BLHV 251 01: Critical Thinking and Ethical Decision-Making

Fall 2015 – Wednesdays - 5:20 – 7:50 PM
C118   640 Mass. Ave

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Required Texts:


Other articles to be distributed in class.

Course Description:

*Many people would sooner die than think. In fact they do.* – Bertrand Russell

*Don’t worry about what people think. They don’t do it very often.* – (Bumper Sticker)

Each and every day we make choices and decisions, both personally and professionally. Ideally, these choices and decisions are guided by the norms of rationality, made after considered judgement, which, when properly executed, result in effective action.

One objective of this course is to identify the individual, interpersonal, and institutional forces that shape our judgement processes. In particular we will identify factors and processes that
can lead good people to make bad decisions. A second objective is to identify the strategies and practices that promote rationality and considered judgement.

A lack of critical thinking in the workplace produces inferior products and services, leads to groupthink, and reduces the effectiveness of decisions. This class will also examine how groups evaluate and analyze ideas, resolve problems, and make key decisions.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate a basic understanding of the ProACT model of decision-making;
- Students will be able to identify logical fallacies and hindrances to critical thinking;
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of groupthink and identify ways to avoid it;
- Students will recognize the role emotional intelligence and group dynamics play in group decision-making;
- Students will explain how to apply these concepts to personal decision-making and future practice.

Course Requirements: For this course you will be evaluated on the following assignments:

- “Biff Tannen” analysis (10 percent)

  - Smart Choice Decision paper (15 percent)

    This assignment will be to take a decision, real, current, or past or future, and write out a plan following the ProACT model described in the text and discussed in class.

- 12 Angry Men analysis (Mid-term – 15 percent)

  For our discussion of “12 Angry Men” I want you to prepare a bullet point analysis of the issues for discussion that will be identified in class. The bullet point analysis should highlight key points for answers to each of the questions.

- Thirteen Days analysis (Final – 35 percent)

  For this final project you will focus on leaders who exercised judgment under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity. More specifically, this case focuses on a decision-making process that ultimately resulted in a successful resolution to a crisis. You will identify the critical events and processes that shaped the decision-making process and analyze the strategy and execution (or was it just good luck?) in the result.

- Blog Contributions (10 percent): Each student will be assigned to a team by the second week of class. On this team, students will rotate as blog discussion leader for each week.

When you are a blog discussion leader, your job is the following:
• Review the relevant theories for the following week
• Write a brief reaction to each assigned reading
• Include any questions you might have about the content
• Link to an interesting article or example that is prompted by the reading
• Generate questions to start the discussion

The rest of the team: When you are not the leader, your job is to do the following:

Post an application of the content, a question involving the content, an example of the content in use, questions about this that may relate to other things we have studied, etc. These posts should be completed by Tuesday evening at midnight prior to the class discussion.

The purpose of the blog is to extend the learning. For those of you that are swamped with learning on certain weeks, you can skip two weeks over the course of the semester. Please do not skip if you are scheduled to be the leader. In that case you should switch leadership weeks with a team member.

At the end of the semester, you will be asked to rate your team member’s participation in the blog. This rating will be considered in the development of your blog participation grade.

-Class Contributions (10 percent)

Class participation is a very important part of the learning process in this course. I expect you to come to class on time, completely and thoroughly prepared. As class participation is an important part of each student’s learning experience, class attendance impacts everyone. As part of class participation, each student will be assigned to one or two class sessions (depending on class size) to serve as a presenter to apply the theories to a specific context. Students will post their reflections on the readings to their blog team. You will be evaluated on your contributions as part of that participation. A contribution is a comment or reflection from you that possesses one or more of the following properties:

• Offers a different and unique, but relevant insight to the issue;
• Moves the discussion forward to generate a deeper, richer appreciation of the concept or issue;
• Transcends the ‘I feel’ syndrome. That is, it includes references to the readings, cases, or exercises and identifies possible tradeoffs or dilemmas associated with ethical decision-making.

Grading: Undergraduate course grades include: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, and F.

A 100-93
A-  92-90
B+  89-87
B   86-83
B-  82-80
C+  79-77
C   76-73
C-  72-70
D+  69-67
D   66-60
F   59 and below

Class Calendar - The following schedule is subject to change.
Sept. 8 – Introduction, What is Critical Thinking? Assumptions, Perceptions and Processing
Sept. 15 – Recognizing and Avoiding Critical Thinking Hindrances, Propaganda and Logical Fallacies
Sept. 22 – First Assignment due – “Biff Tannen”
The Realities of Decision-Making, Individual, Interpersonal and Institutional Dynamics that affect Decision-Making
  Smart Choices, Chap 10
Sept. 29 – Smart Choices – How to think about, how to define, and how to clarify what you’re really trying to solve
  Smart Choices, Chaps 1-3
  Drive, Chaps 1-2
Oct. 6 – Decision under Uncertainty – Alternatives, Consequences, Trade-Offs
  Smart Choices, Chaps 4-7
  Drive, Chaps 5-7
Oct. 13 – The Wise Decision-Maker – How to account for your appetite for risks, How to plan ahead, How to make wise decisions a way of life
   *Smart Choices*, Chaps 8, 9, 11
   *Drive*, Chaps 8-9

Oct. 20 – Prepare to Be Wrong
   *Drive*, Chaps 10-12

Oct. 27 - Assignment 2 due – Smart Choice paper

Nov. 3 – Group Decision-Making – The Abilene Paradox

Nov. 10 – Group Decision-Making – Groupthink

Nov. 17 – Group Decision-Making – *Twelve Angry Men* (movie should be watched prior to this class.)

Nov. 24 – Assignment 3 due – *Twelve Angry Men* analysis

Dec. 1 – Judgment Under Uncertainty – *Thirteen Days*

Dec. 8 – Final class – Assignment 4 - Analysis of *Thirteen Days* due **6 PM December 21, 2015**

**Late Assignments:** The expectation is that assignments should be turned in (hard copy or electronic copy) on the due date; however, I am aware of the reality of students with full-time jobs, families, and other obligations. I want your best effort and best work, not something incomplete, or something you wouldn’t be proud to turn in. Please discuss with me if extra time is needed to complete an assignment. Late assignments that haven’t been discussed with me and haven’t been turned in by the next class following the due date will be lowered one full letter grade.

**Attendance:** Please review the BALS Student Handbook in the section, “Class attendance/absence” ([http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/student-handbooks](http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/student-handbooks)). You are required to attend all classes, except for documented emergencies or university permitted absences. **Three (3) absences may result in a failing grade for the course.** You are responsible, and will be held accountable, for any work missed due to an absence, late arrival or early exit.
**Georgetown Honor System**: All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at www.georgetown.edu/honor, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking.

Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

**Plagiarism**: In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail.

If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student will receive a grade of F for the course.

**Turnitin.com**: Students acknowledge that by taking this course all required papers can be submitted for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

**Students with Disabilities Policy**: Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. If you are a student with a documented disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm) before the start of classes to allow their office time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

**Classroom Etiquette**: Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers, or other communication devices while in class. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of other’s views and opinions.

**University Resources:**
Policy Accommodating Students’ Religious Observances

The following is university policy:

Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity

During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university’s Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. If the university is closed, this class will meet through distance means such as online videoconferencing; check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings.

The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.