

***From Information To Decision: Coping
With a Complex World***
Honors Seminar (HON 231) Course Syllabus
Fall, 2007
11:00 – 12:20, TTh, TEC 227–D

Participating Faculty	
<p>Dr. Frank Fair, Philosophy & Psy. Office: AB4 402, ext. 4-1509 E-mail: PSY_FKF@SHSU.EDU Office Hours: MWF 9:00-9:50 and TTH 9:30-10:50 and by Appointment</p>	<p>Dr. Bill Green, Economics Office: Smith-Hutson 107-D, ext. 4-1267 E-mail: Green@SHSU.EDU Office Hours: M-Th 9:30-10:45; 3:30-5:00</p>
<p>Dr. William I. Lutterschmidt, Biological Sciences Office: LDB – 114 A, ext. 4-1556 E-mail: Lutterschmidt@SHSU.EDU Office Hours: MWF 8:00 – 9:00; T 4:00 – 6:00 and by Appointment</p>	<p>Dr. Bernice Strauss, Director of Academic Support Programs Office: Sam Center AB4 210, ext. 4-4455 E-mail: SAM_BSS@SHSU.EDU Office Hours: By Appointment</p>
<p>Dr. Chris White, Mass Communications Office: Communications 102, ext. 4-1343 E-mail: CWhite@SHSU.EDU Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:00; TTh 4:00 – 5:00</p>	

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- James G. March, *A Primer On Decision Making: How Decisions Happen*, The Free Press, 1994.
- Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics*, William Morrow, 2005.
- *Current Issues in Biology, Vols. 1 – 4*, Scientific American and Addison – Wesley, ISBN # 0321529154
- Additional items on electronic reserve in the library and class handouts.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The primary objective of this course is to introduce the student to fundamentals of decision making and problem solving that will prepared them for subsequent course work and to enrich their lives. To this end, upon completion of this course the student will have learned:

- the fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories of decision making.
- to apply course material to improve thinking, problem solving, and decisions.
- skills in working with others as a member of a team.

- a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values.
- to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

COURSE EVALUATION PROCESS:

The course is divided into four sections. The instructor(s) responsible for each of the four sections will assign work, or give an examination, that will worth 100 points (20% of the final grade). Additionally, each student will be assigned to a group and will be responsible for working with other members of the group to present to the class a “Group Issue Analysis.” The grade for the “Group Issue Analysis” is worth the remaining 20% of the final grade.

Section	Points
“Economic Choices & Decision Making”	100
“Gender & Decision Making”	100
“Decision Making in The Biosphere”	100
“Television and the Public & Decision Making”	100
Your “Group Issue Analysis”	100
Total Points	500

Course grades will be determined on the following basis:

Point Totals	Course Grade
450 – 500 pts.	A
400 – 449 pts.	B
350 – 399 pts.	C
300 – 349 pts.	D
Below 300 pts.	F

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Because of the seminar nature of the course, unexcused absences cannot be tolerated. **For each absence, beyond the two allowed by University policy, two percent (2%) of the total available points will be deducted from your grade.** Attendance will taken at each class meeting. Should serious illness or some other legitimate reason necessitate your missing class, notify the instructor for that unit as soon as possible concerning the reason for the absence.

STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911(a)(2) defines religious holy days as: ”a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will notify the student of a reasonable time frame in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

DISABLED STUDENT POLICY:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If the student has a disability that may affect adversely their work in this class, then he or she needs to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how they can best be helped. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center. There will be no retroactive accommodations.

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Course Schedule

Aug. 21 Introduction to the Course and the Faculty

ECONOMICS AND DECISION MAKING

- 23 “The Economic Way of Thinking” Class Handout; Levitt & Dubner, Introduction & chap. 1.
- 28 “Limited Rationality” March, pp. 1 – 8; Levitt & Dubner, chap.2.
- 30 “Bounded Rationality,” March, pp. 8 – 23; Levitt & Dubner, chap. 3.
- Sept. 4 “Theories of Attention and Search,” March, pp. 23 – 35; Levitt & Dubner, chap. 4.
- 6 “Risk and Risk Taking,” March, pp. 35 – 55; Levitt & Dubner, chap. 5.
- 11 **FIRST EXAMINATION**
- 13 **Group Issue Analysis #1: “Should Parents Be Issued Vouchers for Use in Public/Private Schools?”**

GENDER AND DECISION MAKING

- 18 Introduction, Discussion of Grading, Expectations, Assumptions.
Reading Assignment: Joan C. Chrisler, Ph.D., “The New ‘F Word’”, *President’s Message: Divison 35 News Letter*.
Written Assignment: Great Expectations: In a single typed page describe what you expect from this section. To substantiate your argument, use gossip, glance at the readings, you may even resort to perusing March.
- 20 In The Context of March, Why Gender?
Readings: March, Chapter 2.
Written Assignment: Summarize March, Chapter 2 (in one page).
- 25 Early Development.
Readings: Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria, ”The Eye of the Beholder: Parents’ Views on Sex of Newborns,” *Roberts*. 2. Gould: *Baby X*.
Written Assignment: Early Development: Were you raised as an X? Describe your early learning about gender at home. How did your experience compare to the articles (one page typed).
- 27 Identity Development.
Readings: Etaugh and Bridges, Chapter 4, *Infancy and Childhood*,
Written Assignment: How has the family, schools and the media taught you about what it means to be a male/female?

Course Schedule (Continued)

- Oct. 2 Gender in the Workplace.
Readings: 1. Catherine Hill, Ph.D., Director of Research at the American Association of University Women, *Testimony Before the United States House Committee on Education and Labor, April 24, 2007*. 2. Hochschild and Machung, "The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home," in *Forden, Hunter, and Burns*, Chapter 4.
Written Assignment: Discuss your career choices. How will your work life be affected by your gender?
- 4 Women and Violence.
Readings: 1. Paludi, *Gender, Power, and Violence Against Women*, Chapter 10.
Written Assignment: Discuss what the reading has to say about violence against women. Make certain to indicate what you believe is the cause as well as outlining possible solutions.
- 9 **Group Issue Analysis #2: Separate But Equal: The Case for and Against Single Sex Education**

DECISION MAKING IN THE BIOSPHERE

- 11 Dr. Fair – Making One Decision Maker Out of Many: Constructing Teams by Building Consensus. Read:
(1) March, Chapter 3, "Multiple Actors: Teams and Partners," pp. 103 – 111;
(2) Handout to be read in class on Cost/Benefit analysis.
Dr. Lutterschmidt – Introduction to readings in *Current Issues in Biology*.
- 16 Dr. Fair – Decision Making when Interests Conflict. Read:
(1) March, Chapter 4, "Multiple Actors: Conflict and Politics," pp. 120 – 137;
(2) Handout on "Perceived Risk, Trust, and The Politics of Nuclear Waste;"
(3) Handout on the "Tragedy of the Commons;"
- 18 Dr. Fair – Decision Making with Regard to Sustainable Development: Uncertainties, Values, and Politics. Read:
(1) March, Chapter 4, pp. 139 – 160;
(2) Handouts on Sustainable Development.
- 23 Dr. Lutterschmidt – *Life Out of Step*, by Daniel Grossman. (Vol. 2, Pages 44 – 53.)
- 25 Dr. Lutterschmidt – Student Selected Readings in *Current Issues in Biology*.
- 30 Dr. Lutterschmidt – Student Selected Readings in *Current Issues in Biology*.
- Nov. 1 **THIRD EXAMINATION**
- 6 **Group Issue Analysis #3: "Global Warming: Should Greatly Increased Use of Nuclear Power be a Major Part of Our Response?"**

TELEVISION AND THE PUBLIC

- 8 Chris White does his thing.
- 13 Media Literacy and an Introduction to Mass Media Criticism
Readings: *Ambiguity and Interpretation*, March, Chapter 5 and Media-related Hand-outs

Course Schedule (Continued)

- 15 The Television Industry
Readings: *Ambiguity and Interpretation*, March, Chapter 5 and Media-related Hand-outs
- 20 Television as Cultural Forum
Readings: *Ambiguity and Interpretation*, March, Chapter 5 and Media-related Hand-outs
- 22 **THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**
- 27 Television Narratives
Readings: *Ambiguity and Interpretation*, March, Chapter 5 and Media-related Hand-outs
- 29 **TAKE HOME EXAM AND MEDIA-CONSUMPTION DIARY DUE/WRAP-UP**
- Dec. 4 **Group Issue Analysis #4: “Media Concentration in America: Is Rupert Murdoch the Anti-Christ? ”**
- 6 Come to class having read March, Chapter 6, pp. 258 – 272 on the “technology of foolishness” and be prepared to discuss the issues raised with all of the faculty teaching the course.

GUIDELINES FOR “GROUP ISSUE ANALYSIS”

There will be four (4) “Group Issue Analysis” during the semester. A group of students will make a presentation on a particular issue.

Students will be allowed to indicate preferences for particular issues and will be assigned to groups (teams) according to their preferences to the extent this is possible.

The group (team) presentations must include:

1. The necessary background information to put “the issue” in a meaningful context.
2. Opposing points of view.
3. Critical responses to the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing points of view.
4. Each member of the team is expected to fully participate in the oral presentation.
5. Each team member is expected to recommend an issue resolution — his/her response and justification for it.

Required in advance:

1. It is **essential** for each group to have a **minimum of two meetings** with the faculty member responsible for the particular unit, and
2. An **issue summary** distributed to seminar members containing
 - a. a brief outline of the background of the issue,
 - b. the main contending points of view,
 - c. the major pros and cons for the points of view, and
 - d. suggestions for follow-up inquiry/reading.
3. **The procedure to be used for allocating points among group members must be submitted prior to the group presentation. (Refer to *Point Allocation Among Group Members* on the following page)**

Evaluation Criteria and Methods:

The presentation of the issue analysis by the group should

- (a) be clearly organized,
- (b) convey all the major relevant points accurately,
- (c) use appropriate public speaking techniques,
- (d) use appropriate technology.

The attached *Presentation Evaluation Form* will be used to evaluate each aspect of the presentation and the points associated with each evaluative criteria.

Evaluation Weights:

Fellow students, participating faculty, and the faculty member responsible for that course unit will evaluate the “Group Issue Analysis.” Each evaluator will complete a form indicating the rating given to the presentation and the reasons for the rating. The overall rating will be determined using the following weights:

1/3 = The average of the student ratings,

1/3 = The average of the faculty ratings (by those faculty in attendance), and

1/3 = The rating by the faculty member in charge of the unit.

Point Allocation Among Group Members:

The total points to be allocated among the group is a function of the group average score (0 to 100) and the decision among the group members about how to allocate the points. Members of the group must decide, based on the perceived contribution of each group member, how to allocate the points. For example, if each group member is perceived to have done the appropriate share of the work on the group project, then each member will be given 100% of the points awarded. So if the project was given a grade of 90 then each team member would receive a grade of 90. Alternatively, if there are four members of the team and it is perceived that two team members do more work than the other two, then two members might be given 110% of the grade (99 points) and the other two receive only 90% of the grade (81 points). The allocation must maintain the average for the group, so for every point above the average that one or more team members receive, one or more other team members must have an equivalent reduction. **Any student who feels they have been awarded an improper allocation may appeal to the class coordinator.**