UMBC UGC New Course Request: PHIL 430: Decision Theory

Date Submitted: 1/22/2019                  Proposed Effective Date: as soon as possible

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<th>Dept</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dept Chair or UPD</td>
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COURSE INFORMATION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Number(s)</th>
<th>PHIL 430</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Title</td>
<td>Decision Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transcript Title (≤30c)</td>
<td>Decision Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommended Course Preparation</td>
<td>One 300 level course in philosophy with a grade of C or better, especially PHIL 346, PHIL 371, PHIL 372, PHIL 380</td>
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<td>Prerequisite NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a &quot;D&quot; or better.</td>
<td>One course in Philosophy with a grade of C or better</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repeatable?</td>
<td>☐ Yes ☐ NoX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max. Total Credits</td>
<td>This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grading Method(s)</td>
<td>X ☐ Reg (A-F) X ☐ Audit X ☐ Pass-Fail</td>
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PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (no longer than 75 words):

A philosophical examination of decision theory, which attempts to give an account of how we should make decisions whose outcomes depend upon facts about which we are uncertain. Part of the course focuses on puzzle cases where competing approaches to decision making yield different results. Other topics to be considered include whether our best approaches to decision making are psychologically feasible, and whether and how decision theory should accommodate our different attitudes towards risk.

RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE:

Dr. Lisa Cassell has taught this course once before as a special topics course and plans to teach it in Spring 2020, and then regularly every two years thereafter as part of her standard rotation of courses. It therefore makes sense to have it as a regular course in the catalog. The course is intended for philosophy majors or those with background in philosophy, and is to be offered at our most advanced level. It will go towards fulfilling the philosophy major requirement of two 400 level courses as well as the Upper Division Certificate in Philosophy, Logic, and Science. Because of the advanced level of the topic, we want it to be taught at the 400 level, with the enrollment capped at 20 students, to allow for high level discussion and attract students with adequate background in philosophy. The recommended course preparations listed are our 300 level courses that pertain to logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and epistemology, since PHIL 430: Decision Theory touches on all of these areas at an advanced level. As with all our courses, we want students to have the option of auditing, taking P/F or for a grade.
ATTACH COURSE OUTLINE (mandatory):

See attached
Decision Theory
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Spring 2020

instructor. Lisa Cassell
e-mail. lcassell@umbc.edu
office hours. Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:45-3:45, or by appointment, in PAHB 461

Functional Competency Satisfied by this Course: Critical Analysis and Reasoning

Course Goals and Expectations. This course provides a philosophical examination of decision theory, which attempts to give an account of how we should make decisions whose outcomes depend upon facts about which we are uncertain. Part of the course focuses on puzzle cases where competing approaches to decision making yield different results. Other topics to be considered include whether our best approaches to decision making are psychologically feasible, and whether and how decision theory should accommodate our different attitudes towards risk.

The readings for this course will include both classical texts, as well as some more contemporary work. These reading will not only introduce students to the views of their authors, but will provide models of good philosophical argumentation. By the end of the course, students will not only be familiar with the fundamentals of decision theory, including the formal machinery that decision theory employs, but will also have learned to critically assess the arguments from the readings. They will use these skills to construct clearly written and well-organized philosophical essays.

Prerequisite. Enrollment is limited to students who have taken at least one philosophy course. It is strongly recommended that students have taken one philosophy course at the 300 or 400 level, preferably a course in logic.

Course Readings. All readings will be available online via our Blackboard website. You must bring the relevant required readings with you to every class.

Meetings. Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:00-5:15 in PAHB 456.

Email and Website. This course has a Blackboard website. All of our course materials, including handouts and this syllabus will be posted on Moodle, in their appropriate modules. In addition, the announcements section of our site contains all official class news including dates for current and future reading assignments. It is therefore important that you check the course website regularly.

As a UMBC student, you also have an email that ends in @umbc.edu, and some means to access it. You must check your email frequently. All official class communications concerning closures or other time sensitive matters will come to you via your official UMBC email address.

Schedule. The following schedule is ambitious and, therefore, tentative and subject to change.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING DECISION THEORY

Tuesday, January 28: Introduction to the Course
Thursday, January 30: Tiltemba, Chapter One, “Beliefs and Degrees of Belief”
Tuesday, February 4: Tiltemba, Chapter Two, “Probability Distributions”
Thursday, February 6: Tiltemba, Chapter Three, “Conditional Credences”
Tuesday, February 11: Tiltemba, Chapter Seven (p.225-233), “Decision Theory”
Thursday, February 13: Tiltemba, Hedden, “The Subjective ‘Ought’”

UNIT 2: CAUSAL AND EVIDENTIAL DECISION THEORY, AND THE NEWCOMB PROBLEM

Tuesday, February 18: Tiltemba, Chapter Seven (p.234-255), “Decision Theory”
Thursday, February 20: Gibbard and Harper, “Counterfactuals and Two Kinds of Expected Utility”
Thursday, February 27: Lewis, “The Newcomb Problem as a Prisoner’s Dilemma”

UNIT 3: DECISION INSTABILITY, INFINITIES AND BINDING

Tuesday, March 4: Egan, “Some Counterexamples to Causal Decision Theory”
Thursday, March 6: Hajek, “Pascal’s Wager”
Tuesday, March 11: Broome, “The Two-Envelope Paradox”
Thursday, March 13: Nover and Hajek, “Vexing Expectations”; The St-Petersburg Paradox (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) (optional)
Tuesday, March 18: Spring Break
Thursday, March 20: Spring Break
Tuesday, March 25: Colyvan, “No Expectations”
Thursday, March 27: Meacham, “Binding and Its Consequences”

UNIT 4: ALTERNATIVES TO EXPECTED UTILITY THEORY

Tuesday, April 1: The Allais Paradox, Online Handout
Thursday, April 3: The Ellsberg Paradox, Online Handout
Tuesday, April 8: Kahneman and Tversky, “Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases”
Thursday, April 10: Buchak, “Risk and Rationality”, Chapter One
Tuesday, April 15: Buchak, “Risk and Rationality”, Chapter Two

UNIT 5: JUSTIFYING AND APPLYING DECISION THEORY

Thursday, April 17: Tiltemba, “Representation Theorems”; Briggs, Representation Theorem Arguments (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) (optional)
Tuesday, April 22: Tiltemba, “Representation Theorems”; Briggs, Representation Theorem Arguments (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) (optional)
Thursday, April 24: Meacham and Weisberg, “Representation Theorems and the Foundations of Decision Theory”
Tuesday, April 29: Meacham and Weisberg, “Representation Theorems and the Foundations of Decision Theory”
Thursday, May 1: Olsen, “Subjective Rightness and Minimizing Expected Objective Wrongness”
Thursday, May 8: Wrap-Up

Requirements. Each student must pass each of the following requirements in order to pass this course:

1. Participation/Weekly Discussion Questions: 15%
2. Presentation: 15%
3. Midterm Paper: 30%
4. Final Paper: 40%

Participation/Weekly Discussion Questions: Your participation grade will reflect your attendance and contributions to class discussions, including your conformance to the norms of classroom etiquette (more on this below). You will also be expected to post a discussion question about the reading to Blackboard before every class. You will be expected to be in class to discuss your discussion question.

Presentation: You will be asked to do a short (20-30 minute) presentation sometime during the last two weeks of the semester on the topic of your final paper.

Midterm Paper: You will be asked to write a short paper (4-6 pages) on a topic covered in the first part of the course. I will circulate a list of topics a month before the paper is due, though you may write on a topic of your own choosing, with permission. This paper will be mainly expository.

Final Paper: You will be asked to write a longer paper (7-10 pages) on a topic covered in the course. Again, I will circulate a list of topics a month before the paper is due, though, again, you may write on a topic of your own choosing, with permission. In this paper, you will be asked to critically assess one or more of the views considered in the readings.

Grade Complaints. I am happy to talk to you about your grade throughout the semester. If you are confused about why you received the grade that you did, or if you disagree with the grade that you received, then you should come see me during office hours, or schedule an appointment. There is, however, a procedure that you will be expected to follow. First, you are expected to read the comments, if any, that I have made on your work. Second, you are expected to write down either your questions or your complaints about your grade. Third, you expected to email me those questions or complaints in advance.

Classroom Etiquette. You are expected to be respectful in class. This means that you should not interrupt when someone else is speaking; that you should turn off your phone during the lecture; that you should not sleep or read unrelated material during the lecture; that you should not use the internet during the lecture; and so on. Violation of any of these norms will hurt your participation grade.

Office Hours and Appointments. You are encouraged to make good use of my office hours. I am here to help you succeed in this course, and I am more than happy to review your lecture notes, to explain difficult material a second time (a third time, a fourth time, etc.), and to discuss any questions or insights that you may have. Though I won't spend my office hours going over things that you missed due to unexcused absences, a lot of the material that we cover in class is very difficult. Therefore, I fully expect that you will come to talk to me regularly during
my office hours about stuff that you don’t understand. If you are not available to meet during my office hours, I’m happy to arrange another time to meet with you.
UMBC Statement of Values for Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult the UMBC Student Handbook, or the Office of Undergraduate Education.

Disclosures of Sexual Misconduct and Child Abuse or Neglect

As an instructor, I am considered a Responsible Employee, per UMBC's Policy on Prohibited Sexual Misconduct, Interpersonal Violence, and Other Related Misconduct (located at http://humanrelations.umbc.edu/sexual-misconduct/umbc-resource-page-for-sexual-misconduct-and-other-related-misconduct/). While my goal is for you to be able to share information related to your life experiences through discussion and written work, I want to be transparent that as a Responsible Employee I am required to report disclosures of sexual assault, domestic violence, relationship violence, stalking, and/or gender-based harassment to the University's Title IX Coordinator.

As an instructor, I also have a mandatory obligation to report disclosures of or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect (www.usmh.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionVI/VI150.pdf). The purpose of these reporting requirements is for the University to inform you of options, supports and resources; you will not be forced to file a report with the police. Further, you are able to receive supports and resources, even if you choose to not want any action taken. Please note that in certain situations, based on the nature of the disclosure, the University may need to take action.

If you need to speak with someone in confidence about an incident, UMBC has the following Confidential Resources available to support you:
The Counseling Center: 410-455-2472
University Health Services: 410-455-2542
(After-hours counseling and care available by calling campus police at 410-455-5555)

Other on-campus supports and resources:
The Women's Center, 410-455-2714
Title IX Coordinator, 410-455-1606
Additional on and off campus supports and resources can be found at: http://humanrelations.umbc.edu/sexual-misconduct/gender-equity/title-ix/.

Student Disability Services (SDS)

UMBC is committed to eliminating discriminatory obstacles that may disadvantage students based on disability. Services for students with disabilities are provided for all students qualified under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the ADAAA of 2009, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act who request and are eligible for accommodations. The Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) is the UMBC department designated to coordinate accommodations that would allow students to have equal access and inclusion in all courses, programs, and activities at the University.

If you have a documented disability and need to request academic accommodations, please refer to the SDS website at sds.umbc.edu for registration information and to begin the process, or alternatively you may visit the SDS office in the Math/Psychology Building, Room 212. For questions or concerns, you may contact us through email at disAbility@umbc.edu or phone (410) 455-2459.

If you require accommodations for this class, make an appointment to meet with me to discuss your SDS-approved accommodations.