Course Description

Public opinion polls both reflect and shape public opinion, but how are they conducted and what do they really mean? What position should one take regarding lotteries and casinos? What is a false positive, and how does that affect my health care choices? This course equips students with the reasoning skills necessary to interpret and evaluate many of the statistical arguments that are common in contemporary speech. Discussions focus on how probability and statistics can be used to seek truth and pursue justice, but also how they can be used to deceive and manipulate. Particular attention is paid to public opinion polls and other surveys of human subjects. Advantages and disadvantages of putting our trust in numbers and the role of probability as a part of creation are also considered. No previous statistical training is required, but a willingness to learn the necessary mathematical material is assumed. This course focuses on a conceptual understanding of probability and statistics and on the issues surrounding their pervasiveness in our culture, rather than on the technical skills required to be a practitioner of statistics.

Instructor

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Office hours by appointment or just stop by.

Required Texts and Films

- The only required textbook for this course is
  - *Engaging God’s World* by C. Plantinga

- In addition, we will be reading several selections from
  - the *DCM Reader*

These will be available online via KnightVision, but it is probably more convenient (and perhaps cheaper) to buy a bound copy. It was a required book for all sections of DCM last year, so there should be many copies around. The bookstore has copies, too.

- A number of additional readings and handouts will be distributed in class or available via the web. To help defray the cost of these copies, each student must pay $15 to Sharon Gould in the Mathematics and Statistics Department Office. You may pay cash or write a check to Calvin College. Please do this by Monday, January 8.

- New this year is a DCM Film series. You will be required to see some of these films (details to follow). Others are optional. We will also be viewing some films or parts of films in class.
Electronic Course Materials

- Check your email daily. If I forget to mention something in class, or if someone asks me a question and I think the whole class would benefit from the answer, I will send email to the class. You are responsible for any information communicated via email.

- The course home page is located at http://www.calvin.edu/~rpruim/courses/dcm/07/. Materials that I produce will typically be available here as pdf files. There will also be links to other information available via the internet.

Grading

Grading will be based on quizzes, assignments, a mid-term, and a final. Short quizzes will be given most days covering the readings or assignments due that day. Assignments will be varied. You may be asked to give a written response to a reading or topic, to carry out an activity and report on it, or to work some problems to help you understand some mathematics/statistics. All work must be done on time.

While it is always the case that the same assignment will take different students different amounts of time, you should plan on 2–4 hours of work outside of class each day. If you are spending significantly less time than that, you probably are not doing all you should be doing. If you are spending significantly more time than that, come see me.

Opening Plenary Session

Our course will begin with a plenary lecture by James K.A. Smith (from Calvin’s Department of Philosophy) entitled

Desiring the Kingdom: Love, the Liberal Arts, and Cultural Critique

As you walk over, consider the following questions:

- Given the title above, what do you think the lecture will be about?
- What associations do you have with each of the terms in the title
  - Kingdom
  - Love
  - Liberal Arts
  - Cultural Critique

As you listen to the lecture and reflect on it afterwards, consider the following

- What were the main points the speaker was trying to make?
- How were these points supported/exemplified?
- What part of the lecture did you find most provocative? (That is, what challenged the way you might otherwise be inclined to think/act/believe/etc.?)
- What questions are left unanswered by this lecture?
Wednesday, January 3: Introduction

Class

- 8:30–8:40 Welcome
- 8:50–9:50 Plenary Lecture:  *Desiring the Kingdom: Love, the Liberal Arts, and Cultural Critique*, J. Smith
- 10:30–12:00
  - Course Introduction
  - Discussion of Plenary Session
  - *Pollster says churches put too much value on numbers* (GR Press article by David Yonke)

Preparing for Tomorrow

Required Readings

- From *Engaging God’s World*
  - Preface
  - Chapter 1: *Longing and Hope*
- From the DCM Reader:
  - Preface and Chapter 1 Introduction
  - Colson & Pearcey, *What Are We Doing Here?*
  - Sire, *What is a Worldview?*
- Yonke, *Fill minds, then seats*

Prepare for Quiz

Most days (including tomorrow) will include with a short quiz. The quiz may have multiple choice, true/false, or short answer questions on it. (Later, when we get to the more mathematical parts of the course, there may also be some mathematical exercises to do.) Typically we will grade it and discuss it in class. The quizzes serve two primary purposes: to check that you have done the reading (or seen a film) and understood its main points, and to bring up issues for further discussion in class. They also serve as an attendance check.

Response essay

In response to the reading, I would like you to respond to the following statement:

It is important to be aware of one’s own worldview.

Focus your answer on one or two (most important) reasons why you think it is or is not important. Do not give me a list of all the reasons you can think of. Your response should be **typed** with double or line-and-a-half spacing. The length should be between a paragraph and a page.
**How to Read**

One of the things we hope you learn while in college is how to read. One of the goals for DCM is to help you become a better reader. But what do we mean by a good reader? A good reader is one who is *engaged* with the reading (and in a certain sense with its author). At a minimum, this means seeking to answer questions like

- Why is the author writing this (and in this way)?
- What are the main points the author is trying to make?
- What key terms/categories does the author use, what important distinctions/contrasts does the author employ?
- What support does the author provide for the claims made?
- Do I agree or disagree with the author?
- How does this fit in with what I already know or the way I already think? (Are changes required?)

Of course, there are many styles and contexts for writing, and these questions may need to be adjusted or replaced by others that are more appropriate to the context. The important thing is that good reading *is not a passive activity*. It is not enough to let your eyes pass over each word. It requires additional effort to really “dig into” a reading.

Given that, here is some advice for reading in this class.

- **Before you read**, look over any pre-reading questions that either come with the reading (see the *DCM Reader Points to Look For*, for example) or that I give you. These questions will help you place the reading in context as you go along. You might also quickly scan over the reading to see if it has things like section headings that will help you see the general outline before you begin.

- **As you read**, underline, highlight, make marginal notes, etc. Also keep a piece of paper handy to jot down questions or ideas that don’t fit in the margins of the text.

- **When you finish reading, go back** and organize these into reading notes. Include in these notes
  - an outline of the important points of the reading, including supporting data, examples, arguments, etc. as appropriate,
  - important terms used and what they mean,
  - connections/comparisons to other readings,
  - any questions you have, points you don’t think you understand, etc.

You might also like to leave space to add things to your notes during class discussion.

- **After doing all the readings for the day put your notes aside and see if you can remember the main points of each reading and any important connections, similarities, disagreements, etc. among the readings.**

For the most part, you can treat plenary lectures and films much like the readings (although going back to “re-read” a passage is more challenging.)
Discussion Groups

From time to time we will discuss topics or do activities in small groups. The table below will be used for making the groups. It also includes email addresses in case you need to contact a member of the class.

Each student is assigned a letter and a number according to the table below. We will use these letters and numbers to form groups.

| 65 | A  | 1  | Baker, Nate | ngb3@calvin.edu |
| 66 | B  | 2  | Bird, Kevin | kcb3@calvin.edu |
| 67 | C  | 3  | Bloem, Paul | pnb2@calvin.edu |
| 68 | D  | 4  | Buys, Joel | jdb42@calvin.edu |
| 69 | E  | 5  | DeGroot, Daniel | dtd5@calvin.edu |
| 70 | F  | 6  | DeVries, KC | kcd4@calvin.edu |
| 71 | B  | 1  | DeVries, Michelle | mkd6@calvin.edu |
| 72 | C  | 2  | Dice, Evan | ejd25@calvin.edu |
| 73 | D  | 3  | Dorn, Micah | mjd39@calvin.edu |
| 74 | E  | 4  | Draayer, David | drd8@calvin.edu |
| 75 | F  | 5  | Dykstra, Chris | cdd3@calvin.edu |
| 76 | A  | 6  | Eisenbraun, Gabe | gje2@calvin.edu |
| 77 | C  | 1  | Haveman, Katie | kah32@calvin.edu |
| 78 | D  | 2  | Herrema, Jon | jlh53@calvin.edu |
| 79 | E  | 3  | Hunter, Laura | lah9@calvin.edu |
| 80 | F  | 4  | Kidd, Sean | spk3@calvin.edu |
| 81 | A  | 5  | Kunkel, Andy | ask4@calvin.edu |
| 82 | B  | 6  | Maley, Aaron | acm7@calvin.edu |
| 83 | D  | 1  | May, Jason | jbm7@calvin.edu |
| 84 | F  | 2  | Murphy, Aubrey | aam5@calvin.edu |
| 85 | F  | 3  | Roukema, Hannah | her4@calvin.edu |
| 86 | A  | 4  | Snapper, Greg | gss2@calvin.edu |
| 87 | B  | 5  | Vande Bunte, Luke | lhv3@calvin.edu |
| 88 | C  | 6  | Veenstra, Ryan | rcv3@calvin.edu |
| 89 | E  | 1  | Westlund, David | djw9@calvin.edu |
Discussion Questions

1. The DCM film series begins today with the film *The Constant Gardner*. (You are not required to see this film.) There are several strands to the plot line, one of which is a love story. Justin Quayle is a British diplomat. After a (dull) lecture that he gives for a colleague, as the students are about to file out, one young woman stands to ask him some awkward questions in a rather brash manner. The other students become more and more uncomfortable and eventually simply walk out, leaving only Tessa and Justin. They apologize to each other, decide to go for coffee, end up at her apartment, and sleep together.

Shortly thereafter Justin is sent on assignment to Kenya. Tessa – still brash and direct – asks him to take her with him “as mistress or wife”. They marry, and seem to be quite happily married.

There is, in fact, a scene where Justin takes the web cam from his computer and pretends it is a mini-submarine on a Jaques Cousteau mission and brings it to the bathroom where his very pregnant wife is having a bath. Later there is a similar scene where she has the webcam and records waking up a very sleepy Justin. One gets the impression that they were a fun and playful couple. The former scene involves (female) nudity. (The actress isn’t actually pregnant, but has a convincing prosthetic.) The latter does not.

- Do any of these facts about the film trouble you? Why or why not? Do they make you less inclined or more inclined to see the film? Is there any other information not provided in the short description above that you would need to decide if you should watch the film?
- What do your answers say about you? What do your answers say about your cultural context(s)?

2. Each of the following activities is important for a Christian.

(a) Develop your devotional life through prayer, worship, and Bible study.

(b) Develop an attitude of graciousness towards others and a habit of being patient, honest, compassionate and charitable.

(c) Develop your God-given talents, and serve other people, by finding a vocation at which you can do well; work at that vocation (parenting, a career, volunteer work, etc.) with honesty and dedication.

(d) Develop your intellect and increase your knowledge – by studying during your school years and continued learning throughout your whole life.

If you had to pick one to concentrate on (without neglecting the other three), Which one would you say is the most important for having a positive impact on the world? Which one would you say is the most important for your long-term happiness and fulfillment? If you don’t have the same answer for both questions, why not?