than half of the clicker questions (but fewer than nine out of 10), you will receive 1 point. We will drop your five lowest participation scores out of the 24 when calculating your participation grade.

You may purchase an i>clicker at the Columbia Bookstore (the two different models that will work for our class are both listed there for our course), or online; or you may use the same clicker you used for past classes. The two models to look for are the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition i>clicker (ISBN 9780716779391) and the i<clicker+ (ISBN 9781464120152).

On the first day of class, you will get a handout with instructions on how to register your i>clicker to make sure that your votes are recorded.

Please note: while you will earn participation points for each class by responding to clicker questions, it is possible to lose those participation points for a particular class period if you are disrupting class or distracting those around you. The vast majority of students come to class prepared to participate and learn, so it is very rare for students to lose participation points in this way, but unfortunately it occasionally does happen.

#### Written assignments.

**Problem Sets.** At the end of each week, you will complete a short problem set to apply and test your knowledge of the week's topics before we move on to new concepts. The format of the problem sets will vary, but the purpose will always be to help you to examine and connect key course concepts. As you work on your problem sets, you are encouraged to work with your classmates and ask your TAs questions. *Problem sets will be graded for effort, not accuracy.* This means that if you tried to answer every question and turned in the problem set on time, you will receive full points. This also means that **it's up to you to check your answers against the answer keys**, which will be posted on CourseWorks shortly after each problem set is due.

There will be 11 problem sets, worth up to 10 points each. When calculating your final grade, we will use only your 10 highest scores out of the 11. Problem sets will be assigned on a Thursday, and cover material from that week's lectures. Each problem set is due the Tuesday after it is assigned. Problem sets will be posted, and should be turned in, via CourseWorks.

Why should you spend time trying to get the right answers on your problem sets? For one, the time you spend on problem sets will improve your understanding of the course material and help you prepare for the exams. Plus, having good answers on your problem sets could end up bumping up your grade at the end of the semester! (see Class Policies, below, for more info.)

**Decision Diary.** You won't have a problem set to complete over Spring Break; instead, you'll be writing an analysis of a recent decision you've made. This assignment is designed to help you learn about decision goals and modes while at the same time getting some insight into your own decision

process. Students generally enjoy writing this assignment, and your TAs and I enjoy reading your analyses. Unlike the problem sets, the Decision Diary *is* graded, based on your ability to clearly and accurately apply course concepts to your analysis of your decision. The Decision Diary is worth 80 points, and is due on the Tuesday after Spring Break.

**Midterms.** We will have two in-class midterms, which will each include a mix of short-answer and multiple-choice questions. We will post some sample questions and a review sheet on CourseWorks before each exam. We will use only the higher of the two midterm grades when calculating your final grade; it will be worth 300 points. The dates for the two midterms are:

**Midterm 1: Thursday, February 16**

**Midterm 2: Thursday, March 29**

Because your lower midterm score will be dropped, there will be **no make-up midterms offered**. If you need to miss a midterm for any reason (excused or unexcused), you will receive a zero for that exam, and that will be the score that is dropped. **If you know that you will have a conflict with both midterm dates, you should not take this class.** If you are a student athlete and anticipate that you might be traveling during one or both of these dates, please come talk to me *before the end of the second week of class* to make plans for you to take your midterms on the road.

Because your lower midterm score is dropped, and because some exam questions will be either repeated verbatim from the problem sets or will be closely related to material asked on problem sets (and answered in the answer keys!), the midterms for this course are geared to be slightly more challenging than those in some similar Psychology courses. If you don't do as well on the first exam as you would have liked, don't despair—that score will go away entirely if you do better on the second midterm. Plus, research in the field of cognitive psychology has shown that we learn most effectively by making mistakes and then correcting ourselves. The problem sets are your first opportunity to make instructive mistakes, but the midterms should be part of your learning process as well. So making sure that you understand why you missed the points you did on the midterms (and why you earned the points you did!) should be your first step toward doing even better on the final exam.

**Final Exam.** The final will cover the material from the whole course, with a greater emphasis on topics covered after the second midterm. Like the midterms, it will consist of short-answer and multiple-choice questions. The final is worth 400 points. For students whose grades improve from the midterms to the final, I will change the relative weighting of the two exams such that the midterm is worth 280 points and the final is worth 420 points.

**TENTATIVE Final Exam Date: Thursday, May 11**

**If you have a conflict with this final exam date, you should not take this class.** Please take this date into consideration when making travel plans for the end of the semester, since Columbia University only allows final exams to be taken outside of the scheduled slot in extreme circumstances such as a medical or family emergency.

### **Class Policies**

**Lecture attendance.** Attending lectures and actively participating is a fundamental element of this course. Lectures will cover topics not included in your readings, and we will try to stop frequently for class discussions, group exercises, and other activities. If you miss a class, make sure you go over the lecture slides, and come to our office hours to ask questions about any topics you think you may need help catching up on.

**You cannot make up clicker participation credit for classes you missed, even if those absences are excused.** I also cannot give individual students credit for participation for days when they forget their i>clicker, or when their i>clicker has run out of batteries or is malfunctioning. But every

student gets five free passes, since only 19 participation days are counted out of the 24 lectures for which we'll be tracking clicker use. Use them wisely!

Lecture notes. We will post slides after each class, so you do not need to write down everything on each slide. The slides are numbered, to help you keep track of which slide your class notes refer to.

Late assignments. Problem sets and the decision diary will lose one point for every half-day past their due date. That means that problem sets turned in more than a week after the due date receive no credit, though I would encourage you to still submit them, since they can still be used at the end of the semester to determine whether you qualify for a grade bump (see below).

Extra Credit. There are no extra credit opportunities in this class, but students who end up on the borderline between grades may be bumped up to the next higher grade based on the quality of their problem set work. At the end of the semester when I calculate grades, I will look back at the problem sets of every student who is very close to the next higher grade range. Students whose problem sets show a higher average score than their course grade will be bumped up to the next higher grade.

For example: a student with 895 points would fall into the B+ range, but is very close to the A- cutoff of 900 points. If his problem sets, when graded, average more than 89.5%, his grade will be bumped up to an A-. If his problem sets average 89.5% or lower, his grade of B+ will stand.

Class Conduct. Please your cell phone ringer off during class, and keep it safely stowed in your pocket or bag. Laptops are fine for taking notes, but please respect your classmates and instructor by limiting yourself to class-related activities. Though you may have a preternatural ability to multi-task, using a laptop for purposes other than taking notes is disruptive to those around you. If you anticipate using your laptop for non-course-related activities, please sit in the back row to avoid distracting your classmates.

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic honesty includes presenting only your own work in exams and assignments, and correctly attributing others' ideas where appropriate. Taking credit for work that is not your own is a serious violation within the academic community, and anyone found to be cheating or plagiarizing in this class will be reported to the university. Using another student's clicker on their behalf, or asking another student to use your clicker for you, is also considered a breach of academic honesty. Detailed definitions and examples of academic dishonesty (and a rundown of the consequences) are available in Columbia's Guide to Academic Integrity (<http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity>). It might not be the most riveting bit of text, but you're expected to follow it, so you should know what it says.

I assume you're all here because you're interested in the course topics and enthusiastic to learn as much as you can. But I know that in real life, stuff happens. I always prefer to deal with any issues before they get so bad that they become overwhelming, or so bad that a student feels that depending on someone else's work is his or her best (or only) option. So please do come to me if you're feeling stressed out about the class workload or if there's a concept you're just not getting based on how the readings and lectures explained it. If you have an issue that you'd rather not talk about with me, you could speak with your academic advisor or dean; with a Psychology Program Advisor (DUS; see here: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/psychology/dept/ugrad/curriculum.html#advisors>); or with the counselors at Columbia's CPS (<http://health.columbia.edu/services/cps>).

### **Students With Disabilities**

Students with special needs who may require classroom and/or test accommodations should make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, stop by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of Lerner Hall to register for support services. Students who are eligible for extra exam time will need to fill out paperwork with ODS—please also let me know via email so we can make sure we'll be ready to accommodate you. ODS often requires a few weeks to process an application, so please contact them as soon as you can. The procedures for registering with ODS can be found at <http://health.columbia.edu/services/ods> or by calling (212) 854-2388 (Voice/TTY).

## Readings

All of the chapters in our textbook are short (~10-15 pages), and often only parts of a chapter will be assigned. The readings listed here are a tentative guide—please **keep an eye on our CourseWorks syllabus section for the most up to date reading lists**, including a detailed breakdown of which readings will be assigned for each class meeting.

### Reading notes:

For many of the chapters that I've assigned, I will post notes on CourseWorks to help guide your reading. The notes are designed to be most useful if you've looked at them before starting the readings.

### Textbook:

There is one required textbook for this class. It will be available at the Columbia Bookstore, but if you're getting it early, you may find it available (and cheaper) on Amazon.

- ❖ Hardman, D. (2009). *Judgment and Decision Making*. BPS & Blackwell Publishing. 1<sup>st</sup> ed.  
ISBN: 1405123982 (ISBN-13: 978-1405123983)

### Other required reading:

The assigned chapters from Baron (2000) will be made available through CourseWorks, so you will only need to buy this book if you're interested in expanding upon what we learn in class.

- ❖ Baron, J. (2000), *Thinking and Decision Making*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University.

We will also read a few empirical papers to get a better idea of how researchers have discovered and tested some of the findings and theories we'll be learning about. These papers are listed below, and will be posted on CourseWorks.

### Supplemental reading:

*Note: This is an older book, but it is a great resource for basic explanations of our course topics. If you're having trouble with the way Hardman discusses a topic, I recommend seeing how Plous explains it, and then going back to Hardman for a more up-to-date perspective on it. I've indicated in italics below which Plous chapters are most relevant to each day's topics.*

- ❖ Plous, S. (1993). *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*. New York: McGraw-Hill.  
ISBN: 0070504776

### Tentative List of Topics & Readings

| <i>Topics</i> | <i>Tentative reading assignments<br/>(supplemental readings in italics)</i> |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|

#### Unit 1: Normative & Descriptive Theories of Choice & Judgment

[Weeks 1-5]

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Introduction and overview of choice & judgment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Chapter 1<br/><i>(Plous, Chapters 1-4)</i></li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| Normative theories of choice & judgment        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch. 3 (pp. 26-29)</li> <li>• Hardman, Ch. 7 (pp. 65-69)</li> <li>• Baron, Ch 10 (pp. 233-255)<br/><i>(Plous, Chapters 7-8 &amp; 12)</i></li> </ul> |
| Descriptive theories of judgment               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 3 (pp. 19-25)</li> <li>• Hardman, Ch 4</li> <li>• Hardman, Ch 6</li> <li>• Hardman, Ch 9<br/><i>(Plous, Ch 10, 11, 14, 15, 19)</i></li> </ul>   |
| Descriptive theories of choice                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 7 (pp. 69-75)</li> <li>• Hardman, Ch 8<br/><i>(Plous, Chapters 5-6 &amp; 9)</i><br/><i>(Iyengar &amp; Lepper, 2000)</i></li> </ul>              |

### Midterm 1 (Thursday, Feb. 16)

#### Unit 2: Judgment and Choice Under Uncertainty

[Weeks 6-7]

|                                |                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Judgment of risk & probability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 7 (review)<br/><i>(Plous, Chapters 1-4, 8, 12)</i></li> </ul> |
| Decisions under uncertainty    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 12<br/><i>(Plous, Chapters 1-4, 8, 12)</i></li> </ul>         |
| Time & distance                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 10</li> <li>• Baron, Ch 19 (pp. 471-496)</li> </ul>           |

#### Unit 3: The Decision Process

[Weeks 7-8]

|                |                                                                           |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decision modes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 6 (p. 61)</li> </ul> |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                  |                                                                              |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Process models                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 7 (pp. 75-6)</li> </ul> |
| Preview of decision architecture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tbd</li> </ul>                      |

#### Unit 4: Individual Influences on Decision Making

[Weeks 9-10]

|                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Affect & decision making                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 12 (review)</li> <li>• Lerner et al., 2004</li> <li>• Wilson &amp; Gilbert, 2005</li> </ul>                                  |
| Individual differences in decision making<br>(age, gender, culture, expertise, beliefs, etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Figner &amp; Weber, 2011</li> <li>• Bruine de Bruine et al, 2007</li> <li>• Zaval et al., 2014</li> <li>• Figner et al., 2009</li> </ul> |

### **Midterm 2 (Thursday, March 29)**

#### Unit 5: Group Influences on Decision Making

[Weeks 11-13]

|                                             |                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decisions by individuals in a group context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plous, Ch 16 &amp; 17</li> <li>• Cialdini, 1998 (Chapter 5)</li> </ul>     |
| Social dilemmas                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 13</li> <li>• Hardman, Ch 14</li> </ul>                        |
| Decisions by groups                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 15 (pp.180-86)</li> <li>• Baron, Ch 18 (p. 441-469)</li> </ul> |

#### Unit 6: Zooming In and Out: Implications of Neuroscience and Applications in the World

[Weeks 13-14]

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decision architecture & prescriptive models                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iyengar, 2000</li> <li>• Levav et al, 2010</li> <li>• Johnson &amp; Goldstein 2003</li> </ul> |
| Real-world applications: environmental, financial, & health-related decision making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hardman, Ch 11</li> <li>• CRED Guide (p. 1-43)</li> </ul>                                     |
| Decision making in the brain                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tbd</li> </ul>                                                                                |