Psychology 111
PSYCHOLOGY OF DECISION MAKING

Course Summary

This course is designed to be a survey of modern ideas in judgment and decision making. Decision making is a behavior that is so ubiquitous to our human experience that many disciplines study some aspect of it. The psychology of decision making focuses on how best to make decisions (i.e., normative decision making) and contrast this with how decisions are actually made (i.e., descriptive or behavioral decision making) so that we can better understand, predict (and to some extent, control) behaviors related to decisions and judgments.

This particular course will focus on the contributions of cognitive and social psychology to the field of judgment and decision making (JDM). We will focus on the tricks and short cuts we take to make decisions, how these shortcuts can help us and how they can hurt us, and the consequences of our decision making practices in terms of decision outcomes and our satisfaction with those outcomes.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define judgments and the three different types of decisions people make.
2. Summarize how the decision making environment can influence decisions.
3. Identify seven heuristics and biases that can affect decisions.
4. Compare and contrast past and current theories of decision making.
5. Apply the ProACT model of decision making to a decision problem.
6. Summarize and interpret current psychological research in the context of theories and concepts learned in class.

An important outcome (and evaluation) in this course is for you to work through your own decision problem and draw on the expertise that this area of study can give you to help you make your decision.

Prerequisite knowledge and competencies

This course requires that you have taken Psychology 001 either here at UVM or taken an equivalent Introduction to Psychology course at another school/institution. It is expected that you have a basic understanding of the definition of psychology and how psychological science is conducted. That said, since we will be reading scholarly articles it will be helpful, though not necessary, if you have also had a research methods and/or statistics course. If you haven’t, don’t worry. There will be plenty of opportunities for you to learn how to read a research article in this class without having been exposed to one before.

Resources for Learning

Instructor Resources:

As we will be meeting online, I have developed materials that will take the place of the lectures and live discussions we normally would have had face-to-face in class. Primarily, they will take one or more of the following formats:

- Instructor intro sessions: At the beginning of the module, I'll spend some time describing the module objectives and where the module content fits into the grand scheme of the course. I’ll point out the rhythm of the week and make any comments about changes to that rhythm here.

- Instructor narratives: You may think of these as transcripts of a lecture you might have heard if we met face-to-face. Because you won’t have the ability to “decode” the transcripts as you would a live lecture (for
example, hear me emphasizing or repeating something important, my tone of voice, etc.), wherever possible I will make the “take-home” points clear by bolding them or otherwise highlighting their importance.

- Instructor videos: Sometimes it will be easier for me to show you how to complete a problem or example, rather than to just write a text description of it. When that happens, there will be a short video of me (or someone else) working through a problem.

- Instructor wrap-up sessions: At the end of module, I’ll do a wrap up of the week’s work – point out interesting discussion threads, clarify any confusing points, and help to make any connections that may have been missed. Also in the wrap up I will make comments about any course housekeeping: grade posting, Blackboard notes, etc.

- Instructor “Office Hours”: Comments and questions about the class can be made to me via email (not Bb “Messages”) or the general discussion board. I will respond to emails within 24 hours Sunday-Thur. Emails received Friday and Saturday emails will be dealt with on Monday. Questions can also be posted to the general discussion board, and may receive a speedier response but will definitely also be answered within 24 hours. In deciding which to do, use this rule: if it is a private or personal/individual matter, use email; if it is a general question that others from the class would benefit from knowing the answer to, post to the general forum. If you pose a question in an email I think would benefit the class, I will post it to the general forum.

Text Resources:

The primary textbooks for the course are


In a given week, there are often many chapters assigned. Chapters in both books are relatively short.

There will also be supplementary readings from other books and journal articles.

Video Resources:

We are living in an exceptionally excellent time for this class. The topic of JDM is often covered in a variety of disciplines, and those disciplines are finally beginning to communicate with each other. As such, there is an incredible amount of video resources of different JDM researchers talking about their work. Whenever possible, I will have you watch segments (or all of) these talks so you can see how the topics you are learning are being applied in different areas of psychology and other fields of study.

Course Evaluations/Grading Criteria

Your processing and mastery of the course materials will be assessed in 4 ways:

   1. Concept Checks (15%) – Think of concept checks as my way of virtually assessing your head nodding. In a face-to-face class, I might stop and ask, “Does everyone understand?” before moving on. I might give you a problem to work through in class and then have you report your answers to see if everyone “gets it.” Since I can’t see your bobbing head in this online format, I’ve created a series of checks after each topic. They are short (maybe 3 to 4 questions) assessments of your ability to recall new concepts (think: definitions) and apply the concept to a novel situation (think: word problems). For time considerations, they will often be multiple choice questions. They will cover instructor notes and readings. These will also give you insight into the structure for the final exam.
2. Discussion Forum Participation (25%) – The joy of this class lies in the discussion. We’ll discuss some of the broader applications of what we learn, think about the course topics in a new context, and compare and contrast our experiences. Since we all make decisions and judgments, this is an easy way for you to see the importance of the area of study and to get to know a little bit about each other. I’ll provide discussion prompts, or topics, for you to comment on. You will also be expected to comment on your classmates’ postings. Occasionally, I will give your discussion group a unique problem to solve, and you’ll use the forum as a way to work through the exercise. The purpose of the forum is to engage with and learn from your peers, and give you a way to analyze your own experiences.

3. Blog Entries (25%) – The blog entries will allow you to work through your own decision problem using a particular method called the PrOACT method. More details can be found in the supplemental documents.

4. Weekly Homework Assignments (20%) – These assignments will give you hands-on application experience of what we are learning in class. You may be asked to work through a decision problem using theories/formulas learned in class. You may be asked to scrutinize a decision of yours or someone else that week. The purpose of these assignments is to hone the skills you learn in the content module beyond the concept check.

5. Contemporary Research Assignment (15%) – Throughout the course there will be contemporary readings on JDM in psychological science. To add to your in depth reading, you will choose one article from a list provided by the instructor. The assignment has two parts: (1) you will annotate an article using your preferred .pdf reader by identifying important concepts in each section of the article, links to theories and concepts we learn in class, and your own personal thoughts and comments; (2) you will write a short review paper/essay of the article, providing a one paragraph summary of the background theory, research design, and major finding, with additional compliments and critiques of the study design and application of the findings. More detail can be found in the supplemental documents.

There will be a course wiki where you can choose one of the research articles and signal your choice to the class. If you choose an article that no one else has chosen and complete your assignment using that article, you will receive a bonus. You will not be allowed to change your article after your choice is made without a penalty.

6. Final Exam (20%): The final exam will be a cumulative exam covering the entire content of the course. It will consist mainly of multiple choice questions (similar to the concept checks) as well as two short answer questions. The exam will be open book, open source (i.e. use any course materials or the internet) but will not be collaborative (please do not work together, either through the forums or any other means, to complete the exam).

Below is the grading structure presenting the possible grades you may earn in this class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94-97</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-82</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-62</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 60</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td></td>
<td>XF Failure resulting from academic</td>
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Additionally, depending on your choices, you may also receive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audit: By instructor permission. A successful auditor will need to complete all discussions, the blog assignment, and all concept checks.</td>
<td>AU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete: Incompletes are allowed at the discretion of the instructor and the student's dean. It is not granted without approval from the dean. Work must be completed as outlined by the UVM policies handbook.</td>
<td>INC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass/No Pass: Students must complete all work as required of the course. The registrar will redesignate all grades higher than a “D” as “P”. Pass/No Pass designation must be approved by the registrar and academic advisor.</td>
<td>P/NP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Late Assignments

There will come times (though hopefully not many) over the course of the class where you will have to make important decisions about whether to complete an assignment for this class. We have all been there, and I feel it is best to make my position clear about how late assignments are handled up-front.

1) Late Discussion Posts – Refer to the Discussion Posts rubric. Generally, you will lose a point for missing the initial post deadline and lose a point for each comment you fail to make by the comment deadline.

2) Late Assignments – You will lose 10% of the assignment’s original point value each day it is late for up to three days (or up to 30% off). On the fourth day, the assignment is no longer accepted.

3) Late Concept Checks – Concept Checks will not be available after the module for the week ends. They will not be reopened.

4) Late Blog Posts – Follow the structure of late assignments.

5) Late Exam – The exam will not be available after the exam is closed. It will not be reopened.

Challenging a Grade

I do my best to provide my grading rubric before the assignment is due, so that you can work with an eye toward what I am looking for. That said, there may come a time where you and I do not see eye-to-eye on the grade I feel you have earned. Please know, challenging a grade will never result in your grade being lowered. However, if you decide to challenge a grade, you must:

1) Do so in writing (this will not be difficult for an online class) no more than 1 week after the grade is posted.

2) Outline why you feel your work should earn a higher grade with supporting evidence from the literature or class. Note: Supporting literature does not include what another class member got for a grade on their assignment. But if I missed why your example was a good example of theory X, explain in detail what I was missing making explicit links to the theory as you go.

Grade changes will be at my discretion, and made at my leisure (which means I won’t jump to re-grade an assignment, but will get to it when time allows).

Extra Credit

Currently, there is no extra credit option for this class. I am evaluating whether comments to blog posts will receive extra credit, not to exceed 5%. I will make this decision no later than the beginning of the third week of class.
Weekly Plan

The rhythm of this online class is as follows:

Sunday: The course module is released, containing the instructor intro, folders by topic, assessments, and the discussion board.

Monday: Students begin working through the course materials (readings, videos, narratives) at their own pace.

Tuesday: Students continue to work through the course materials and begin their blog post.

Wednesday: Students make their initial post to their discussion group by 5pm. Posts are released by the instructor and students may then make comments on other people’s posts.

Thursday: Discussions continue on the discussion board. Check the general discussion forum to see if there is any news to know that may help you. Students complete their blog entry and post it to the class by 9pm.

Friday: Discussion boards wrap for grading at 9pm, but may continue as long as the conversation is alive.

Saturday: Your "catch-up" day. Make sure you are on track.

Sunday: Concept checks and the week’s homework assignment are due, both by 11:59pm.

For the specific weekly plans, see the Master Schedule.

Technical Help/Resources

- **Blackboard (Bb)**: It is your responsibility to make sure you have a firm grasp of Blackboard, as it is essentially the sole mode of content delivery for this class. On your Bb "homepage" (before you log into specific classes) you’ll see a box with links to help with student problems. Utilize the information you find here to try to solve any problems that you have before moving onto phase II…

- Text/Written entries: Whenever possible, when submitting assignments please attach word documents. Name you files with your name, the assignment title and the module number (so Richardson_decisions_in_a_day_wk1.docx). You may also choose to do some assignments by hand. In that case, please upload a .pdf with the same type of naming convention.

  Please compose all assignments in a text editor and not directly in Bb. In theory (as of a recent Bb update) you should be able to copy and paste your work neatly from Word (or other program) into the text editor of Bb, where needed (e.g., blogs) to complete your assignment. It’s a good idea to save all of your work somewhere other than Bb, as a precaution.

- **Browsers**: It is recommended that you use Mozilla Firefox when accessing Bb.

- **Email**: If you need to contact me during the course, I recommend that you use traditional email (not Bb "Messages") or the general discussion forum.

- **Computers/Software/Internet**: Continuing education has put together information about being a successful online student. I’ll cover the basics of what you need here, but to determine your personal readiness for the class, please visit https://learn.uvm.edu/online/learning-effectively-online/  
  - You need to have reliable access to a computer with internet access.
  - Your computer must be able to open .pdf documents.
  - You must be able to log into Bb and log into our class. If you cannot access our class, contact me via email.
  - Your computer should allow you to watch videos.
You must have a .pdf reader that also allows you to make comments to .pdf files. Adobe reader has this capability. Personally, I use Foxit reader.

You may want to have a twitter account. This first assignment has a twitter option for completion, but it is not necessary to do the assignment.

Note that I refer to a computer, by which I mean a desktop or laptop/netbook/notebook. I am not referring to a smart phone or a tablet (ipad, nexus, Kindle). There is a Bb app, however I would not rely on it to do important work for this class. You may want to try it (it is not free) to view course content, but I strongly recommend that for any graded material (participating in discussions, uploading assignments, taking the exam) that you use a computer.

- Computer/IT Support: The UVM Tech Team is available in the summer from 8am-4:30pm Monday through Friday. There is no UVM Tech Team support on the weekend (so, keep this in mind if you choose to complete an assignment on Saturday or Sunday). You can access the Tech Team by phone (802-656-2604) or email (techteam@uvm.edu) or submit an online request.

Learner Support
- ACCESS: You can learn more about the Academic Support Programs offered at UVM by visiting the website at http://www.uvm.edu/aspprogs. For those students who wish to document their reason for needing accommodations and thus take advantage of the accommodation that I can offer, you can find information on how to do that as it pertains to the summer semester here: http://www.uvm.edu/access/?Page=summer/summer.html&SM=summer/summersubmenu.html

Please make accommodations and make sure that I am notified before 1/3 of the course has elapsed. Do not wait until the later part of the course to notify me of a needed accommodation unless you experience a sudden and acute need for accommodation.

- Writing Center: Excellent resources are available via the UVM Writing Center’s website: http://www.uvm.edu/wid/writingcenter/

- Online Learning at UVM: I highly recommend taking the time to go through UVM’s resources on online learning such as the Online Learning Readiness Quiz: http://learn.uvm.edu/OnlineLearningReadinessQuiz/story.html

And the tips for online learning success: http://learn.uvm.edu/online/10-tips-for-achieving-success-as-an-online-student/

Course Etiquette and UVM Policy

Course Etiquette (or Netiquette): Much of our class discussions will center on problem solving and sharing personal examples. As a result, I expect you to be courteous to each other, respect each other’s different viewpoints, and support each other’s work. No flaming will be allowed. I will expect you to adhere to all University rules regarding the treatment of others. Most importantly, because all of this class is conducted in a written format, you have an opportunity to think before you speak. I encourage you to exercise that opportunity.

UVM Policy on academic dishonesty: UVM has a policy on academic integrity, which you should read here: http://www.uvm.edu/policies/student/acadintegrity.pdf. You may not plagiarize, fabricate, collude unless specifically directed to do so by the instructor (in this class, you collude on the discussion board), or cheat. In other words, do original work, give credit where credit is due by citing sources properly, and don't use unapproved materials to complete an assignment or exam (see above where I discuss what you can and cannot use during the exam, for example). I am familiar with Turnitin and other means to check for plagiarism. I will use them if I suspect plagiarism.