

**PA 753: Decision Making in Public Affairs**  
Course Syllabus, Fall 2016<sup>1</sup>  
Hybrid /Thursdays, 6:00-8:45 p.m. DTC 617



**SAN FRANCISCO**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY**

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Consultation: Mondays 4:00 to 5:30 pm, or by appointment

The very complexity that has made a theory of decision making process essential has made its construction exceedingly difficult. — *Herbert Simon, 1959*

(P)eople make good choices in contexts in which they have experience, good information, and prompt feedback.. .They do less well in contexts in which they are inexperienced and poorly informed, and in which feedback is slow or infrequent. — *Thaler and Snnstein, 2009*

**COURSE INTRODUCTION & DESCRIPTION**

I developed this course to cater to those with concentrations in policy and public management, but the tenets discussed here easily touch upon many areas in public affairs and civic engagement. As current and future designers of policy and as managers of public program, students here should enhance their knowledge of how people arrive at decisions, as individuals or within organizations, as consumers of public programs or participants, themselves, in policy formulation and implementation.

Decisions involve processes, they entail costs: the processes of making public policies, or arriving at good decisions, as members of society are not always fun, short, or cheap. And decisions presume values: tremendous contemporary debates center around responsibilities in a well-functioning society, the role of government or markets, social welfare, corporate regulation, individual freedom, and so on. Therefore, some of the questions you will encounter through the readings, videos, and research here, are the following:

- What do we mean by rationality? How are decisions made in the presence of risk and imperfect information?
- How do policy makers decide among competing values, such as efficiency, and equity?
- Are there shortcuts to decision making? What are cognitive biases? What are their implications for policy design and public management?
- What do we mean by freedom to choose? Could policymakers become choice architects and influence the incentive structures for citizen decision-making?
- How do decisions happen in organizational context? How do managers allocate scarce resources in solving problems? Do public managers differ in their decision styles compared to business managers?

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*: This is a blended/ hybrid-format course. This syllabus must be understood along with the course management contents on I-Learn, where detailed instructions for particular assignments, virtual activities, and additional learning resources may be identified or posted*

- How are the variables above present in some of the policy and public dynamics that you have observed in society, or at your work, in your role as policymaker or decision maker?

### STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES & METHODOLOGY

At the end of the semester, using a methodology of critical reading, discussions, research, reflection, and journaling, students should be able to:

- (1) Demonstrate an understanding of the development of knowledge in the field of decision making, and new discoveries in decision science;
- (2) Reflect on, research, and demonstrate an understanding, of the implications of decision making models for policy design and public administration;
- (3) Develop self-awareness about decision making, as future policymakers and program managers; and
- (4) Contribute, as adult learners, to the collective learning activities of this class.

The course is a seminar; it is not lecture-driven, and we are meeting in person only half the time. You are expected to devote a significant amount of time reading on decision making in public affairs, policy, or services, reflecting / writing your deliberations efficiently and professionally, and acting as effective resource persons to the entire class, in recitation and virtual activities. We will have a mix of light reads and videos and some heavy, theoretical and empirical studies. This seminar employs a progressive deliberation over the materials as the semester goes on.

In this hybrid format, your full attention and preparation are required. Some of the virtual assignments are a series of exchanges, not a one-shot affair or assignment that is due each Thursday. So be aware of the Schedule and posted Activity Guides: virtual activities begin right after the in-person session and **often there are two (2) deadlines to meet, during the virtual week**. Any further instructions via email during virtual weeks should be considered, you are welcome to consult me during office hours, or through the “chat corners” that will be provided on I-Learn.

### LEARNING RESOURCES

The learning resources chosen represent an interdisciplinary array of knowledge from administrative theory, political science, behavioral economics, natural sciences, psychology, and mathematics.

1. Thaler, R. H., and Sunstein, C. R. (2009). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Revised & expanded edition. New York: Penguin.
2. Khaneman, D. (2013). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
3. Norman, D. (2013). *The design of everyday things*. Revised & expanded edition. New York: Basic Books.
4. References - Students are expected to demonstrate graduate-level writing proficiency, and use the APA style of citation throughout the MPA program.
  - a. Hacker, D., & Sommers, N. (2011). *A writers' reference* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

- b. Library - Ms. Mira Foster is the SFSU Librarian for our field. For your library questions, you may contact Mira at [mira@sfsu.edu](mailto:mira@sfsu.edu), or at (415) 405-2590.
5. Additional journal articles, reports, activity guides, including assessment criteria will be posted on I-Learn.
6. Videos from recognized outfits are going to be used extensively, and will be posted on I-Learn.

### PROFESSOR'S POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS

All interaction relating to the course must be of a **positive** nature; understand that not all policies can be written on this syllabus.

My expectations are that as graduate students, you will demonstrate utmost commitment and professionalism in the classroom and in virtual space; diligence and resourcefulness in tapping social science knowledge and tools in understanding the course contents, and improving your professional skills; and consistent monitoring of your individual learning goals. Ensure that potentially debatable topics do not harm the trust that is essential to learning. Look for cues so that participation is equitable and engaging for all.

As members of the academic community, you are enjoined to follow strict rules of academic honesty. Formal disciplinary measures may be meted out for cheating or plagiarism. Demonstrate graduate-level writing proficiency. In your papers, including online discussions, are expected to reference our readings. Papers or online posts that have no explicit reference to scholarly materials will earn a zero grade.

Absences or tardiness will be reflected on your grade. Two (2) absences in this hybridized schedule - meeting only a few weeks of the semester in person — would result in an automatic Fail grade. The amount of time for, and quality of discussion and team outputs can be diminished by absences and having to get everyone caught up. So, plan to arrive on time, bring any homework, and stay until official dismissal. Late arrivals or early departures are partial absences.

Due to time and the constraints of real-time exchanges over scheduled topics in class and online with groups, **no makeups** will be designed if you miss a class, or a virtual activity. Issues of health or personal matters that would prevent you from attending or completing the requirements should be raised as soon as known, and may be addressed through the Incomplete or Withdrawal processes. For requests to take an "Incomplete," the student is responsible for providing justification documents on problems preventing completion of the course. Please also see the College deadlines and University policies.

**Participation in this Seminar.** As an intensive reading and critical-exchange graduate seminar, in this course your participation may be graded more weightily compared to your other courses. You will be called upon to be resource persons to the class as well. As such you must prepare to master key points in the assigned materials. **When in class, look around you to see if** other people would also like the chance to speak.

Excellent final grades presume excellent participation in class. Being in the classroom is not equal to participation at all. Just talking, or asking a question about the schedule, for example, is not the aim here. Prepare for each session of class to contribute meaningful thoughts about the topic at hand. Some exercises in class will be graded as a team or group.

**Communication & Advising.** Head off unnecessary confusion by listening carefully in class, taking notes, reading instructions and keeping up with the schedule. During the semester, the best way to communicate and consult me is by email. Please be informed that I am teaching two classes, one of which has an off-site/ field learning component, during Thursdays. I will monitor and participate in forums during virtual sessions. For emails, I will strive to reply to emails within 48 hours.

Email: [ejoaquin@sfsu.edu](mailto:ejoaquin@sfsu.edu)

Office Hours: Mondays 4:00-5:30 pm (Suite 679, 835 Market St.) or set up an appointment by email

**Use of Gadgets.** While you may use laptops to take notes or access I-Learn in class, you should use a quiet keyboard. Text messaging, calling, personal emailing, and surfing the Internet during class are unprofessional. Unless specifically instructed, or relating to class, you need not access the Internet, and should avoid distracting the class by using electronic gadgets.

#### ADDITIONAL SFSU & CHSS POLICIES

CHSS Withdrawal Policies and Deadlines: The last day to drop a class is September 14, 2016 until 11:59pm. Starting September 15 — November 22, 2016 you must submit a paper withdrawal petition. Withdrawal from a class starting September 15, 2016 will be considered for serious and compelling reasons only and must have accompanying documentation. The following reasons are not considered serious and compelling: Changing your major, poor performance, class not required for graduation/major, lacking the pre-requisite, instructor forgot to drop me, not attending class or more time needed for other classes. If you wish to withdraw from class due to unexpected changes in your work schedule, illness or family emergencies, documentation will be required, along with a copy of unofficial transcripts. Submit your petition within a reasonable timeframe (e.g., within 2 weeks of a change in work hours.) From November 23 — December 14, 2016 you may not withdraw from a class or the University, except only in the case of a serious documented illness or verified accident.

Withdrawals cannot be initiated electronically and must be submitted using a paper application. All electronic submissions of withdrawals will be denied automatically by the Associate Dean. You are only allowed to withdrawal from a maximum of 18 units and take a class no more than 2 times at SF State. Approval from the instructor and/or Chair does not constitute automatic approval from the associate dean so continue attending class until a decision is made. Please refer to the following website for further information on withdrawal polices: <http://chss.sfsu.edu/src>

CR/NC Option: The last day to request CR/NC option is October 19, 2016 until 11:59pm. The Associate Dean will not approve requests for changes if you miss this deadline.

Late Add Policy: The period to add classes via permission numbers is August 24 — September 14.

2016. It is your responsibility to procure a late permission number from your instructor and add the class. Faculty cannot add you into a class. Starting September 15, 2016, a Waiver of College Regulations form must be signed by your instructor, Chair and CHSS Associate Dean to add. This will be approved only if there was an administrative error. Deadlines for all registration procedures, including withdrawals and requests for credit/no credit, can be viewed on the Registration Calendar at the following website: <http://www.sfsu.edu/~admisrec/reg/regsched.html>

Final Exam: According to Academic Senate policy F76-12 a time period is set aside at the end of each semester for a formal examination period. All classes are expected to meet during the final examination period whether an examination is given or not. The final examination schedule is published each semester in the Class Schedule.

[http://www.sfsu.edu/~acadres/final\\_exams/finalfl6.htm](http://www.sfsu.edu/~acadres/final_exams/finalfl6.htm)

Religious observance. “The faculty of San Francisco State University shall make reasonable accommodations for students to observe religious holidays when such observances require students to be absent from class activities.” — SFSU Faculty Manual (2011, 53). Please see the professor well in advance of those days to give notice and figure out accommodations based on the Course Schedule. Failure to give advance notice may deprive you of allowances.

Disability Programs and Resource Center: Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to inform the professor early on. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC, located in SSB 110, can be reached by telephone at 415-338-2472 (voice/TTY) or by e-mail at [dprc@sfsu.edu](mailto:dprc@sfsu.edu).

Student disclosures of sexual violence: SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact these: The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208 [http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe\\_pic/Counseling](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_pic/Counseling) and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208 <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>. For more information on your rights and available resources: <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND WEIGHTS

**A. Attendance & participation at in-person meetings (15%)** - See expectations and policies above. For an excellent grade in this category, try to connect the themes, show how new ones build upon previous lessons, and demonstrate extra diligence or observation, to bring in relevant developments in public affairs.

**B. Printed journals and rejoinders for in-person meetings (35%)** - With the virtual activities (see C, below), the bulk of our course activities is geared toward reading, structured reflections, and writing, 65% when combined.

- In-class journals are **approximately** 500-word **essays** (about 1.5 pages, if single-spaced).
- Follow the classroom journal guide posted on I-Learn on the **contents** of journals.
- Journals without references in proper **APA style** to the readings will earn no grade.
- Submission:
  - Submit them at the start of that class, **around 6 pm**, and not during the break.
  - Submit 2 **hard copies**. A copy will be given to a peer for a rejoinder / peer critique. See the journal guide for the contents of this rejoinder.
- **A full letter grade** is deducted if you submit hours after the deadline. Late in-class journals should be **emailed**.
- Due to the continuing nature of the discussions, and because the material would have been discussed in class, **no journals will be accepted 24 hours after the deadline**.

Consider this: your peers would also have to read your journals, not just the professor, and if you were late the professor would then have to forward your late paper to your peer, who would then have to read an electronic copy that might be harder for them to read, and then have to email it back (or print it by themselves) in time for the next journal.

- Journaling in this seminar serves the following goals, and will be assessed against this rubric:
  1. Documenting, using professional writing, what new things you are learning from the materials;
  2. Demonstrating your reflection of the implications of the material for public administration/ public policy making and implementation;
  3. Demonstrating the connections that you are making between the materials and your public affairs experiences;
  4. Recording your own reflections/ mental processes for absorbing, critiquing information, and arriving at conclusions about the concepts we are learning, as the materials accumulate; and
  5. Having a vehicle through which you can write and exchange ideas with peers and professor, in a structured, participative, timely, and professional manner.

• **Furthering the learning goals through rejoinders and peer editing of journals:**

While PA 753 is by no means a writing class, formal writing is a skill expected of MPA graduates. The journals and exchanges (in hard copies and in virtual sessions) here provide a good avenue to hone your writing and editing skills, if you have no time to attend a writing-refreshment class.

By having the chance to share papers, you could model good reading and writing habits. The chance to read your peers' journals, in turn, would, allow you to pick up good practices, such as:

1. ways to improve your reading/listening (if video) skills — what **key points of the materials have you missed**, that your partner's journal captured?
2. ways to improve critical thinking— what are good **ways of spotting relevance, connections, and substantiating arguments** that your partner's journals demonstrated?
3. ways to improve your formal writing/integration skills — what are good **ways of weaving in several key points/ materials** that your partner's journal demonstrated?

C. **Virtual discussions and other virtual activities (30%)** - The goal here mirrors that of journaling, above, but with online structured discussions within groups, and other assignments to be completed on I-Learn.

- **Activity Guides** and assessment criteria can be found on I-Learn. Sometimes, you will be asked to conduct a small research, to substantiate your arguments.
- Please follow the steps for each session's activity; they are not all the same every week, and they are not one-shots.
- Virtual chats are designed for groups or the class. If you miss it, **there is not going to be an individually designed make-up activity.**
- Like the journals for in-person meetings, timeliness will be weighted substantially in this online platform because of the continuous nature of our discussions.

D. **Final essay — (20%)** — Prepare an analysis of Norman's book, with a bit of research to substantiate your claims.

- Upload your paper on I-Learn. See the course schedule.
- One letter grade is deducted per day if submitted after the deadline. No late paper will be accepted after 48 hours.
- Write your analysis in no less than 3 and no more than 4 pages, single-spaced.
- Goal and contents. Many writers have reviewed Norman's book before; **avoid reading them** to avoid copying them.
  - o This review should be yours (see Academic Honesty mie). You should not follow the typical book reviews on the web. Professional reviewers keep up with the literature and are able to judge or compare a book to others, over time.

Your goal here is different and narrower: **review the book for the implications that its concepts and principles offer for the design and management of public policy and public service.** The book appears to be geared toward the commercial world and products; yet it holds important ideas that are generalizable to/ helpful in public affairs.

- o Demonstrate that you can spot at least some of these generalizable principles and support your claim. What key principles in the book do you find useful for the work of governmental decision-making or policy making and implementation? Or the target beneficiaries of public policy and administration? Identify them, and explain your analysis.
  
  - o Give a few examples of those situations in public policy or administration to which the principles may apply. Conduct some research on those to support your arguments. This essay could mirror your journal for our in-person meeting, but with some research required, not just personal observations, or experiences.
  
  - o Cite any and all source materials in text and at the end of your essay, in APA format.
  
  - o Note that it would be obvious if you read only the first chapters of the book.
- Assessment. Your paper will be assessed in terms of (1) accuracy — your grasp of the principles or concepts that you pick out should be an accurate reading of the book; incorrectly understanding the author can happen if you lift a quote without reading enough for context; (2) correspondence and substance — make sure your application of the principle is fitting the example you choose in public policy or public service, conduct research to provide substance to your argument; (3) writing professionalism, and (4) timeliness.

### Grade Breakdown & Weights

In-class activities	15%
Book analysis	20%
In-class journals, peer editing & rejoinders	35%
Virtual session activities	30%

Students will receive letter grades on their work in which an A is worth 10 points, and A- is worth 9, a B+ is worth 8, a B is a 7, and so on. These grades are then multiplied by their weights (%) and added up to get the final letter equivalent. You may consult me the following semester if you have questions about your final grade. I will give feedback or grades for activities that occur during the semester as much as possible.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

*The Instructor reserves the right to make changes to this schedule*

DATE TOPIC, READINGS, and ACTIVITIES	Due today, if in-person; Deadlines, if virtual this week
<p>August 25 - In person; 6 -7:15 pm only</p> <p>Course Introduction, Requirements, Policies</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Syllabus</b></li> <li>• <b>I-Learn guides and contents</b></li> </ul>	<p>Do virtual introductions on I-Learn</p> <p>Bring textbooks to class</p> <p>Students not present tonight may be dropped from the rolls</p>
<p>Virtual Week of 8/26 ending on 9/1</p> <p>Thinking about Choice, Judgment, &amp; Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Watch the video on I-Learn</b></li> <li>• <b>Follow the Activity Guide</b></li> </ul>	<p>Post reflection journals on or before <b>August 28, 11:59 pm</b> on I-Learn</p> <p>Virtual discussions end at noon of September 1</p>
<p>September 8 - In person</p> <p>Why Study Decision Making? Classical Theory/ Rational Choice Theory</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Obama Administration budget pushes better decisions</b></li> <li>• <b>Rational choice theory, criticisms, and alternative theories, by Mary Zey</b></li> </ul>	<p>Submit 2 hard copies of journal at the start of class — focus your reflection on Zey’s article, not the news report</p>
<p>Virtual Week of 9/9 ending on 9/15</p> <p>Alternative Theories of Decision Making</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The science of “muddling through,” by Charles Lindblom</b></li> <li>• <b>Mixed-scanning: A “third” approach to decision making, by Amitai Etzioni</b></li> </ul>	<p>Post reflection journals on or before <b>September 11, at 11:59 pm</b> on I-Learn</p> <p>Virtual discussions end at noon of September 15</p>

DATE TOPIC, READINGS, and ACTIVITIES	<b>Due today, if in-person; Deadlines, if virtual this week</b>
<p>September 22 - In person</p> <p>Self-Interest &amp; Altruism in Making Choices</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>On the relation of altruism and self interest, by Jane Mansbridge</b></li> </ul>	<p>Submit 2 hard copies of journal at the start of class; bring your peer's previous journal</p>
<p>Virtual Week of 9/23 ending on 9/29</p> <p>Collective vs. Individual Rationality (Tragedy of the Commons; Prisoner's Dilemma)</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The struggle to govern the commons, by Dietz, et al.</b></li> <li>• <b>Watch the video on I-Learn</b></li> <li>• <b>Follow the Activity Guide</b></li> </ul>	<p>Post your journals on or before <b>September 29, at 6 pm</b> on I-Learn</p> <p>Virtual activity ends at 8:45 pm</p>
<p>October 6 - In person</p> <p><b><i>Continue</i> with Game Theory and Management of the Commons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Read - Game Theory and the Coast Guard</b></li> <li>• <b>Listen - Budget Negotiations: A Study in Game Theory</b></li> <li>• <b>Watch - The Secret Rules of Modern Living Algorithms</b></li> </ul>	<p>Bring your peer's previous journal</p>
<p>October 13 - In person</p> <p>Decision Making Inside Organizations</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The writings of Cyert and March by Pugh, et al.</b></li> <li>• <b>Managerial perspectives on risk and risk taking, by March and Shapira</b></li> </ul>	<p>Submit 2 hard copies of journal at the start of class; reflect on both, and try to connect the articles</p>

DATE TOPIC, READINGS, and ACTIVITIES	<b>Due today, if in-person; Deadlines, if virtual this week</b>
<p>Virtual Week of 10/14 ending on 10/20</p> <p>Decision Making Styles: Public vs. Private Sector</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Comparing public and private decision making and decision makers, by Paul Nutt</b></li> <li>• <b>How public and private leaders differ, by Jon Andersen</b></li> </ul>	<p>Post your journals on or before <b>October 17, at 11:59 pm</b> on I-Leam</p> <p>Virtual discussions end at noon of October 20</p>
<p>October 27 - In person</p> <p>Humans and Econs: Two types of individual decision makers</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Thaler &amp; Sunstein, Nudge - read thoroughly the Introduction and all the chapters in Part 1</b></li> <li>• <b>Khaneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow- Part 1 (concentrate on the two systems) and Part 2 (concentrate on heuristics and biases)</b></li> </ul>	<p>Submit 2 hard copies of journal at the start of class. <b>Your analysis must focus primarily on Thaler and Sunstein's work or policy proposals</b>, with Khaneman serving as conceptual reference</p> <p>Bring your peer's previous journal</p>
<p>Virtual week of 10/28 ending on 11/3</p> <p>Money: Financial Decision Making</p> <p><b>Read the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Thaler &amp; Sunstein - read thoroughly all the chapters in Part 2</b></li> <li>• <b>Khaneman - Part 3 (concentrate on planning fallacy and overconfidence) and Part 4 (concentrate on loss aversion and keeping score)</b></li> </ul>	<p>Post your journals on or before <b>October 31, at 11:59 pm</b> on I-Leam</p> <p>Virtual discussions end at noon of November 3</p>

DATE TOPIC, READINGS, and ACTIVITIES	Due today, if in-person; Deadlines, if virtual this week
November 10 - In person  Decision Making in Health Care Policy  <b>Read the following:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Thaler &amp; Sunstein, read thoroughly all the chapters in Part 3</b></li> <li>• <b>Khaneman, Part 5</b></li> <li>• <b>Thinking about pregnancy like an economist, by Emily Oster</b></li> </ul>	Submit 2 hard copies of journal at the start of class. <b>Your analysis must focus primarily on Thaler and Sunstein's work or policy proposals</b> , with the other readings serving as conceptual reference and supplement  Bring your peer's previous journal
Virtual week of 11/11 ending on 11/17  Freedom of Choice in Decision Making  <b>Read the following:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Cost of Rights, by Holmes &amp; Sunstein</b></li> <li>• <b>Thaler &amp; Sunstein, read thoroughly all the chapters in Part 4</b></li> </ul>	Post your journals on or before <b>November 14, at 11:59 pm</b> on I-Learn  Virtual discussions end at noon of November 17
<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>	
December 1 - In person  Using Behavioral Economics to Improve Public Policy and Administration  <b>Read the following:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Behaviorists show the US how to improve government operations, by B. Applebaum</b></li> <li>• <b>How government is using behavioral economics to get people to make better decisions, by J.B.Wogan</b></li> </ul>	Submit 2 hard copies of journal at the start of class.  Bring your peer's previous journal
12/8 - Virtual/ Consultation  <b>Book essay &amp; research</b>	Students work on your book essay and research
12/15 - End of the semester <b>Final paper due</b>	Upload your papers on I-Learn by 8:45 pm

