

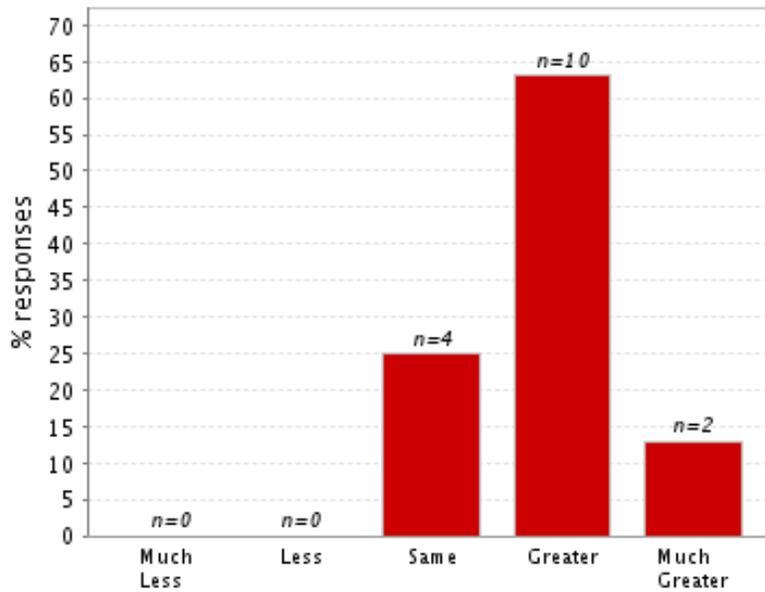
Overview of Evaluations for Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

PSYC 458 01 / ECON 263 01 Decision Neuroscience Fall 2014

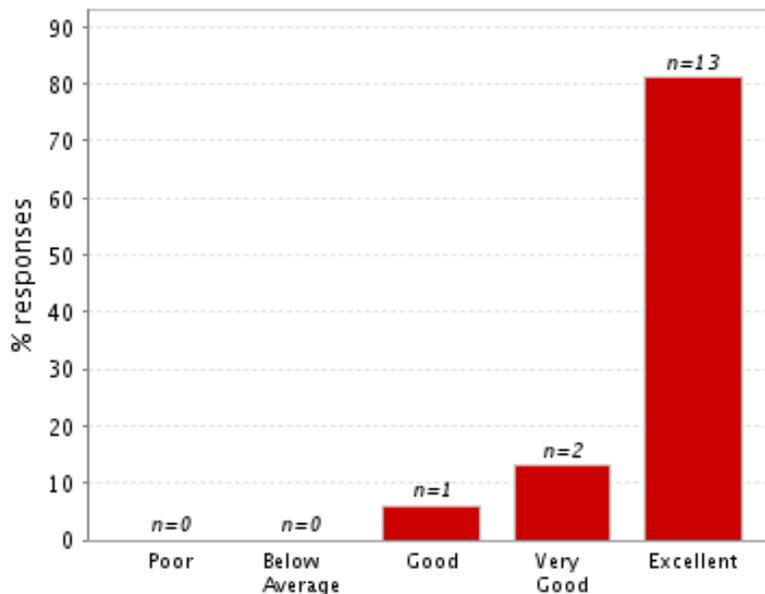
Total number of students: 19

Evaluations completed: 16 (Number of declines 0; Number of non-respondents: 3)

Overall, how would you rate the workload of this course in comparison to other Yale courses you have taken?



What is your overall assessment of this course?



Question 1

Looking back on Psychology 458 01 / Economics 263 01, what is your overall assessment of the course? What are its strengths and weaknesses, and in what ways might it be improved?

Response 1

I loved the course - learned a significant amount from it.

Response 2

A really great class--I learned a lot from all aspects of it, including lecture, reading, reading responses, and paper. Well-organized, very responsive professor, interesting topics, etc. My only complaint would be the size. 18 is just a bit big.

Response 3

This is a very good course, and I'm not sure that it could actually be substantially improved from a neuroscience perspective. As a non-neuroscientist, I wish there had been more focus early on as to how brain scans lead to practical developments, like a new drug or a new form of therapy or some kind of useful persuasive technique. (We got some of this later, but only after about six straight weeks spent on explaining how the brain evaluates rewards without talking much about human behavior.)

Response 4

Excellent class! Loved the balance between participation, discussion, and written assignments

Response 5

Great class, exactly what you expect. Everything was spelled out very clearly and I had a very positive experience.

Response 6

It was a challenging but completely doable course if one had a few of the recommended prerequisites. The wealth of the material made it hard to keep certain things straight in our head, but when we told Greg this he created a very handy guide that summarized all that we had learned in one convenient place, which was super kind of him. The weekly reading responses helped my writing skills a lot more than I expected, but it might be nice to have an occasional week with a slightly different assignment just to add some variety.

Response 7

This course is fantastic, I would even say the best course I've had at Yale. I loved that the only readings for the course were relatively current journal articles. Reaction papers were a fantastic way to both ensure in-depth reading of the required paper each week and also foster general scientific literacy. Discussions were productive and informative. The final paper assignment

provided the right balance of structure and freedom. One suggestion might be finding structured ways of reviewing readings from previous weeks, just so they stay fresh in our memories. It felt sort of like we would have class on a topic and then totally move on. Maybe a more integrative reaction paper one week around midterm and again at the end, requiring citations from a number of the semester's readings? Another suggestion would be have a chance for everyone to share what they're working on for their final project. This isn't all that important, but I was really curious what other people were working on.

Response 8

This class is the DEFINITION of learning curve! It starts off very difficult, especially if you have never taken an economics or cognitive science course. But, as you continue through the semester the readings become a little easier (either they become easier or you just learn how to read them better), and you become more skillful at writing the reading responses. The course is composed of one reading response/week and a final paper. Class discussions are AWESOME and Professor SL? He's probably the B-E-S-T professor at Yale University. Do you remember that teacher in High School that you really loved because he/she was always looking out for you and made class fun? That's basically Professor SL!

Response 9

This course was an absolute pleasure and perhaps the best course I've taken in the Psychology department. I gained a really solid understanding of a lot of neuroanatomy and learned so much about decision neuroscience and neuroeconomics. Greg was phenomenal and made every class a blast wish we met more than once a week (I can't believe I'm asking for more class...)! The class is definitely challenging, more so than the syllabus makes it out to be. I was expecting a substantial level of reading but wasn't expecting our reading responses to be graded so stringently, and of course the material is quite difficult. Nevertheless, I think I handled it pretty well and I'm really glad I was able to take this course.

Response 10

Overall I feel like we learned a lot and covered a lot of information. I became skilled at reading lots of studies and summarizing them well. The jumpstarts were fun too. In regards to what can be improved, I feel like it is hard for me to be able to articulate exactly what I learned, even though I know I learned a lot. While the discussion was interesting, I would have like to have a little more explanation from Prof. SL.

Response 11

The workload was pretty gigantic. Cool course overall. I don't think that the jumpstarts were a great use of time; maybe they could be limited to a small number of minutes? It was very helpful to have the paper spread out over two deadlines so that we couldn't wait to write the whole thing until right before the end.

Response 12

Terrific course. Very in-depth material and the papers and topics were all quite interesting.

Response 13

Outstanding... I like that the reaction papers ensure that everyone has read the papers. Discussion was great. Jumpstarts were awesome. I think it would be helpful to start off the class

with some general tips for tackling decision neuro papers or with a brief survey/intro to what's been done and who's who in the decision neuro world (e.g. who is Glimcher or Knutson and how do they approach decision neuro differently)

Response 14

Extremely strong course overall. Prof SL was caring, invested, brilliant, quick to give feedback, and highly organized. I learned a ton about a very specific area in neuroscience, and truly feel like I now know this demanding material a mile deep. More than that, I got tremendously better at reading and writing about scientific journal articles, as well as feel like I now have a great mentor in the neuroscience faculty. I didn't expect this class to feature AS MUCH serious neuroscience and primary research as it did, but this was a welcome surprise. This class always felt fairly rigorous, but there was a great payoff in material learned. I left the course brimming with ideas for future imaging experiments (including a possible thesis idea), as well as grateful for having the opportunity to have taken the challenging-but-worthwhile course. Incidentally: Try to get this to count as a SC distributional requirement!!!! This was real science! Shouldn't be an SO; should be an SC.

Response 15

It is an amazing course! very interesting topic and a very dedicated and amusing professor.

Response 16

I really enjoyed this class. As a neuroscience psychology major there was an economics learning curve that I had to catch up on. One strength of the class is that you learn from primary literature as true academics do. Since there are no assessments there is no pressure to try and absorb the every single detail about decision making but you still learn a ton without realizing.

Question 2

Please evaluate each instructor of Psychology 458 01 / Economics 263 01 . What are the instructor's strengths and weaknesses, and in what ways might his or her teaching be improved?

Response 1

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

He was an absolutely phenomenal professor! I have nothing bad to say. He structured the class well and established a really great atmosphere for discussions.

Response 2

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

The best professor I've had. I was not always interested in the readings or topics but looked forward to discussions because I knew he would change my mind. Thinks a lot about students and cares about the whole experience. Really really great.

Response 3

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

What a wonderful man. Exquisitely helpful with assignments, encouraging at all times (I've never seen him frown at a bad or incomplete answers), fun to hang out with at office hours, understanding when an assignment is late, and devotes personal attention to each student. Will eat lunch with you if you ask. Take him up on it.

Response 4

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Great! Always helpful and approachable. Very knowledgeable.

Response 5

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Greg is dope, as they say. He knows his stuff really well, his expectations for the his students were totally reasonable, and the class was engaging and fun every week. He also just cares so much and was very good about transparency with grades, timelines for assignments, and helping students meet their goals.

Response 6

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Greg is without a doubt the best professor I've ever had, for his overall brilliance, his thoughtful

pedagogy, and most of all for his genuine care for each student. I know it's not very productive to say, but I honestly wouldn't change a thing.

Response 7

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Professor SL really, truly goes the extra mile for his students. He often gave us anecdotes from his graduate school days to tie the material back into realistic scenarios that we can all relate to. His stories also made class much more fun. Because class was so long, the discussions that he facilitated made class SO MUCH BETTER. He'd also bring food into class :D

Response 8

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Greg is awesome!! Every class was really fun; he presented the challenging course material in an extremely thorough but also understandable manner, and also managed to make jokes and keep class discussions interesting and entertaining.

Response 9

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Prof. SL is a very accommodating/understanding laid-back professor. He knows a lot about his field and really makes the effort to make class fun and interesting. Since he knows so much, I just wish that he shared his knowledge a little more often.

Response 10

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Great at facilitating discussion and getting us interested. Provided very helpful feedback on the midterm draft and in office hours.

Response 11

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

He makes the material very accessible and exciting.

Response 12

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Very organized, invested, and caring professor. Walked through each of the articles so that we took a ton out of them, gave thorough and TIMELY feedback to assignments, and did a great job of choosing students for the course (so that this could actually be a rigorous and challenging NEUROeconomics seminar, rather than simply a behavioral economics seminar). Seems genuinely eager to be a resource and continued friend to us, which of course is awesome. Also appreciate the move to give a midterm course evalthis is rare for a Yale professor and shows genuine humility / concern for teaching.

Response 13

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Really dedicated, focused, creates interesting and well balanced course material.

Response 14

Gregory Russell Samanez-Larkin

Larkin is one of the best teachers I've ever had at Yale

Yale Online Course Evaluation
Yale University © 2004-2006

Question 4

How would you summarize Psychology 458 01 / Economics 263 01 for a fellow student? Would you recommend Psychology 458 01 / Economics 263 01 to another student? Why or why not?

Response 1

I'd definitely recommend this class. It's an exploration into the different components of decision-making, with a good amount of neuroscience but also a reflection on greater applicability of topics.

Response 2

An amazing class. You learn to read papers very very well, write brief synopses really really well, notice and articulate nuances well, and think about bigger questions. Take it.

Response 3

Absolutely. If you have any interest at all in neuroscience and how humans make decisions, I strongly recommend this. But keep in mind that you'll need at least a passing interest, or the talk of brain area X and brain area Y will fade into mush. Also, it would be a very good idea to brush up on your general brain science beforehand -- which areas are where, and what sorts of things they do. Otherwise, you might get lost in class discussion.

Response 4

Excellent senior seminar. Perfect balance of work. Greg is AWESOME.

Response 5

Great class. It's exactly what you think: read a bunch of neuroscience papers, write a reading response, talk about the papers, 10-page essay at the end. A lot of work, but if this is your area of study and you think you want to take it, then you probably want to take it. Students were well-versed in the subject area which made discussions lively and even fun. Greg is a fantastic resource and super approachable, a guy worth knowing. He also gives you all the hot gossip on the authors of the papers, which is always fun.

Response 6

I would definitely recommend it. The content is super interesting. Even though for my own personal purposes I prefer to study neuro in the context of mental disorders and decision-making in the context of behavior, it's definitely worth it to get to know the underlying mechanisms that are at play during the decision-making process. Greg is awesome, the requirements are totally doable (10 page paper--with built in interim deadlines, weekly 600-word reading response, 2 very small presentations). The readings are very dense, especially at the beginning, but you will learn how to get the most important information from them and synthesize across materials very efficiently by the end of the course through the reading responses. The reading responses were an especially good resource when writing the final (and for the future too) since each summarizes 5 or 6 articles in 600 words or less.

Response 7

I wholeheartedly recommend this absolutely amazing course, which is also an excellent option to fulfill your senior psych writing requirement if you need it. Greg is the best professor at Yale. He's funny, engaging, totally brilliant, and genuinely cares more about his students than any other prof or TA I've had at Yale. Each week you read 4-6 recent journal articles and write a 600-word response. Some of the papers are long and difficult, but one of the best things about the course is how quickly you become a pro at reading this kind of literature. The reaction papers are difficult at first, but Greg gives great feedback and is good about communicating expectations. The readings are a really good mix and provide the meat of the discussion topics for each class. This is definitely a discussion-based seminar, and you are expected to contribute each week. Student questions drive most of the discussion, and every class kicks off with a mini-presentation from student groups about that week's readings. The final paper is totally open-ended and, as I said, is a great choice for your senior psych writing requirement. Greg seemed to always be willing to meet and talk about the paper or anything else, and the proposal and half-finished draft he requires at points throughout the semester help keep you structured and focused. Take this class if you want to learn a lot, be significantly but not unreasonably challenged, and have a fantastic classroom experience.

Response 8

Take this class if you're interested in the way that neural regions control different aspects of decision making, like physical and cognitive effort, time discounting, reinforcement learning and more.

Response 9

An absolutely phenomenal course, one of the best in the Psych department. The seminar is a survey course on neuroeconomics: the neuroscience behind key components of decision-making, e.g. subjective valuation, intertemporal discounting, risky and ambiguous decision-making, and neuromarketing. It's a lot of neuroscience (all your readings are journal articles) and so it's quite challenging, but by the end of the semester you'll have gained a really good picture of how exactly you make decisions. Greg is the coolest dude ever! He's extremely knowledgeable and presents the course material in a thorough yet understandable manner, and creates such a fun class environment that I wish this seminar met more than once a week. The course is tough and maybe harder than the syllabus makes it out to be (the reading responses take much longer than you'd think they would and grading is rigorous), so be prepared to work for your grade, but it's so worth it. If you're a psych major with an interest in behavioral economics, this course will definitely cause a surge in your VTA/midbrain dopamine neuron activity!

Response 10

I recommend the course if you are interested in the material. It is certainly not easy! There is a considerable amount of reading and since it is seminar-style you can't really slack off. Each week you write a short summary of the articles that you read. There is also a final paper with a semester deadline for the first draft. "Jump-starts" are fun demos that people in the class take turns doing and they usually involve something consumable. Prof. SL is laid back, easy to talk to, and knows his field. Overall, a great senior seminar. Only aspect I would like to see improved is to have a better balance between teaching and discussion - and having a little more explanation from Prof. SL

Response 11

VERY neuro heavy. Papers are long, hard, and exceedingly dull. Tons of homework, and the reading responses take a long time to write. But class discussions were great.

Response 12

Highly recommend. Great survey of work that's been done in decision neuroscience. Class is organized by weekly themes. Professor SL also wants you to be a good student and participant in group discussion weekly reaction papers make sure that everyone has read the material and he has you turn in half your paper ahead of time so that you won't end up writing all of it last minute.

Response 13

Don't be fooled by the "PSYC/ ECON" course listing... This is a SERIOUS neuroscience course. You'll read 5-6 imaging papers each week (writing a short review paper on them), discuss real brain regions/neural processes, and do true methods critiques of the journal articles. But if you're up for it, the payoff is huge. You'll learn neuroeconomics a cool and relevant and (relatively) unexplored area of neuroscience a mile deep; you'll be taught by a wonderfully caring and instructive and organized professor; and, if you put in the time, you'll feel like you've learned a ton from this course. Workload is pretty sizable, but so is Greg's skill as an instructor and the learning payoff of the class. Great elective- fun, interesting, rigorous.

Response 14

take it if you can get in, I learned so much and Greg is amazing.

Question

Does the course have a reasonable balance between technical detail (necessary for understanding) and broad themes and applications?

Response 1

It certainly delves into technical aspects of neuroscience that I'm glad I was familiar with before this class. I think towards the middle and end of the class, we started exploring broader themes and applications of decision neuro (of which there are many).

Response 2

Yes.

Response 3

Just a little heavy on technical detail. I'd love to see at least one paper each week that focuses on applications, to help keep us anchored (they were somewhat backloaded this year).

Response 4

Yes!

Response 5

In general, yes. But we did have fantastic discussions about applications, and I might have preferred to budget just a little more time for that. We got better about finding a rhythm and balance as the semester went on.

Response 6

Sure!

Response 7

Yes. It really helps if you come in with a strong background in Neuroscience or behavioral econ, I think, but Greg makes sure everyone is on the same page. I think this course is 100% ABOUT how technical details contribute to broad themes and applications, so there's inherently a great balance.

Response 8

At first the balance was off, with way more technical detail than broad themes and applications. I had to make a concerted effort to focus on the broad themes and applications as opposed to the technical details so that I can get what I wanted out of the course.

Response 9

[First of all, kudos to whoever designed this evaluation for including this question this year (probably the most important evaluative question you could ask about any course).] This course strikes a perfect balance, which is difficult to achieve in an applied neuroscience course. On the one hand, it was extremely technical, with a lot of anatomy, but the units themselves stretched through several important themes in decision-making, and ultimately touched on the applications of decision neuroscience to marketing and social welfare. We spent two weeks on these applications maybe one more would have been nice? Of course, I'm primarily interested in application so maybe that's just personal preference, but I really can't complain about the balance between technical detail and themes. This course was awesome.

Response 10

Yes, I think it struck a good balance. Not sure if I ever got a complete understanding of the technical aspects (mathematical modeling, reinforcement learning, etc) but am glad we also spent time on broad themes toward end of semester.

Response 11

I'd say it was a little overly technical, very much so at the beginning.

Response 12

Towards the latter half of the course, there was more emphasis on broad themes and applications which improved the balance. Things like the diagram showing all the brain regions and which papers corresponded to them were very helpful.

Response 13

Yes- the balance was great. Broad themes and applications were almost always clear, but the technical detail gave the class and readings a rigor that's pretty rare for Yale College courses. Definitely a neuroscience course, and not just a more pedestrian "behavioral econ." pop-science decision-making overview. Love that we talked about some studies as purely "behaviorally," as if the norm were neuroimaging. As you noted at the end of the semester, there's some question re: whether any of these studies are actually important / helpful to understanding ourselves... but that's more of a question about the utility of the whole field of functional imaging. For what it was, this was a great class and well balanced.

Response 14

Yes!

Response 15

Yes