



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

JOHN GLENN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PUB AFRS 4010 (5679)

Public Affairs Decision Making
3 credit hours
Autumn 2018

Mondays & Wednesdays, 4:10pm – 5:30pm

Mendenhall Lab 131

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Office hrs Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:30-6:30 pm and by appointment

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Decision making is fundamental to human activity. Individuals and groups make decisions for both personal and organizational purposes. Behavioral scientists from economics, psychology, sociology, and management have studied the way in which individuals and groups make decisions under different conditions. Scholars in mathematics, computer science, and machine learning have studied the computational properties and applications of decision processes. Both families of research provide important insights for public administration, where interest in decision making is motivated by pragmatic concerns of policy and management, rather than a conceptual understanding of the decision making process itself.

Public affairs decisions, like many other decisions, have to be made in the context of imperfect information, uncertain events, conditions, and outcomes, and variations in values. In the face of these challenges, decisions must be made to the best of our ability in order to meet a wide range of societal objectives. Many models and methods have been developed to analyze and inform decisions in operational, managerial, and policy settings. In this course, we will cover major topics and insights from the decision sciences. Specifically, we will consider:

- The distinctive characteristics of the problems we face and the decisions we make in public policy and public management

- The value of models and other decision-making tools in policy analysis and administrative decisions
- Key insights from psychology, economics, organizational studies, statistics, and political science about the limitations on rational decision making in public affairs
- Applications of decision making models and tools in policy and management settings
- Implications of decision analysis for current and future challenges in public affairs

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to build on the fundamentals of policy analysis and public management covered in your previous coursework by:

- o Building an understanding of both **descriptive and normative approaches** to decision making and their application in public affairs
- o Developing skills for the **critical assessment of assumptions** used in the processes of policy analysis and public management
- o Extending your understanding of the **challenges to fully rational decision making** in public affairs contexts
- o Developing your ability to **systematically account** for those challenges with responsible decision making strategies for both policy analysis and public management

Course learning objectives are pursued via podcasts, lectures, class activities and discussion, and readings. Student understanding of decision analysis concepts and methods is assessed by items on two exams, six homework assignments (problem sets and short essays), quizzes, class activities, group discussion, and a decision making journal.

BASIS FOR ASSESSMENT

Your grades will be based on the following activities (detailed rubrics and prompts can be found on Carmen):

Midterm Exam (15%; Wednesday, October 10th, regular class time)

The midterm will cover key concepts and skills from the first seven weeks of the course. Format will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay responses.

Final Paper (total 25%; Due by Tuesday, December 11th, 5pm)

The comprehensive final paper will be a synthesis of material from the semester. You will be selecting an area of interest to you to focus on for this project. More guidance will be provided in the first few weeks of class. There will be a *peer review draft* and a *submitted draft* on which you will receive feedback to inform your final paper. You will receive points towards your final paper grade from the submitted draft, and points toward your class participation grade from the peer review engagement, as will be noted on the rubrics. There will be one day of

writing workshop in class for this paper. This content will also be used for your individual presentation. You will submit your draft and final paper to the Carmen dropbox.

Individual Presentation (10%; in class to be scheduled Nov 26 – Dec 5)

You will prepare a 5-7 minute presentation on your paper. Clearly, not all the content in the paper can be covered, so you will have to make choices about what to include. Detailed rubrics and PowerPoint templates will be provided - grading will be driven by clarity of presentation, cohesiveness of content, and knowledge of topic.

Homework Assignments (30%; 6 assignments)

Homework assignments will provide an opportunity for you to think more about the topics we cover outside of class and consider their real world relevance. It is acceptable for you to discuss these assignments with other students in the course, but everyone must turn in their individual copy (not exact duplicates of anyone else's work) to Carmen. Detailed prompts will be provided on Carmen.

Podcast Reviews (10%; 4 entries throughout the semester)

At the beginning of the semester, you will commit to listening to one or two social science podcasts that deal with problems in decision making. Each week, you will listen to at least one episode of the podcast(s) and post a review to the Carmen discussion board. Your review should include a *summary* of the episode, *why* it concerns decision making in public affairs, *examples* of concepts we've covered in class that show up in the subject of the episode, and some *insight* you have about how to manage the decision or *question* you have about how the decision is covered in the episode (300-500 words).

Here are some suggested podcasts that you may want to listen to. You may commit to another series, but you will need to explain your interest and receive the instructor's permission.

Planet Money

What's the Point

Hidden Brain

Brookings Cafeteria

Intersections

Freakonomics

The Arthur Brooks Show

The Rudd Report

Summary Judgment

Plate of the Union

Energy Policy Now

The Policy Scout

If Then - Slate

Code Switch

Class Participation (10%)

Your participation in class discussions and group exercises is a critical part of understanding this content. You cannot participate when you are not in class. However, I understand that conflicts arise, so let me and Daniel know ahead of time as early as possible if you will have to miss class. You will need to rely on your classmates for notes.

Rather than taking attendance every day, your participation and attendance will be indirectly measured through participation in assessments on readings and on participation in class discussions. Keeping up with material covered in readings is necessary both for your understanding of the material and for the seminar structure of the course.

Your engagement and quality of participation in the peer review workshop in terms of providing meaningful feedback to your classmates for the final paper will also contribute to this portion of your grade.

If there are extenuating circumstances that interfere with you turning in any assignments on time, let me or Daniel know as soon as you are aware. Otherwise, assignments lose 50% of possible points if they are one day late, and will receive 0 points after that.

Formatting requirements for all written assignments

Microsoft Word document; double-spaced, 12-point font, 1 inch margins, include your name and page numbers.

Grading

Grades on assignments are intended to reflect the overall quality of performance of the student. You may appeal your grade on an assignment if you think the grade does not reflect the quality of your performance on the assignment. To appeal a grade, submit a clear written explanation describing why you believe the assigned grade is inappropriate within one week after your work is returned. You must cite specific components of the rubric for the given assignment. I will carefully consider all such appeals. If I re-grade the assignment, I will re-grade the *entire* assignment. As a result, the final grade for the re-graded assignment may be greater than, less than, or equal to the original grade.

Transformation of numerical grades to letter grades will correspond to this schedule:

| | | | | | |
|----|---------|----|---------|---|----------------|
| A | 93-100 | C+ | 77-79.9 | E | 59.9 and below |
| A- | 90-92.9 | C | 73-76.9 | | |
| B+ | 87-89.9 | C- | 70-72.9 | | |
| B | 83-86.9 | D+ | 67-69.9 | | |
| B- | 80-82.9 | D | 60-66.9 | | |

Assignment Schedule

| Class Due | Assignment | Due Date |
|--------------|--|---|
| | NOTE: | Assignments due @ 11:59pm NIGHT BEFORE class |
| 2 | Homework #1 Select Podcast(s) for reviews | Sunday, August 26 |
| 3 | Homework #2 | Tuesday, August 28 |
| 4 | Podcast review #1 | Tuesday, September 4 |
| 6 | Podcast review #2 | Tuesday, September 11 |
| 8 | Podcast review #3 | Tuesday, September 18 |
| 9 | Paper proposal | Sunday, September 23 |
| 10 | Podcast review #4 | Tuesday, September 25 |
| 12 | Homework #3 | Tuesday, October 2 |
| 14 | Midterm Exam | Wednesday, October 10 – In Class |
| 17 | Homework #4 | Sunday, October 21 |
| 19 | Homework #5 | Sunday, October 28 |
| 21 | Draft paper for Peer Review | Sunday, November 4 |
| 22 | Homework #6 | Tuesday, November 6 |
| 25 | Draft paper for Feedback | Sunday, November 18 |
| 26-29 | Individual presentations | Monday Nov 26 – Wed Dec 5 |
| -- | Final Paper Due | Tuesday, December 11 |

TEXTS

Students can access textbook information via the Barnes & Noble bookstore website: www.shopOhioState.com as well as from their BuckeyeLink Student Center. This information is disseminated by B&N to all area bookstores. You may buy from a store of your choice and/or shop for books (always use ISBN# for searches) online.

There is **one required** text for this course:

Thaler, R.H., & Sunstein, C.R. (2009). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. [ISBN-13: 978-0143115267 ISBN-10: 014311526X]

Additional readings, as well as other media resources, will be posted on the Carmen course page at least one week in advance of their due date.

Students can access textbook information via the Barnes & Noble bookstore website: www.shopOhioState.com as well as from their BuckeyeLink Student Center. This information is disseminated by B&N to all area bookstores. You may buy from a store of your choice and/or shop for books (always use ISBN# for searches) on line.

HARDWARE & SOFTWARE

- The **Carmen** site for this course is extremely important. I try not to contact the class through email unless it is an emergency, so any announcements about the course will be posted to the News feed. It is your responsibility to keep up with class communication and any material you may have missed.

Course Outline

- I. Introduction to Decision Making with an Application to Public Affairs
Classes 1-3
- II. Normative decision making
Classes 4-8
- III. Descriptive decision making
Classes 9-13

Mid-Term – October 10 – Class #14

- IV. Guest Lectures sharing Local, State and Federal decision experiences
Classes 15-20
- V. Final project:
Peer Review session and Writing Workshop for Papers
Classes 21-22
- VI. Additional/Deeper Dives on Decision Topics TBD
Classes 23-25

Thanksgiving Break

- VII. Final Project: Student presentations
Classes 26-29

Final Paper due – Tuesday, Dec 11.

WRITING SUPPORT

The University Center for the Study and Teaching and Writing (<https://cstw.osu.edu/writing-center>) is a resource available to all students. The Writing Center at the CSTW offers free help with writing at any stage of the writing process in a variety of formats, including research papers, proposals, and reviews. You can schedule online or call 614-688-4291.

- Clients may schedule ONE appointment at our Smith Lab and/or The Research Commons (3rd Floor, 18th Ave Library) location each week. Clients may have one walk-in tutorial daily (up to four per week) at our satellite center on the first floor of Thompson Library.
- Clients registered with the Office of Disability Services may have two appointments per week.
- Clients with more than their allowed number of appointments per week will have the overflow appointments canceled.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

(From: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coamfaqs.html#academicmisconductstatement>)

The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's *Code of Student Conduct* and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's Code of Student Conduct may constitute "Academic Misconduct." Sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

In 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.

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 page: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>
Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity: <http://oaa.osu.edu/coamtensuggestions.html>
Eight Cardinal Rules of Academic Integrity: www.northwestern.edu/uacc/8cards.html

It is also important to be clear on your syllabus about what your policy is regarding collaboration on assignments, as some instructors encourage it, while others prohibit it.

Glenn College Diversity Values Statement

The Glenn College is committed to nurturing a diverse and inclusive environment for our students, faculty, staff, and guests that celebrates the fundamental value and dignity of everyone by recognizing differences and supporting individuality. We are dedicated to creating a safe space and promoting civil discourse that acknowledges and embraces diverse perspectives on issues and challenges that affect our community.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. If you or someone you know is suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the **Office of Student Life Counseling and Consultation Services (CCS)** by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614-292- 5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younklin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on call counselor when CCS is closed at 614--292--5766 and 24 hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1--800--273--TALK or at suicidepreventionlifeline.org. Also, the OSU Student Advocacy Center is a resource to help students navigate OSU and to resolve issues that they encounter at OSU – visit <http://advocacy.osu.edu/>.

ADA ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with disability that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

Detailed Course Schedule

| # | Date | Topic | Preparation | Assignment |
|----|--------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | Wed 8/22 | Review course syllabus, Introduction to Decision Making | | |
| 2 | Mon 8/27 | Introduction to Decision making in Public Affairs | - Read Introduction and Ch 1 in <u>Smart Choices</u> | - HW#1 due - Select podcast |
| 3 | Wed 8/29 | Structuring Decisions: Models for Organizing and Analyzing Information | - Read Ch 2 & 3 in <u>Smart Choices</u> | - HW#2 due |
| | Mon 9/3 | Labor Day Holiday - no class | | |
| 4 | Wed 9/5 | Normative: Rational decision making and What is a “good” decision? | Reading on expected utility theory | - Podcast #1 review due |
| 5 | Mon 9/10 | Normative: Value-focused thinking | Chapter 1 and 2 from <u>Value- focused Thinking (1992)</u> | |
| 6 | Wed 9/12 | Normative: Decision context, Generation of alternatives, Uncertainty and Risk tolerance. | | - Podcast #2 due |
| 7 | Mon 9/17 | Challenges to Normative Models | Chapter 4 in <u>Nudge</u> | |
| 8 | Wed 9/19 | Tools for informing decisions: Multi- attribute utility models, Cost-benefit analysis, risk analysis | | - Podcast #3 due |
| 9 | Mon 9/24 | Descriptive Decision Making: Lessons from Behavioral Psychology | - Video: Thinking fast and slow - Ch 1 and 2 in <u>Nudge</u> | - Proposal for paper due |
| 10 | Wed 9/26 | Descriptive: Heuristics and Biases continued | Ariely, “The end of rational economics” | - Podcast #4 due |
| 11 | Mon 10/1 | Descriptive: Cognitive and social biases (group think) | Chapter 3 in <u>Nudge</u> | |
| 12 | Wed 10/3 | Choice architecture in public policy Nudge and Retirement, Social Security | Nudge Ch 5, 6, 9 | - HW#3 due |
| 13 | Mon 10/8 | Nudge and Medicare Prescription Drugs, Organ Donations, Environmental Policy HW#3 and Mid-term exam review | Nudge Chapter 10, 11, 12 | |
| 14 | Wed 10/10 | Mid-term exam Proctored by Daniel Baker | | |

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|-----------|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 15 | Mon 10/15 | Guest lecture – State and federal health policy (Greg Moody, Leadership Institute at Glenn, former Health Policy lead for Governor Kasich) | | |
| 16 | Wed 10/17 | Guest lecture – non-profit Federal food safety policy (Dr. Barbara Kowalcyk, professor in OSU Food Science and head of non-profit) | | |
| 17 | Mon 10/22 | Guest lecture – State education and budget policy (Paolo DeMaria, OH Superintendent of Education) | | - HW#4 due |
| 18 | Wed 10/24 | Guest lecture – Local public health policy (Mike Fielding, Columbus Public Health) | | |
| 19 | Mon 10/29 | Guest lecture – Representative Mike Duffey, Ohio State legislator | | - HW#5 due |
| 20 | Wed 10/31 | Guest lecture – Brandi Braun, Deputy Chief Innovation Officer, City of Columbus | | |
| 21 | Mon 11/5 | In-class peer reviews of draft paper Lead by Daniel Baker | | - Draft for peer review due before class |
| 22 | Wed 11/7 | Writing workshop for draft paper Lead by Daniel Baker | | - HW#6 due |
| 23 | Mon 11/12 | Topic TBD | | |
| 24 | Wed 11/14 | Topic TBD | | |
| 25 | Mon 11/19 | Topic TBD | | - Draft paper due |
| | Wed 11/21 | Thanksgiving Holiday – no class | | |
| 26 | Mon 11/26 | Student Presentations | - Feedback will be provided on papers | - Slides to Carmen before presentation |
| 27 | Wed 11/28 | Student Presentations | | |
| 28 | Mon 12/3 | Student Presentations | | |
| 29 | Wed 12/5 | Student Presentations | | |
| | T 12/11 by 5pm | [no class] | | - Final paper due |