

Psy 420 Advanced Social Psych Seminar: Judgment and Decision Making

Professor: Allen McConnell
E-mail: mconnar@muohio.edu
Office: 213 Psychology Building
Phone: 529-2407
Hours: TBA

Class meets in 204 Psychology Building
Tuesdays and Thursdays
Meeting time: 5:00 - 6:15 p.m.

This class is CRN 68857 PSY 420

Psy 420 on the Web: <http://www.users.muohio.edu/mconnar/psy420-jdm.html>

Texts and readings

- Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and practice* (4th edition). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Plous, S. (1993). *The psychology of judgment and decision making*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Additional course readings provided on the Psy 420 Blackboard.

Course overview

This course focuses on understanding judgment and decision making processes. Every day, people make decisions both big (e.g., choosing a career, ending a romantic relationship) and small (e.g., picking a pizza for dinner). How do we make decisions such as these? Why do many of our decisions produce very strong feelings and emotions within us? What biases our decisions? How can we make better decisions in the future? What aspects of judgment and decision making are beyond our control and purview? Judgment and decision making processes not only impact small groups of people, but can affect societies and the world more broadly (e.g., how do countries end up going to war, what processes result in global economic downturns). Social psychologists have become the vanguard in judgment and decision making research, borrowing many ideas from cognitive, personality, developmental, and clinical psychology. In this course, we will examine judgment and decision making from a social psychological perspective, but we will draw upon other areas of psychology as well that contribute to our understand of JDM.

This course has several goals...

- First, students should develop an in-depth and integrative understanding of how approaching judgment and decision making from a psychological perspective improves our understanding of human behavior.
- Although the emphasis of the course is on how social psychologists study judgment and decision making, this seminar is designed to show how different subdisciplines in psychology speak to our understanding of judgment and decision making.
- Students should also learn how theory helps to frame issues associated with judgment and decision making and how research findings that examine judgment and decision making speak to psychological theory, helping to build bridges among different areas of psychology.
- Lastly, this course should help students identify and understand various judgment and decision making processes that affect human behavior in the real world. In other words, the application of findings and theories should help students “make sense” of why people do the things they do. These insights should help students better understand the events they see in the news, with their friends, in their families, and within their communities.

Grades

Qty.	Item	Points each	Total Points	Percent
2	In-term exams	200	400	32%
1	Final exam	200	200	16%
2	Analysis papers	150	300	24%
1	Oral presentation	100	100	8%
13	Reading quizzes	10	130	10%
20	Class participation	6	120	10%
Totals			1250	100%

During the semester, grades will be posted on-line at the course's website (see URL on the front page of this syllabus, they are *not* posted on Blackboard), listed by the last digits of students' Banner IDs. They will be updated periodically so students can monitor their performance in the course.

Final grades will be determined by total points accumulated during the semester applied to this scale:

Points	Percent	Grade
1156 - 1250	93% - 100%	A
1119 - 1155	90% - 92%	A-
1081 - 1118	87% - 89%	B+
1031 - 1080	83% - 86%	B
994 - 1030	80% - 82%	B-
956 - 993	77% - 79%	C+
906 - 955	73% - 76%	C
869 - 905	70% - 72%	C-
831 - 868	67% - 69%	D+
781 - 830	63% - 66%	D
744 - 780	60% - 62%	D-
0 - 743	0% - 59%	F

The instructor reserves the right to adjust the grading scale. If modifications occur, such changes will only make it easier for students to get a better grade (i.e., the scale will never be adjusted against students). However, it would be extremely unwise to anticipate that an adjustment will occur. Final grades will be based on the final number of points earned as applied to the above grading scale, no exceptions. There is no end-of-semester negotiation period where students plea and barter for a better grade in the class. If students are dissatisfied with their performance in the class, they should discuss their situation with the instructor early in the term to identify ways to improve: don't wait until it's too late.

Exams

Two in-term exams (mostly essay and short answer) will assess material from Weeks 1-6 (Exam 1) and Weeks 7-12 (Exam 2). These in-term exams are not cumulative, and they will focus on the readings and class discussions. Although the exams will primarily reflect what is discussed in class, assigned material not discussed in class is fair game. However, exams will not assess trivial things. Exams assess how well students are learning and integrating the readings and class discussions, with a focus on research findings and theories more than on applications. A final exam will also be administered (on May 5 at 7:45 p.m.), with about 25% of its material coming from the Cialdini book and the remaining 75% being cumulative material from earlier in the semester.

Analysis papers

During the semester, each student will write two short (4-5 double-spaced pages) papers, applying the topic matter for the course to an analysis of a current, real-world phenomenon. Students will have their choice between two topics: US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan or the recent economic downturn. Students can pick the topic they prefer, however *both* papers must be written on the same topic (i.e., no switching for Analysis Paper 2). These papers are individual projects (i.e., they are not group projects), and they must be conducted individually. Any act of plagiarism will be dealt with *severely* (see class policies).

For each paper, students must identify news-worthy aspects for the topic and apply the theories and findings of the course to explain why things occurred the way they did (i.e., analyze). Students will bring to bear a minimum of three different principles in each paper. Details regarding the assignment will be provided in handouts to be distributed later in the semester. Analysis Paper 1 will draw upon course material covered in Weeks 1-6, and Analysis Paper 2 will draw upon material presented between Weeks 7-12. Only material related to course readings and discussions should be used in the analysis papers.

Oral presentations

During the last two regular class meetings, students will present an analysis of a topic of their own choosing (this must be approved by the instructor by 4/9) in a 5-7 minute in-class presentation. Students can pick any topic (except for US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan or the economic downturn), but each student must have a unique topic (no duplicates). The goal of the presentation is to provide a showcase for students to “pull everything together” and analyze a new topic of their own interest. Students must have their topic approved no later than April 16, and the order of presentation will be determined in class on April 21. A handout with more details will be provided later in the semester.

Quizzes

During the semester, short pop quizzes on assigned readings will be administered to reward students for keeping up with their readings. They will not be difficult. If students do their reading, this will be the easiest 100 points of the grade. They will be administered at the very beginning of class. If students are late to class or are absent, they *cannot* make them up (even with a documented excuse).

Class participation

Following the first week of classes, student involvement in class discussions will be assessed by the instructor (5 points per class). Students who participate in class (e.g., contribute to discussions, raise questions) will receive credit for their involvement. Those who say nothing will not. Because our seminar is quite a small class, class participation is essential for its success. It is the intent of the instructor that this “requirement” will be relatively transparent and that students will naturally be inclined to participate in class discussions.

Class policies

Academic integrity: Any act of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, lying, cheating, plagiarism) will not be tolerated and will be punished to the fullest extent in accordance with Miami University policy on academic misconduct (see Sections 501-507 of Undergraduate Academic Regulations, Student Handbook). Students must sign an agreement regarding plagiarism. Any act of plagiarism, *at minimum*, will result in a zero for that project (multiple acts, *at minimum*, result in an F for the course). Any evidence of academic misconduct by a group of students will be considered academic misconduct by all parties involved.

Assignments: Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus, and they are due during the regularly-scheduled class period (i.e., an assignment is late if handed in later in the day after class). In essence, this syllabus serves as a contract between the instructor and students. The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time as warranted. However, the instructor will make such revisions at least one week ahead of a particular due date if it entails making assignments due at an earlier date. Any alterations will be announced in class. Although such arrangements will be communicated in advance, it is the student's responsibility to attend to these announcements. Students who do not attend class assume the responsibility for missing alterations to the course.

Special considerations: In situations where special and documented circumstances require that a student not take an exam during a scheduled time (e.g., arrangements for disabled students, being a member of an athletic team that has an official obligation during class, religious observance), special arrangements can be made to accommodate such needs. However, such students must make arrangements with the instructor at the beginning of the semester and provide official documentation regarding these circumstances.

Course notes and readings: Attending class and taking notes are each student's responsibility. The instructor will not lend out notes or reproduce a lecture under any circumstances. Students who miss a class should ask classmates to borrow their notes. In addition to the assigned texts, there are additional scientific papers that are assigned for reading (these are provided as PDFs through the course's Blackboard website). It is the students' responsibility to obtain these papers (do not wait until the last minute to download them).

Classroom conduct: While in the classroom, people are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and civil manner. It is quite all right (and downright encouraged) for people to express their opinions and beliefs in an impassioned fashion. It is quite another thing, however, to be disrespectful or rude *to* students or *to* the instructor. It is fine to disagree with others, and it is okay to express non-PC (politically correct) views. However, disrespectful conduct will not be accepted. Disagreeing with others is fine and expected, but being disagreeable is not. In class, listen to others, participate, and be involved. If students want to read the paper, talk to friends, Facebook, or sleep — stay at home. Finally, please turn off cell phones in class.

Make-ups: There are no make-ups if students miss an exam or a report due date because of an unexcused absence. An unexcused absence occurs when a student (1) did not obtain prior permission from the instructor concerning the absence or (2) did not provide documented evidence justifying the absence. Documented evidence can be one of three things: (1) a note from a physician or nurse stating that students were too sick to attend class, (2) a letter from a funeral home or clergy on their letterhead indicating that the student attended a memorial service, or (3) a letter from Dean Schilling. There are no exceptions to this policy. There are absolutely no make-ups for quizzes. If students miss a quiz, they will receive a zero (regardless of the circumstances, even if they have an excuse).

Incompletes: Except for cases of documented medical or family emergencies, incompletes will not be given. There is no need for students to do badly in this class: the instructor will be available for meetings and will answer e-mail questions promptly, and points are earned in small chunks rather than a couple of monstrous exams. Deadlines for dropping classes and withdrawals are provided by the Office of the Registrar. Please see the official academic calendar published by the Office of the Registrar for more, and official, details regarding these dates and university policies.

Semester breakdown

This is the breakdown of the semester day by day. *Assignments are due on the day listed.* That is, the date reflects the due date, not the assignment date. Reading assignments are either entire chapters from Plous's or Cialdini's books, or they are readings available from the Blackboard website (listed by authors).

			Topic	Assignment
Week 1	Tu	1/13	Welcome and overview of the class	
	Th	1/15	Problems with introspection	Nisbett & Wilson (1977)
Week 2	Tu	1/20	Biased perception and memory	Plous 1-4
	Th	1/22	Nonconscious thinking	Dijksterhuis et al. (2006)
Week 3	Tu	1/27	No class	
	Th	1/29	Automaticity	Bargh & Chartrand (1999)
Week 4	Tu	2/3	Mental control	Wegner et al. (1994)
	Th	2/5	No class	
Week 5	Tu	2/10	JDM theory	Plous 7-9
	Th	2/12	Heuristics	Plous 10, 11, 13
Week 6	Tu	2/17	Statistical weaknesses	Plous (12, 14, 15)
	Th	2/19	Stereotyping	Macrae et al. (1994)
Week 7	Tu	2/24	Exam I	
	Th	2/26	Affect and misattribution	Dutton & Aron (1974)
Week 8	Tu	3/3	Illusions of control	Langer (1975)
	Th	3/5	Biased perceptions	Lord et al. (1979)
Spring Break	Tu	3/10	Spring Break	
	Th	3/12	Spring Break	
Week 10	Tu	3/17	Optimistic illusions	Taylor & Brown (1988)
	Th	3/19	No class	
Week 11	Tu	3/24	Self-biases	Gilovich et al. (2000)
	Th	3/26	Self-fulfilling prophecy	Snyder et al. (1977)
Week 12	Tu	3/31	Stereotype threat	Steele (1997)
	Th	4/2	Shooter bias	Correll et al. (2007)
Week 13	Tu	4/7	No class	
	Th	4/9	Exam 2	Analysis Paper 2 due
Week 14	Tu	4/14	Self-perception	Cialdini 1-3
	Th	4/16	Social influence	Cialdini 4-5; Last day to approve oral topic
Week 15	Tu	4/21	Influence coming full circle	Cialdini 6-8
	Th	4/23	Oral Presentation Day 1	
Week 16	Tu	4/28	Oral Presentation Day 2	
	Th	4/30	No class	

Final Exam administered on Tuesday evening, May 5, at 7:45 p.m., in 204 PSYC.