LOC 313: Learning & Thinking in Organizations
Fall 2020
Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:40 to 4:00 | Remote

Instructor: Peter Meyerhoff, PhD  
Consultation hours: By appointment  
peter.meyerhoff@northwestern.edu  
847 341 3112

TA: Meghan Leggero  
Consultation hours: By appointment  
megleggero@u.northwestern.edu

COURSE OVERVIEW

Learning & Thinking in Organizations explores human judgment and decisionmaking under conditions of uncertainty. You will learn to recognize recurring patterns in your own cognition and that of the people around you, and examine the ways those tendencies can lead people to better or worse courses of action. The class opens with a focus on the work of two research psychologists, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, who developed an important framework for understanding how people reach conclusions and make decisions. Their work formed the foundation of the field of behavioral economics.

As we move through the quarter, we will draw on this framework to analyze human judgment and organizational decisionmaking in the domains of medicine, public health, criminal justice, and sports. We will investigate ways to use insights from research to improve the functioning of organizations, with a goal of making life better for the people that work in them and the people they serve. In the final project, working either independently or in a group, you will research an organizational phenomenon and develop a design for change using the theoretical perspectives from the course. Grading is based on quizzes, a midterm, and a final project.

The course takes place during a public health emergency, significant social and cultural conflict in the United States, and a presidential election. Students are encouraged to use the analytic perspectives from the class to investigate questions of interest to them throughout the class and on the final project.

Learning Activities

- Practicing and building systematic skills to observe, document, and understand human judgment and decisionmaking
- Reading and discussing research that analyzes judgment and decisionmaking in real-world and laboratory contexts
- Conducting an individual research project that includes an 8-10 page literature review on a phenomenon of interest to you
- Working as a group or independently, developing a research-based design for organizational change that extends from the literature review, communicated through a concise slide presentation and in 3 social media formats: a blog post, a thread, and infographics
**SCHEDULE**

**SEPT. 17**  The 2 Systems

Prof. Kahneman’s framework understands judgment and decisionmaking through a metaphor of System 1 and System 2. We will look at examples and scenarios that illustrate the two systems.

**READ**

This syllabus

**BRING**

Notebook or journal and pen/pencil

A story about a very fast decision you made this week

A story about a recent decision that involved some deliberation

**SEPT. 22**  Cactus 1549

We use the 2-systems framework to examine the case of US Airways Flight 1549, in which the flight crew executed a water landing and evacuation of an Airbus 320 that lost both engines shortly after takeoff.

**READ**

Kahneman, Introduction

Kahneman, Chapter 1: The Characters of the Story

Kahneman, Chapter 2: Attention & Effort

Kahneman, Chapter 3: The Lazy Controller

**WATCH**

Capt. Sullenberger’s account (search YouTube for “Captain Sully's Minute by Minute Description”)

**BRING**
A story about something relatively difficult you have practiced so many times that it has become automatic.

SEPT. 24  A Machine For Jumping To Conclusions, Part 1

This class introduces classes of cognitive errors.

TAKE QUIZ 1 BEFORE 2 PM

READ

Kahneman, Chapter 4: The Associative Machine
Kahneman, Chapter 5: Cognitive Ease
Kahneman, Chapter 6: Norms, Surprises, and Causes

BRING

A story about a belief you have that you think might be wrong.

SEPT. 29  A Machine For Jumping To Conclusions, Part 2

We continue to discuss classes of cognitive errors.

READ

Kahneman, Chapter 7: A Machine for Jumping to Conclusions
Kahneman, Chapter 8: How Judgments Happen
Kahneman, Chapter 9: Answering an Easier Question

BRING

The number 17 or the number 83, written on a piece of paper.

OCT. 1  Heuristics and Biases

We explore the basic heuristics and biases uncovered by Tversky & Kahneman.
TAKE QUIZ 2 BEFORE 2 PM

READ

Kahneman, Chapter 35: Two Selves
Kahneman, Chapter 36: Life as a Story
Kahneman, Chapter 37: Experienced Well-Being
Kahneman, Chapter 38: Thinking About Life

BRING

The first paragraph of any 2019 article about shark attacks
A story about a belief that some organization seems to be operating under that you think might be wrong
A personality sketch of an invented character (“Jackie”) who is very likely to be a librarian

OCT. 6 Choices

We discuss prospect theory and how people make assessments that lead to decisions.

READ

Kahneman, Chapter 10: The Law of Small Numbers
Kahneman, Chapter 11: Anchors
Kahneman, Chapter 12: The Science of Availability
Kahneman, Chapter 13: Availability, Emotion, and Risk
Kahneman, Chapter 14: Tom W’s Specialty
Kahneman, Chapter 15: Linda: Less is More

BRING
A list of 3 things you would like to own

**OCT. 8**

**Understanding Ourselves**

We discuss flawed self-assessment, the experiencing vs the remembering self, and how we acquire misinformation.

**TAKE QUIZ 3 BEFORE 2 PM**

**READ**

Kahneman, Chapter 25: Bernoulli’s Errors

Kahneman, Chapter 26: Prospect Theory

Kahneman, Chapter 27: The Endowment Effect

Groopman, Introduction

Groopman, Chapter 1: Flesh-and-Blood Decision Making

Groopman, Chapter 2: Lessons from the Heart

Groopman, Chapter 3: Spinning Plates


**BRING**

A description of something you know you’re very good at

A description of something you know you’re very bad at

**OCT. 9-12**

**MIDTERM**

**OCT. 13**

**Decisionmaking in Criminal Justice**
We apply the course framework to the legal system.

We will also start a discussion of possible research questions for the final project.

**READ**

Wixted & Wells (2017). The Relationship Between Eyewitness Confidence and Identification Accuracy: A New Synthesis. PAGES 10-20 ONLY.

Readings TBD

Any 10 cases from The Innocence Project (innocenceproject.org/all-cases)

**BRING**

Two or more ideas of questions you would like to explore on the final project, based on the course ideas you have learned so far

**OCT. 15  The Hot Hand**

We consider examples from the world of sports and look at a non-intuitive finding from Tversky and colleagues.

**TAKE QUIZ 4 BEFORE 2 PM**

**READ**

Silver, Chapter 3: All I Care About Is W’s and L’s

Silver, Chapter 8: Less and Less and Less Wrong

Silver, Chapter 10: The Poker Bubble

Groopman, Chapter 4: Gatekeepers

Groopman, Chapter 5: A New Mother’s Challenge

**WATCH**

Moneyball OR Concussion

**OCT. 20  Working with Doctors, Part I**
We discuss physician cognition.

We will also form final project teams for those who want to work in groups.

**READ**

- Groopman, Chapter 6: The Uncertainty of the Expert
- Groopman, Chapter 7: Surgery and Satisfaction
- Groopman, Chapter 8: The Eye of the Beholder
- Groopman, Chapter 9: Marketing, Money, and Medical Decisions

**WATCH**

- This video, even if you’ve seen it (search YouTube for The Monkey Business Illusion)

**BRING**

- A story, only if you’re comfortable sharing it, about an experience you or someone you know has had with a medical condition that was difficult to diagnose

**OCT. 22**  **Working with Doctors, Part II // Expert: Dr. Samuel Grief**

We are joined by an expert, Dr. Samuel Grief, Medical Director at CVS Health, as we continue our discussion of physician cognition. Dr. Grief will talk about his practice experience and about organizational decisionmaking during COVID.

**TAKE QUIZ 5 BEFORE 2 PM**

**READ**

- Groopman, Chapter 10: In Service of the Soul
- Groopman, Epilogue: A Patient’s Questions
- Additional Reading TBD

**BRING**

- Optionally, a question for Dr. Grief based on the course reading
OCT. 27  It’s Tough to Make Predictions, Especially About the Future, Part 1
We discuss predictions in the domains of elections, finance, weather, and natural disasters.

READ
Silver, Introduction
Silver, Chapter 1: A Catastrophic Failure of Prediction
Silver, Chapter 2: Are You Smarter Than a Television Pundit

BRING
A specific prediction that you feel relatively confident about

OCT. 29  It’s Tough to Make Predictions, Especially About the Future, Part 2
We continue to discuss predictions, with a focus on the upcoming presidential election.

TAKE QUIZ 6 BEFORE 2 PM

READ
Silver, Chapter 4: For Years You’ve Been Telling Us That Rain Is Green

BRING
At least 3 predictions of the upcoming election, published in print or video, along with the predictor’s stated basis for the prediction

NOV. 3  COVID, Part 1
We will consider issues related to the 2020 pandemic in light of course ideas. You will also spend time working in your project teams or working individually.

READ
Silver, Chapter 7: Role Models
Additional readings TBD

**BRING**

A question you have about a public policy issue related to the pandemic

**NOV. 5**  **COVID, Part 2**

We will continue to discuss issues related to the 2020 pandemic. You will also spend time working in your project teams or working individually.

**READ**

Readings TBD

**BRING**

A response to one of the questions we discussed in the previous class

**NOV. 10**  **Literature Reviews**

Students will workshop their literature reviews and receive feedback either within their final project teams or with other individuals.

**TURN IN**

Draft literature review (individual)

**BRING**

Your draft literature review, which you have circulated

**NOV. 12**  **Social Media Posts & Infographics**

Students will workshop their blog posts, threads, and infographics and receive feedback from other teams or individuals.

**TURN IN**

Draft blog post, thread, and infographics (either individual or team)

**BRING**
Your draft blog posts, threads, and infographics, which you have circulated

**November 17**  
**Wildcard Day**

We use course ideas to discuss one or more phenomena proposed by students.

**Read**

Readings TBD

**Watch**

Videos TBD

**November 19**  
**Final Presentations, Part 1**

Project teams and individuals will make their final presentations.

**November 24**  
**Final Presentations, Part 2**

Project teams and individuals will make their final presentations.

**December 1**  
[ No class ]

**Final Projects Due at 10 PM**

**Turn In**

- Literature Review (individual)
- Slides & script
- Post
- Infographic
- Thread

**FEEDBACK, EVALUATION & GRADING**

The course grade is based on a 100-point system.
The midterm and quizzes will involve short responses based directly on chapters in the 3 course texts. Both the midterm and quizzes are open book, but you’ll need to read carefully and think about the text before you start. If you engage with the reading, the questions will be easy to answer and you will receive full credit. There are 6 quizzes, each consisting of 4 questions worth 0.5 points each. The midterm includes 10 questions worth 4 points each.

For the final project, you will receive feedback on your literature review and social media posts from the instructors and your colleagues as you work toward your final presentation. You will revise your literature review and social media posts based on the feedback, and turn these in along with the presentation. These grades will be significantly more challenging, and perfect scores will be rare.

Points are allocated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>MIDTERM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>QUIZZES (6 X 2 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW [individual]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>THREAD (3 pts), BLOG POST (3 pts), INFOGRAPHICS (2 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>FINAL PRESENTATION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MATERIALS

- Kahneman, Thinking, Fast & Slow
- Groopman, How Doctors Think
- Silver, The Signal and the Noise
- A notebook with pen or pencil

LATE WORK

If are not able to take a quiz on time, you may have one extension of up to 3 days with no grade reduction. After that, a quiz can be made up at any time before December 1 for half credit. The midterm and final project must be turned in on time, except in extraordinary circumstances and with the prior approval of the instructors.

DISABILITIES

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit: http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html