

# Syllabus for PSYC 5341— Decision Making

Spring 2009

TTh 12:30-1:50, LS 102

**Instructor: Professor Daniel Levine**

**LS 414, Ext 3598**

**e-mail: [levine@uta.edu](mailto:levine@uta.edu)**

**Web site: [www.uta.edu/psychology/faculty/levine](http://www.uta.edu/psychology/faculty/levine)**

**Office Hours for Prof. Levine:** MW 4-5, TTh 2-3

**Textbook:** Plous, Scott, *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*, McGraw-Hill, 1993. Additional handouts will be provided on the quantitative aspects of decision making. We will also discuss various journal articles, with students leading the discussions.

## **Goals of the course:**

- (1) To teach normative principles of decision making, judgment, and choice;
- (2) To teach how a person's characteristic decisions and judgments often deviate from normative principles, as indicated by psychological experiments;
- (3) To apply parts (1) and (2) to real-life situations including those relating to professional judgments and consumer choices;
- (4) To instill an appreciation for quantitative judgments, such as those of probability, and how those can or should influence human decisions.

## **Material covered:**

Class discussion is an important part of this course, and can take unpredictable turns, so the schedule is somewhat flexible. But it is approximately as follows:

Jan. 20-22 — Questionnaire and general themes

Jan. 27-29 — Effects of perception, cognitive dissonance, memory, and context (Chs. 1-4 of Plous; articles by Fischhoff, 1977; Slovic & Fischhoff, 1977)

Feb. 3-5 — How phrasing of questions affects answers (Ch. 5-6 of Plous; article by Tversky & Kahneman, 1981.)

Feb. 10-12 — Overconfidence (Ch. 19 of Plous, article by Griggs & Cox, 1982; **handout on calibration** — *homework due Feb. 17*)

Feb. 17 — Other behavioral traps (Discussion of homework; Ch. 20-21 of Plous)

Feb. 19-24 — The representativeness heuristic (Ch. 10, 12 of Plous; articles by Ajzen, 1977, and Fischhoff & Bar-Hillel, 1984; **handout on probability** — *homework due Feb. 24*)

Feb. 26-Mar. 5 — The availability and anchoring/adjustment heuristics (Discussion of homework; Ch. 11 and 13 of Plous; articles by Tversky & Kahneman, 1973; Borgida & Nisbett, 1977; Taylor & Thompson, 1982)

Mar. 10 — Review

Mar. 12 — MIDTERM EXAM

Mar. 17-19 — SPRING BREAK

Mar. 24-26 — Go over midterm; Perception of randomness vs. pattern (Ch. 14-15 of Plous; article by Gilovich et al., 1985)

Mar. 31-Apr. 7 — Expected Utility Theory and Prospect Theory (Ch. 7-9 of Plous; article by Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, and Ellsberg, 1981; **handout on those theories** — *homework due Apr. 9*)

Apr. 9-14 — More details of Prospect Theory

Apr. 16-28 — Toward more realistic theories of actual human decision making (articles by Mellers et al., 1999; Grossberg and Gutowski, 1987; Leven and Levine, 1996; Busemeyer & Townsend, 1993; Roe et al., 2001; **handout on alternative decision schemes** — *homework due Apr. 23*)

Apr. 30-May 7 — In-class project presentations of experiment design ideas; review for final

FINAL EXAM THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2009, 11:00AM -1:30 PM

**Grading:** 100 each for final, midterm, homework plus class participation, and experiment design. Midterms and final about 40 to 50 percent quantitative problems. Final will be comprehensive BUT biased strongly toward later material, particularly in the quantitative problems. You will be asked to design (but not necessarily run) an experiment on decision making: it can be either an experimental study in a psychology laboratory or a “quasi-experimental” study in another setting (business office, survey of the population, etc.). These experiments will be discussed in class for feedback but graded only on the writeup, due at the time of the final exam.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** If you are a student who requires accommodations in compliance with the ADA, please consult with me at the beginning of the semester. As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide “reasonable accommodation” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Your responsibility is to inform me of documentation authorizing the specific accommodation. Student services at UTA include the Office for Students with Disabilities (located in the lower level of the University Center) which is responsible for verifying and implementing accommodations to ensure equal opportunity in all programs and activities.

**Student Support Services:** The University supports a variety of student success programs to help you connect with the University and achieve academic success. They include learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, admission and transition, and federally funded programs. Students requiring assistance academically, personally, or socially should contact the Office of Student Success Programs at 817-272-6107 for more information and appropriate referrals.

**Academic Honesty:** Academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form at The University of Texas at Arlington. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. (Regents’ Rules and Regulations, Part One, Chapter

VI, Section 3, Subsection 3.2., Subdivision 3.22).

**Bomb Threats:** If anyone is tempted to call in a bomb threat, be aware that UTA will attempt to trace the phone call and prosecute all responsible parties. Every effort will be made to avoid cancellation of presentations/tests caused by the bomb threat. Unannounced alternate sites will be available for these classes. Your instructor will make you aware of alternate class sites in the event that your classroom is not available.

**Library Information:** Helen Hough is the Psychology Librarian. She can be reached at (817) 272-7429, and by email at [hough@uta.edu](mailto:hough@uta.edu). You will find useful research information for psychology at <http://www.uta.edu/library/research/rt-psyc.html>.