

Seminar in Thinking, V89.0300.004
Spring, 2010

Instructor

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Courses on “thinking” usually cover a number of topics in higher-level cognition, such as judgment, concepts, and reasoning. However, in this seminar, we are going to focus in depth on a single area: decision making. Decision making is a critical part of every person’s life, as we make decisions such as what college to go to (if any), whether to get married, what career to follow or job to take, which house to buy, and so on. Indeed, we make smaller decisions all day long, from what to have for lunch to where to sit in a class.

Decision making is relevant not only to psychology but also to fields such as business and economics. Questions about where to invest your money and whether a business should introduce a new product or service are critical to large- and small-scale economics. Furthermore, economic theory makes explicit assumptions about how people make decisions (e.g., to maximize their future wealth), some of which are wrong. Thus, some of our reading will be from the economics literature.

The text is *Rational Choice in an Uncertain World: The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making* (2nd ed.) by Hastie & Dawes. However, much of the reading will be assigned articles, which will be available on Blackboard, in the Course Documents section.

This course is a seminar. What that means is that you are going to do a lot of the work in the class. Rather than sitting back and listening to me talk for two hours (which neither of us would enjoy much), we are going to be discussing the readings, and everyone will be presenting an article or two to the rest of the class. We’ll be talking about the arrangements for this in the second week. Because this is a seminar, class participation is critical. It will be necessary, then, *to do the reading every week before coming to class*. To help you keep on track with that, I am going to give a very short quiz at the beginning of every class on that week’s reading. I will only count the top 10 of those quizzes, so that you can miss two, if you need to miss class. But that includes absences due to unavoidable problems, such as illness or religious observance, so do not skip a quiz until you really need to. That is, you don’t get any “excuses” from quizzes; you just drop two of them. Also, I am going to keep track of class participation, and it will factor into your grade. I do all these things simply to ensure that we have a true seminar atmosphere. You really will learn more if you are actively involved than if you just listen to me drone on. Some of you may not be used to talking in classes, and you will have to push yourselves to speak up. That will be a good experience for you.

There will be a short midterm, a final exam and a term paper. The exams will be exactly like every other exam you have had. The term paper will require you to apply what you have read in this class to an issue or problem that you choose (and clear with me first). Details will follow.

I am very happy to discuss the class material with anyone who would like to. Do not feel that you should not disturb me if you have a question or want to talk more about ideas we have presented in class. Email is probably the best way to make an appointment. However, email is not appropriate for questions with long answers, or for emergencies and issues that require immediate response. Also, please note that it is never appropriate to ask, “Did anything important happen in the last class?” Although I check my email regularly, I may be busy for an entire day or out of town for a couple of days, and so I will not be able to answer every question immediately. So, do use email, but don’t rely on it when you need a fast response.

Class Schedule, Spring 2010

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic and Reading</u>
1/21	Introduction, HD Preface, ch. 1
1/28	Normative models of decision making HD ch. 2, 11
2/4	Judgments from memory; Availability; Anchoring HD ch. 4, p. 87-100; Tversky & Kahneman (1973)
2/11	Representativeness HD p. 101-116, ch 6; Tversky & Kahneman (1980)
2/18	Base Rates Nisbett & Ross, Hertwig et al., Tversky & Koehler
2/25	Randomness, Uncertainty HD ch 7, 8; Gilovich et al.
3/4	Making choices HD ch 3, 10; Payne et al.,
3/11	Making choices II: Critiques of the standard paradigm Gigerenzer & Todd (ch. 1), Borges et al. (ch. 3), Todd & Miller (ch. 13)
3/18	SPRING BREAK. Sorry, no class
3/25	Midterm + Real life decisions Groopman (ch. 2-3), Gawande
4/1	Framing, loss aversion HD ch 12, Tversky & Kahneman (1981), Kermer et al. OR Stanovich
4/8	Cont., Mental accounting Johnson & Goldstein, Kahneman #8, Thaler
4/15	Do people know what they want? Simonson #41, Kahneman #42, Wilson & Gilbert
4/22	Feelings vs. thought HD ch. 13, Bazerman et al., Loewenstein et al.
4/26	(Paper due by 4 pm. Hard copy, not electronic.)
4/29	Meanings Medin et al. (1999), Tenbrunsel & Messick

FINAL EXAM 5/6, 6 - 7:50 p.m.

Lectures: Thurs 4:55 - 7 pm, room 851 Meyer Building

Paper is due by 4 pm, Monday 4/26. Hand in a hard copy—not emailed.

Note. HD = Hastie & Dawes, *Rational Choice in an Uncertain World* (2nd ed.)