

WESTMONT COLLEGE

IS 1xx - Decision-Making in a Global Context
Fall 2025

Course Information

Time: MWF 9:00-10:00am or equivalent
Location: Off-campus program
Instructor: Phil Beccue, Adjunct Faculty / Founder & Principal, White Deer Partners / 805-390-5166
www.WhiteDeerPartners.com

Course Description

Motivation

This course offers a thorough introduction to the basic principles of decision analysis. You will learn how to think about and analyze the choices that shape our lives and organizations. We will discuss various organizational and practical challenges to making high-quality decisions, and present the various tools and methods that can be employed to address these challenges.

Many of today's businesses operate in multiple countries, regulatory environments, currency exchanges, and trade policies — so an integral goal of this course is to expose you to various cultures and points of view from around the world. You will dialogue alongside business and community leaders that come from all over the globe and have vastly different perspectives than yours. You will work together to maximize each other's strengths, and to put those strengths toward a common goal. You will find unique opportunities to further enrich your leadership skills with real-world experiences outside the U.S.

We will learn and apply topics around decision-making and cultural norms that are only possible by being there. You will engage with small business owners, understand their challenges and opportunities, dig in to at least one key issue for each one and work together on teams to solve business and organizational problems with a decision lens.

Structure

A goal of this course is to expose students to decision-making contexts at the lower socio-economic levels of societies that have differing worldviews compared to western democratic ideals, and with practical engagement help them to think globally, communicate cross-culturally, and overcome cultural obstacles in understanding and supporting the aspirations of local leaders. We will use local contacts to set up meetings or engagements with the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum – the “normal local people.” These can be visits or engagements in a local project or even a presentation to educators, shop-owners, county authorities, etc. We will connect these local issues with some touch points close to the national economy – e.g., in Viet Nam we may visit a coffee plantation and a nationally-owned coffee retail establishment. Students will reflect on relationships between fundamental beliefs and business structures, goals, strategic directions, economic status, and quality of life.

Students will work in groups of 3-5 on at least 4 practical engagements with local leaders. These groups will likely have a mix majors, analytical backgrounds, and maturity levels, and teams will be designed to complement the skills as students taking distinct roles on their teams, much as organization, volunteer,

and business teams experience in any setting. Students will develop a special expertise in problem structuring, leadership, value modeling, and data collection, and as opportunities present themselves, some groups may also be required to apply advanced analytical techniques such as probabilistic modeling, creating best-practice parametric models in excel, conducting analyses of multiple alternatives and a full range of uncertain futures, and generating multiple sensitivity analyses to create insights around optimal policies.

For each country, students will be exposed to one to three key topics emphasizing underlying context and read a short book or article on those topics. For example, in China they may focus on the history and personality of Deng Xiaoping, leader of the Chinese Communist Party, to explore how his life and personal beliefs were integral to the vision for his country after Mao's rule, especially how his open market policies deviated from the original socialist elements set forth in 1949. Students will write a 2-page summary paper on what they noticed or were impressed by, and compare the country we are visiting to their own or another region recently visited. The first country must be compared to someplace they have already visited.

IS 1xx Learning Outcomes

Because this course is one part of a broader Westmont education, those outcomes have connections to that broader education. This course will include at a minimum the following learning outcomes:

- **Communication Skills.** Students will be able to communicate decision principles and strategies for small businesses and community organizations following the standard conventions of writing or speaking in the discipline. Students will have ample opportunity to demonstrate communication skills through class exercises, presentations, and client interactions.
- **Christian Synthesis.** Students will make evident the intersection of their skill and knowledge in informing good decision-making practices with a deep understanding of how their faith informs their interaction with other cultures, personal applications, and their vocations as followers of Christ.

Furthermore, we will discuss a rigorous, disciplined approach to solving decision problems with an emphasis on value-focused thinking, in the context of multicultural viewpoints, limitations, and aspirations. To that end, this course will:

- Expose students to a variety of decision-making styles and connecting with the worldview of decision-makers from other cultural contexts
- Improve student's understanding of quantitative decision-making for management
- Grow "soft skills" in areas such as leadership, facilitation, coordination, and communication
- Develop an understanding of how quantitative tools and analysis may lead to improved decision-making
- Improve quantitative reasoning ability
- Increase student's facility with spreadsheets
- Refine skills in problem structuring to prepare for applications of data analytics, computer programming, financial analyses
- Raise awareness on balancing competing values of economics, environmental, technology impact, class discrimination, justice, local regulations, necessity of bribes and kickbacks, integrity

- Encourage students to interpret, reflect on, and use quantitative models and data in public, industry, and personal decision making.

These outcomes will be assessed through regular written assignments, project work with nationals, class discussions, and exams.

Decision Analysis Defined

We all make decisions many times a day. Most of these are automatic, habitual decisions, such as what to wear, when to break for lunch, what to do next weekend. For small decisions, if we make poor choices we may be frustrated or embarrassed, but it is typically not worth spending a large amount of time/energy to improve. But strategic decisions are different. They could have a significant impact on your own life, or on your organization. For some companies, their very survival may depend on the outcomes of their strategic choices.

Decision Analysis helps people and organizations address strategic questions with rigor, often calling on decision professionals to assist in structuring, quantifying, and evaluating decision alternatives. To achieve decision quality, one needs to think carefully about the tough questions in high-risk, high-stakes decisions, such as:

- What alternative courses of action can be taken?
- How do these alternatives compare with respect to risk and return?
- Which factors in the decision have the most impact on the desired outcome?
- How much money or time is it worth to purchase information to help make the decision?
- Where should information-gathering efforts be focused?
- What do I do with limited data to support a decision?
- How do I manage capital investments with uncertain demand forecasts?
- What if the company forecast of the future is wrong?
- How do I reflect difficult tradeoffs for competing values?

Decision Analysis is based on solid and proven principles, and is especially effective at maximizing opportunities characterized by large investments, long time-horizons, portfolio interdependencies, difficult tradeoffs, lack of consensus, and numerous sources of uncertainty and risk.

Prerequisites: None

Resources

- Readings
 - “Making Hard Decisions” (2004) by Robert Clemen and Terence Reilly
 - “Smart Choices” (2005) by John Hammond, Ralph Keeney, and Howard Raiffa
 - “Decision Quality” (2016) by Carl Spetzler, Hannah Winter, and Jeffifer Meyer
 - Harvard Business Review (November 2013) article by Hugh Courtney, Dan Lovallo, and Carmina Clarke. [Deciding How to Decide](#)

- Software
 - You must have access to Microsoft Office (2013 or later). The college provides free licenses to Microsoft Office 365. Visit the IT support desk at the library for more information.
 - Optional: DPL Professional Academic Software by Syncopation Software

General Education

GENERAL EDUCATION: COMMON SKILLS. Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning

This course fulfills the Common Skills: Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning (QAR) requirement because it emphasizes understanding and communication of numeric data to inform and communicate value tradeoffs and characterize risk and uncertainty. Alternatives are compared by building mathematical models of various futures, including probabilistic analyses. The students will be challenged to communicate quantitative results in graphical and concise summaries of complex analyses in a format easily understood by decision-makers. Methods employed to analyze strategic decisions include strategy tables, decision hierarchies, tornado sensitivity diagrams, 2-dimensional sensitivity analyses, and risk profiles.

GENERAL EDUCATION: COMPASSIONATE ACTION. Serving Society

This course fulfills the GE requirement, Serving Society. Students will be exposed to decision-makers from many different cultural backgrounds and in small groups will have the opportunity to have deep conversations about the connection between their business needs, values, and worldviews. They will apply decision-making tools and processes to real-world decisions of small business owners and community leaders, both learning from them and offering insights into how the local leaders' values are consistent with creative strategies and new opportunities. There will be 3-4 projects in the semester, and student groups will interact with local leaders 2-4 times within a 7-day period, so that we anticipate roughly 20 hours of service engagement time in this course. These experiences are well beyond the cultural experiences of tourists that can be isolated from the opportunities, aspirations, challenges, and frustrations of the local culture. Students will not have lectures by local guides, but rather enter into a dialogue with local business owners and political leaders about current issues they face. They will wrestle with economic challenges, environmental concerns, class discrimination, and political equity. Reflection essays will demonstrate the students grasp of other cultures and the contrast with and awareness of their own culture in the context of daily life and long-term planning.

Commented [CF1]: Given the recent faculty decision to eliminate "Serving Society" as a GE requirement, we kept it here with the recognition that it probably does not need to be categorized as "GE" on the syllabus (just being careful here). We also included a Rationale, but recognize that too might be unnecessary given the recent change.

Assessment

Letter grades will be assigned according to relative contributions of various aspects of the course as follows:

- Class participation (10%)
- Problem sets and essays (20%)
- Class projects (40%)
- Midterm exam (10%)
- Final exam (20%)

For class projects in the field, students are expected to work in groups of three to five, each taking a specific role in the team. Emphasis will be on applying concepts in lectures and problem sets, and will include a final presentation for each project.

The course will be graded as follows:

	Course Score
A	93
A-	90
B+	87
B	83
B-	80
C+	77
C	73
C-	70
D+	67
D	63
D-	60
F	<60

Instructions for students with disabilities

Students who choose to disclose a disability are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) as early as possible in the semester to discuss possible accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted to students whose disabilities have been verified by the ODS. Accommodations will be designed to minimize the impact of a disability and ensure equal access to programs for all students with disabilities. Please contact ods@westmont.edu for more information.

Academic integrity policy

Dishonesty of any kind is not tolerated and may result in loss of credit for the work involved and the filing of a report with the Provost's office. Be familiar with the College's plagiarism policy found at www.westmont.edu/offices/provost/plagiarism/plagiarism_policy.html. For this class, you are encouraged to work together in groups on some assignments and group projects. You may also seek help from your instructors and fellow students. Outside resources that provide specific solutions such as Chegg and textbook solutions manuals are strictly prohibited. If in doubt, please consult with the instructor.

Course schedule

Week	Day	Topic
1	Mon	Introduction to Decision Analysis
	Wed	Introduction to Decision Quality
	Fri	Fundamentals of Decision-Making
2	Mon	Elements of a Decision: Values
	Wed	Elements of a Decision: Decisions
	Fri	Elements of a Decision: Uncertainties
3	Mon	Modeling Decisions: Influence Diagrams
	Wed	Modeling Decisions: Influence Construction
	Fri	Modeling Decisions: Decision Trees
4	Mon	Project #1
	Wed	Project #1
	Fri	Project #1 Presentation
5	Mon	Values in a Business Context
	Wed	Decision Dialogue Process
	Fri	Decision-making Styles
6	Mon	Leadership and Project Teams
	Wed	Project #2
	Fri	Project #2
7	Mon	Project #2 Presentation
	Wed	Probability Basics
	Fri	Subjective Probability
8	Mon	Pitfalls: Heuristics and Biases
	Wed	Expert Elicitation
	Fri	Biases and Traps in Decision-making
9	Mon	Project #3
	Wed	Project #3
	Fri	Project #3 Presentation
10	Mon	Evaluation Principles
	Wed	Expected Value Computation
	Fri	Risk Profiles
11	Mon	Value-of-Information
	Wed	Value-of-Control
	Fri	Mid-term Exam
12	Mon	Project #4
	Wed	Project #4
	Fri	Project #4 Presentation
13	Mon	Commitment to Action
	Wed	Multiattribute Utility Models: Basics
	Fri	Additive Utility Functions
14	Mon	Assessing Utility Functions
	Wed	Assessing Weights
	Fri	Final Exam

Commented [PB2]: Throughout the course, students will work in groups of 4-5 on real decision problems faced by local leaders (e.g., in China, Viet Nam, Saudi Arabia, Greece) and apply concepts to local business owners and community leaders.

Commented [PB3]: In 3-4 countries, students will work in groups with individual business owners or local leaders, spending 6 total hours spread between 3 or more sessions (2 hours for each of 3 sessions) within a 10-day visit. With 3-4 countries, we anticipate each student will accumulate 18-24 service hours in a cross-cultural setting helping with practical problems.

Commented [PB4]: Students will be writing reflection essays to examine the complexities of economic challenges, environmental concerns, class discrimination, and political equity from their experiences on class projects with local leaders.