Decision Making in Complex Environments
A View towards Collective Action and Social Change

SYSC 399U, Fall 2013
Meets T-Th from 10:00 – 11:50am
Knowledge, Values, Rationality Cluster
Leading Social Change Cluster

Explore the heuristics through which individuals, groups and communities make their decisions. No prerequisites.
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Or visit (http://www.pdx.edu/sysc/courses-fall-2013)
Decision Making in Complex Environments: a view towards Collective Action and Social Change (SYSC 399U)

Instructor: Martin Zwick and Rajesh Venkatachalapathy

Decision Making in Complex Environments is an interdisciplinary course that explores the heuristics through which individuals, groups and communities make their decisions in response to their environmental conditions. Such actions are sometimes optimal, sometimes sub-optimal and sometimes outright irrational and harmful and the course identifies the reasons for deviations from rational behavior.

After surveying the psychology of judgment and decision making, the course introduces rational choice theory. Using this framework, it will identify the social, cultural and political contexts in which human actions can be understood.

The course then introduces the critiques of our approach and shifts its focus to decision making capacities of groups, interactions of individuals within groups and interactions of groups with institutions. It concludes by presenting how factors that nurture and catalyze social change and collective action can be understood from this perspective.

Prerequisites: Some familiarity with middle/high school mathematics.

Expected Preparation: Knowledge, Values Rationality or Leading Social Change SINQ desirable, but not required. There are no other pre-requisites.

Basic Course Structure

The sessions are part discussion and part interactive lecture. The students are assigned readings that will be discussed at the beginning of class. The instructor lectures for the remainder of the lecture. The instructor’s lecture will sometimes augment the discussion and sometimes be independent of the discussion. Some of the topics discussed include

- Game Theory
- Bounded Rationality
- Heuristics of Judgment and Decision Making
- Rational Choice Theory
- New Institutionalism
- Group Decision Making
- Collective Action and Social Change