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# BUS 259: Predictably Misbehaving

Spring 2018, led by Joshua Foster, Ph.D.

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Course Location and Time: Sage 3235 | Mon. & Wedn., 1:50-3:20  
Office Hours: 10:30-12:00 on Mon. & Wedn., or by appt. in Sage 2473  
Course Webpage: D2L Website  
My Email: fosterj@uwosh.edu

I am always happy to help! If you ever have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me or stop by my office. If I'm not in another class I will almost certainly be around to chat.

Texts: *Nudge* by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein  
*The Art of Choosing* by Sheena Iyengar  
Plus online readings via the course website.

## Course Description

This three credit course will use behavioral economics to survey a range of social problems that directly impact community life. As a Quest II Explore Society course (XS) in the University Studies Program, we will focus on the ethical implications of various methods of civic engagement that are used to address these problems. The Signature Question for this course is "How do people understand and engage in community life?" To answer this question, we will carefully consider the efficacy of public policies based on our understanding of human behavior, which will expand your civic knowledge in these areas.

Behavioral economics is the study of how systematic errors in judgment impact economic outcomes. We will ask questions about how these errors influence decision making in business, consumer behavior, government, philanthropy, the environment, and our personal lives. Each week will be dedicated to a specific question for which behavioral economics can prescribe a method of civic engagement to build better communities.

Our discussions will prepare you with a civic knowledge and perspective to thoughtfully address challenges that your own community may face. Knowing how people respond to changes in various economic environments is of paramount importance when designing public policy. Those who are in a position to shape these economic environments are called "Choice Architects." You will be encouraged to consider how you can ethically engage your community as a Choice Architect to improve social outcomes.

## Learning Objectives

This course has been designed to achieve specific UW Oshkosh Essential Learning Outcomes. A description of the related assignments to each of these outcomes is included.

Regarding the **identification and objective evaluation of theories and assumptions**, a dedicated student should be able to:

1. Critically examine the assumptions and theories of economic models for their impact on various community members.
  - Assignments: Quizzes, Midterm, and Final.
2. Recognize the dynamics and evolution of modern economic knowledge.
  - Assignments: Quizzes, Midterm, and Final.

Regarding **critical and creative thinking**, a dedicated student should be able to:

1. Apply critical and creative thinking to how psychological biases can inform economic models of human behavior.
  - Assignments: Quizzes and Final.
2. Employ and further develop their civic imagination.
  - Assignments: Midterm, and Final.

Regarding **ethical reasoning and action**, a dedicated student should be able to:

1. Clearly and respectfully communicate the ethical implications of public policy strategies and action.
  - Assignments: Class participation, Midterm, and Final.
2. Express their voice to affect change with the use of behavioral economics.
  - Assignments: Class participation.
3. Interact with new social issues that are beyond their comfort zone.
  - Assignments: Class participation.

## 1 The University Studies Program

The University Studies Program (USP) is the 21<sup>st</sup>-century approach to a liberal arts education. It provides you with a collection of academic experiences inside and outside of the classroom that are specifically designed to stretch your intellectual curiosities while simultaneously providing real-world applications that you can take with you into your professional, civic and personal life. This education is aided by providing you with a host of scholarly resources, intimate learning groups, and community engagement activities across several semesters.

In this 38-credit program, you will be engaged in meaningful questions regarding sustainability, civic learning, and intercultural knowledge. This course is part of the Quest series, which is designed to help you reflect on questions such as “What do I believe and why do I believe it?” As a Quest II course, our discussions will engage you with challenging social issues, enhance

your ethical reasoning, improve your communication with those who hold different opinions, and prepare you for your transition into Quest III.

One of the most valuable takeaways from this course in your preparation for Quest III will be our analysis of public policy strategies and the corresponding economic outcomes in our communities. This will uniquely prepare you to understand your role as a Choice Architect and the impact you can have on the broader socio-economic environment.

### **1.1 Liberal Arts Education**

The premise of a liberal arts education is that each student should be prepared to be a *free citizen*. This means a liberal arts student should be capable of participating in all areas of civic life. This course will contribute to your education in the liberal arts by asking you to critically examine traditional economic assumptions, explore a wide variety of social problems, and expand your ability to participate in societal discussions.

### **1.2 Civic Knowledge and Engagement**

Civic knowledge consists of an awareness and understanding of the various political and social processes that impact the nature and quality of life in local, state, national, or global communities. It also encompasses the cultivation of skills which may be useful in public life, like effective communication and ethical reasoning. Civic engagement means having an appreciation for and applying the values gained from civic knowledge in real world settings, directed at improving the quality of life in the communities of which one is a part. Civic knowledge and civic engagement emphasize learning, reflection, and action in order to create better communities.

### **1.3 Ethical Reasoning**

Ethical reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Your ethical self identity will evolve as you practice ethical decision-making and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.

In this course, you will develop your ethical reasoning skills through the study of suboptimal social outcomes due to psychological irrationalities, which can often be remedied with public policy. The ethical implications of promoting societal values through various policies will be central to our discussions in class on a weekly basis. Our readings will routinely speak to specific ethical issues. You will be asked to address the ethical implications of various policies in multiple writing assignments, and you will be assessed, in part, on your ability to communicate the ethical implications of various policies during in-class quizzes and examinations.

The goal is not to build consensus on which policies are ethical and which are not, but instead to challenge preconceived notions of what is right and wrong by viewing social issues from new perspectives. Our discussions will ask you to reflect on your personal beliefs while hearing arguments that challenge those beliefs. This reevaluation of ideas will aid you in understanding behaviors and preferences different from your own. This process will help develop the ethical reasoning skills you will rely on during your community experiences in Quest III and beyond.

For an in-depth self-assessment on ethical reasoning, I would encourage you to consult the Ethical Reasoning Value Rubric that is posted to the course website.

## 1.4 Learning Communities

Your learning community for this Quest II course will consist of approximately fifty of your peers. While larger than your Quest I community, it will allow you to hear many more perspectives while sharing your own with a larger audience.

## 1.5 Early Alert

Early Alert is a progress notification system used in all University Studies Program courses. After the third week of class, you will receive a grade for your overall progress in this course and each of the courses you are taking this semester. Your Early Alert assessment for this course will be based on all assignments due by the third week of class. You will receive this information in an email during the 5<sup>th</sup> week of classes. Early Alert is designed to help you evaluate your scholarly engagement so that you know if you are on the right track. If you need to make some changes, there are resources available to support your academic success. These Early Alert grades are not permanent and will not appear on your transcript.

## 2 Attendance

Attendance is extremely important. It's so important it gets its own section in the syllabus. Please plan to attend every class.

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Expectations of students while attending lecture:

- Arrive to class on time.
  - Remove all distractions (e.g. cell phones and laptops).
  - Ask questions when you have them.
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### 3 Assessment

Each of the following assignments and assessments will address your understanding of civic knowledge and engagement.

You will be assessed on the following (% toward final grade):

Midterm Examination (25%)

March 14

Final Examination (25%)

May 9

In-class Quizzes (30% Total)

February 7

February 21

March 7

April 4

April 18

May 2

In-class Participation (10%)

Quest II Activities (10%)

Academic Open House from Feb. 12 to Feb. 16 (3 Visits Required).

UWO Alumnus Visit on Feb. 28.

Undergraduate Research Visit on April 2.

Career Services Event on April 4 and April 11.

Celebration of Scholarship on on April 26.

A *Participation Information Sheet* is available on our course website for a full description of expectations and requirements for this assessment.

#### 3.1 Final Grade

Your final numeric grade will be converted into a final letter grade according to the following rubric.

Numeric to Letter Grade Rubric   All Grades Rounded to the Nearest Integer <sup>1</sup>												
Numeric Grade:	93-100	90-92	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	0-59
Letter Grade:	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F

### 4 Campus Resources

There are many resources to aid you through your studies in the University Studies Program. Please see below for more information on these resources.

<sup>1</sup>For example, if your final numeric grade is a 79.55 then it gets rounded to an 80, which gives you a final letter grade of B-. As another example, if your final numeric grade is 92.42 then it gets rounded to a 92, which gives you a final letter grade of A-.

#### **4.1 Center for Academic Resources**

The Center for Academic Resources (CAR) provides free, confidential tutoring for students in most undergraduate classes on campus. CAR is located in the Student Success Center, Suite 102. Check the Tutor List page on CAR's website ([www.uwosh.edu/car](http://www.uwosh.edu/car)) for a list of tutors. If your course is not listed, click on a link to request one, stop by SSC 102 or call 920.424.2290. To schedule a tutoring session, simply email the tutor, let him/her know what class you are seeking assistance in, and schedule a time to meet.

#### **4.2 Writing Center**

The Writing Center helps students of all ability levels improve their writing. Students can make a free appointment or stop by to see whether a consultant is available. For more information, view their website (<http://www.uwosh.edu/wcenter>), call 920.424.1152, email [wcenter@uwosh.edu](mailto:wcenter@uwosh.edu), or visit them in Suite 102 of the Student Success Center.

#### **4.3 Polk Library**

Polk Library offers many professional librarians who can help you find any and all library resources. Specifically, Ted Mulvey, the Information Literacy Librarian, is available to assist you as you access, evaluate, and use information in University Studies Program classes. Phone: 920.424.7329; email: [mulveyt@uwosh.edu](mailto:mulveyt@uwosh.edu). You may also set up a research advisory session with a librarian at: [rap@uwosh.edu](mailto:rap@uwosh.edu).

#### **4.4 Reading Study Center**

The Reading Study Center is an all-university service whose mission is to facilitate the development of efficient college level learning strategies in students of all abilities. The center offers strategies for improved textbook study, time management, note-taking, test preparation, and test-taking. For more info, email [readingstudy@uwosh.edu](mailto:readingstudy@uwosh.edu), view the website ([www.uwosh.edu/readingstudycenter](http://www.uwosh.edu/readingstudycenter)), visit them in Nursing Ed Room 201, or call 920.424.1031.

#### **4.5 USP Office and The Pollock House**

The Pollock House (800 Algoma Blvd.) is currently occupied by the University Studies Program and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The USP staff there can assist you in a variety of areas, including professional development, course scheduling, peer mentors, community partners, and event organization. The Pollock House has space that may be used by small groups for meetings and events. To reserve a room in the Pollock House, visit <https://www.uwosh.edu/usp/contact-us/pollock-house-reservations>.

### **5 Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Both the University and I are fully committed to providing you with the highest quality education, regardless of a disability. If you have a disability that may require special accommodations for our class, please be sure to speak with the Dean of Students Office in Dempsey 125. In addition, please be sure to speak to me privately at the beginning of the semester so that I know how to best meet your needs.

## 6 College of Business Academic Conduct Policy

As a UW Oshkosh student, it is your responsibility to be informed about what constitutes academic misconduct, how to avoid it and what happens if you decide to engage in it. Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to):

1. Plagiarism (turning in work of another person and not giving them credit).
2. Stealing an exam or course materials.
3. Copying another student's homework, paper, exam.
4. Cheating on an exam (copying from another student, turning in an exam for re-grading after making changes, working on an exam after the designated time allowance).
5. Falsifying academic documents.

Please refer to UWS Chapter 14 (University of Wisconsin Student Academic Disciplinary Procedures) for information on academic misconduct at <http://www.uwosh.edu/deanofstudents/university-policies-procedures/academic-misconduct>. Pay particular attention to UWS 14.03 (definition of academic misconduct) and UWS 14.04 (disciplinary sanctions). Please note that all incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the appropriate university authorities.

It is not acceptable for two or more students to work together and turn in the same work unless the assignment is specifically a group assignment. In the case of a group assignment, groups are treated as a unit and the sharing of work between groups is not permitted. Plagiarism is defined as the use of another's work without attribution. It is acceptable to use a published solution to a particular problem if the solution's source is documented. If you are using material from a published source or an organization's internal documents, that source must be documented or referenced. If proprietary materials are utilized, appropriate permissions must be obtained.

Students are expected to adhere to the University's Academic Integrity Statement. It can be found online at <http://www.uwosh.edu/deanofstudents/documents/academic-integrity-statement>.

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Summary of Topics, Readings and Assessments<sup>†</sup>

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Week 0	<b>Introduction to Behavioral Economics</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L.
Week 1	<b>Libertarian Paternalism and Public Policy Ethics</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L. <i>Assessment:</i> In-class Quiz. February 7.
Week 2	<b>Evaluating Tradeoffs &amp; Delayed Gratification</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L.
Week 3	<b>Irrational Investing: Strategies on Saving for Retirement</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L. <i>Assessment:</i> In-class Quiz. February 21.
Week 4	<b>Over-consumption: Too Much of a Good Thing</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L.
Week 5	<b>Workplace Dynamics: Individual and Collective Behavior</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L. <i>Assessment:</i> In-class Quiz. March 7.
Week 6	<b>Review and Midterm Examination</b> <i>Assessment:</i> Midterm Examination. March 14.
Week 7	<b>Spring Break</b>
Week 8	<b>Happiness: References and Adaption</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L.
Week 9	<b>Health: Nutrition and Fitness</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L. <i>Assessment:</i> In-class Quiz. April 4.
Week 10	<b>Climate Change: A Perfect Storm of Bad Incentives</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L.
Week 11	<b>Trials: Probability Judgments and Findings of Fact</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L. <i>Assessment:</i> In-class Quiz. April 18.
Week 12	<b>Crime, Drugs, and Rock'n'Roll</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L.
Week 13	<b>Charity: Altruism and Pro-community Actions</b> <i>Reading:</i> Check D2L. <i>Assessment:</i> In-class Quiz. May 2.
Week 14	<b>Review and Final Examination</b> <i>Assessment:</i> Final Examination. May 9.

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<sup>†</sup> I reserve the right to adjust this schedule as I see fit. Changes will be posted to D2L.