

# SYST 542

## Decision Support Systems Engineering

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### Course Description

Fall 2016

The main focus of this course is the design of computerized systems to support individual or organizational decisions, providing a systems engineering approach to the decision support system (DSS) lifecycle process. The course topics include factors leading to effective computerized support for decisions, characteristics of tasks amenable to computerized support, basic functional elements of a decision support system, the decision support lifecycle, and factors leading to successful integration of a DSS into an organization. Additional topics include support for multi-person decisions, support for distributed decision processes, support for time-critical decisions, and how to refine and improve an organization's DSS development capability. A DSS is built on a theory (usually implicit) of what makes for successful decision support in the given context. Empirical evaluation of the specific DSS and underlying theory should be carried on throughout the development process. The course examines some prevailing theories of decision support, considers the issues involved in obtaining empirical validation for a theory, and discusses what if any empirical support exists for the theories considered. Students design a DSS for a semester project.

#### Class Details

*Prerequisites: SYST 210 – Systems Methodology and Design I, or graduate standing  
Equivalent to: EEP 602 - Decision Support for Enterprise Integration*

##### *Classes*

- \* This course has weekly sessions on Thursdays, from 4:30 p.m. to 7:10 p.m.*
- \* The sessions will be held at room 124 of the Planetary Hall.*

##### *Office hours*

- \* Room 2227 of the Nguyen Engineering Building (SEOR Department).*
- \* Thursdays, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., or by appointment.*
- \* Prof. Costa contact data: (703) 993-9989 / [pcosta@gmu.edu](mailto:pcosta@gmu.edu).*

##### *Administrative*

- \* Registration deadline (and last day to drop without penalty): September 6<sup>th</sup>.*
- \* Last day to drop with 33% Tuition Penalty: September 20<sup>th</sup>.*
- \* Final drop deadline (with 66% Tuition Penalty): September 30<sup>th</sup>.*

## Course Logistics

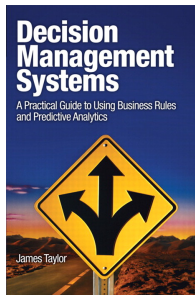
1. All course communication will be done via the Blackboard system. Students are expected to have access and be able to use the system before classes start. Blackboard is accessible via the MyMason portal at <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/>. Instructions for using the Blackboard system are provided in the “resources” link at the bottom of the portal page.
2. Although attendance is mandatory and a key aspect for understanding the course material, most classes will be recorded using Blackboard Collaborate. This is meant for supporting students that cannot participate in one class (e.g. work-related travel, etc.), allowing them to attend remotely and/or to see the recordings. A student guide for using Collaborate is located at:  
<http://coursesupport.gmu.edu/Students/index.cfm?audiencename=Students&categoryname=Bb%20Collaborate&datname=Full%20Participant%20Guide>
3. Failure to access the system due to lack of knowledge on either Blackboard or Collaborate is ***not*** an excuse for missing classes, late assignments, or failing course deliverables.
4. Volgenau School Computing Resources has answers to many questions about school systems on their web site: <http://labs.vse.gmu.edu> and will try to help you if have problems connecting to school computing systems. However, they will not provide assistance with general computing questions or course assignments. If you have any questions about how to use software to complete your assignments, please refer to the following document:  
<http://labs.vse.gmu.edu/uploads/FacultyFAQ/StudentWelcome.pdf>
5. Other resources that you may find helpful may be found at:  
<http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus/>
6. Accommodations for disability: If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should:
  - a. make sure this documentation is on file with Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and
  - b. talk to me to discuss your accommodation needs.
7. Inclement weather: Class sessions cancelled due to inclement weather or other University emergencies may meet online in Blackboard Collaborate. Check the Announcements area for the course for updates.

## Expected Behavior

1. Class attendance is essential. Information will be presented that might not necessarily be in the book, and is certain to be needed in course assignments.
2. You are allowed to enter or leave class at any time, provided you do your best to avoid disrupting the activity going on.
3. Please make sure you have your electronic devices in silent mode. *Should you find yourself in extreme need of answering an incoming call, just leave the room to do so.*
4. Students are encouraged to interact on homework assignments, but your write-up must be your own. Assignments are intended to provide practical, hands-on experience with the ideas presented in the course.

5. Assignment dates and scheduling provided below are subjected to changes, which will be posted to Blackboard. It is the students' responsibility to keep abreast of any changes.
6. With a few exceptions, almost all of the course deliverables will be submitted electronically, will be scheduled in advance, and will have some flexibility for students to request changes. Yet, these requests must be made in advance. Should any scheduled event impact a student's participation in class activities and assignments, it is the student's responsibility to coordinate with me prior to the event.
7. Religious observances are one common example of events that might impact students' activities. Students are responsible for planning ahead. Please, refer to the GMU's calendar of religious holidays at [http://ulife.gmu.edu/religious\\_calendar.php](http://ulife.gmu.edu/religious_calendar.php).
8. Late assignments, when properly justified, will receive reduced credit in accordance with the late assignment policy (below in this document). No points will be awarded if homework is turned in after solutions have been posted.
9. Academic Policy: All academic policies as given in the Honor System and code will be strictly followed. These are available at <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=27&navoid=5383>.
10. General Policies: All general policies defined in the University Catalog are in place for this course. You can access those at <http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=27&navoid=5440>.

## Textbook



### **Decision Management Systems: A Practical Guide to Using Business Rules and Predictive Analytics**

James Taylor

IBM Press; 1 edition (October 10, 2011). 320p.

ISBN-10: 0132884380

ISBN-13: 978-0132884389

The course text is freely available for online access via the GMU Library.

This is a graduate course in which different aspects of DSS are going to be explored and the ability to conduct independent research is expected. Therefore, students are encouraged to also refer to the following resources when performing their assignments:

- [Decision Management Systems: A Practical Guide to Using Business Rules and Predictive Analytics](#), 1 edition (October 10, 2011), by James Taylor. IBM Press; 320p. ISBN-10: 0132884380
- [Decision Support Systems and Intelligent Systems](#), 8th edition, by Ephraim Turban, Jay Aronson, Ting-Peng Liang, and Ramesh Sharda, Prentice-Hall, 2007. ISBN-10: 0131986600.
- [Decision Support Systems](#), 2nd Edition, by George Marakas, Prentice-Hall, 2003. ISBN-10: 0130922064.

- [Making Hard Decisions](#), 2nd Edition, Robert Clemen, Duxbury, 1997. ISBN-10: 0534260349.
- [Value-Focused Thinking: A Path to Creative Decisionmaking](#) (Paperback), Ralph L. Keeney, Harvard University Press, 1996. ISBN-10: 067493198X.
- Decision Support Systems Hyperbook, Power, D.J., accessed August, 2006 at <http://dssresources.com>.
- [Spreadsheet Modeling & Decision Analysis](#), 5th Edition, Cliff T. Ragsdale, Thomson; South-Western, 2007. ISBN-10: 0324312504.

**Disclaimer:** the links to amazon.com above were provided solely as a reference to facilitate students in their research (e.g. via the University's library system). Neither the instructor nor GMU is recommending this store.

## Lecture Notes

Lecture notes for each chapter will be made available from the Blackboard course page before class. You will need to [download Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) to read these lecture notes.

## Course Outline

9/1	Week 1	Course Logistics, Unit 1.
9/8	Week 2	Unit 2, Unit 3.
9/15	Week 3	Unit 3, Project group assignments.
9/22	Week 4	Unit 3, research paper titles due.
9/29	Week 5	Unit 4
10/6	Week 6	Unit 4
10/13	Week 7	Unit 5, paper review presentations.
10/20	Week 8	Unit 6, Paper review presentations
10/27	Week 9	Unit 6/Unit 7, Group progress report due 10/21 - group progress presentations.
11/3	Week 10	Unit 7/Unit 8, paper review presentations.
11/10	Week 11	Unit 8, paper review presentations, Final exam handed out.
11/17	Week 12	Paper review presentations, Final exam due.
11/24	-x-	Thanksgiving Break
12/1	Week 13	Group report due, Group project presentations.
12/8	Week 14	Group project presentations.

**This is a very dynamic and intensive course. Exercise planning, be proactive and do your best to stay ahead of schedule.**

## Academic Integrity

George Mason University is an Honor Code university. Please see the Office of Academic Integrity website (<http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>) for a full description of the honor code and the honor committee process.

Graduate work is often best completed in a collaborative manner. Active discussion and support between students is encouraged. You will be assigned to a project group for the course's final assignment. This collaborative project may be divided up so that individual group members complete portions of the whole, provided that group members take sufficient steps to ensure that the pieces conceptually fit together in the end product. Other assignments are designed to be completed independently. For these assignments, you are encouraged to discuss your ideas with others and conference with peers on drafts of the work and to incorporate the results of those discussions in the work; however, the final product you submit must be your own individual work.

## Grading

The grading structure of this course is as follows:

- Group Project (30% of grade)
- Assignments, including homework and class quizzes (20% of grade)
- Exam (25% of grade)
- Paper Review Presentation (25% of grade)

## Assignments

There will be assignments posted via Blackboard during the course. Each assignment will have its respective due date defined during the announcement.

You are not prevented from working with your peers on the class work and homework exercises, and are even encouraged to do so. However, each student must provide his/her own answers, and I might verify whether he/she actually worked in his/her respective exercise and understood the solution provided. In any case, past experience consistently shows that students who didn't keep up with the assignments had a hard time with their grades.

Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard and can be of three types:

**Homework Assignment:** Each homework assignment is out of 100 points. Unless stated otherwise, I will present the solutions at the beginning of the next class after the assignment was handed. If you submit your assignment after it is due but before I post the solutions, you can earn a max of 70 points.

*An assignment handed after the solutions are posted will yield 0 points.*

**Quizzes, or Challenges:** These are conducted in class and each will be out for an amount of points to be disclosed prior to the class. The details of each quiz, or challenge will be explained during its respective announcement.

**File naming convention:**

*Syst542\_AssignmentTypeAndWeek\_LastnameFirstname.*

Example: Syst542\_Hwk2\_DoeJohn

Always check for grades on Blackboard. If you don't see the grade, report to me by the next class after assignments have been returned. I will not entertain missing grade requests that come later in the semester.

**Final Exam**

The Final exam will be a take home exam due within a week. It will be posted on Blackboard on 11/10, and it is due on 11/17 before class.

**Group Project**

*Overview.* Students should divide themselves in the first class into eight groups of 4-5 people. Each group will design and implement a DSS for a problem of their choice. Group assignments will be made by the second week of classes. Groups may meet in person or via virtual sessions as often as necessary and are encouraged to interact between meetings. The problem you choose is entirely up to you.

*Progress report.* Groups should provide one 5-page written progress report during the course and present it in class. This report is intended to provide me with both an update on each group progress as well as with a means to support each group in succeeding with their goals. The progress report and its presentation are evaluated and account for 5% of the Group's grade.

The progress report must be submitted via Blackboard by **Friday, 10/21, 11:59 p.m.** eastern time. This report should include brief descriptions of:

- The DSS Concept;
- User requirements; and
- Project management plan.
- Description of the model, dialogue and data subsystems;
- Implementation plan (what will be implemented in your prototype); and
- Evaluation plan (how will you evaluate your prototype).

A progress report presentation should be given in class on **Thursday, 10/27 (week 9).** Details regarding this presentation will be given closer to the event.

*Group Project Oral presentations.* Each group will have 23 minutes to present their work, while at least 5 minutes will be reserved for questions. Slides must be submitted

via Blackboard no later than 2 p.m., Eastern Time, *of the day before the presentation!* It is tolerable to make changes to your presentation after submitting it, although you are expected to submit a reasonably “close-to-final” version of the actual presentation.

All group components are expected *to present* and *to be available for questioning*. A demo of your prototype is required and will count towards your final grade, but you must ensure that all aspects of your project are evenly represented.

The final presentation must include a live demonstration of a DSS prototype. Usually, DSS prototypes were based on an Excel model implementing some of the techniques learned in the course to solve the problem chosen by the group. There have been groups in the past using more sophisticated approaches, such as a Python or a Java-based front-end to an Excel model. Although polished and sophisticated prototypes are welcomed, the minimum requirement is an Excel-based implementation of a DSS.

*Group Project Final report.* A 10-15 pages written report is due on **Thursday 12/1, 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time**. It must be submitted via the Blackboard system, which will have a suggested outline available to students. Neither the bibliography section nor the appendices count towards the page limit.

*Grading.* Groups may select any implementation environment they judge appropriate for their respective problem. The Group Project grading is structured as follows:

- Progress report (5%);
- Oral presentation and demo (50%); and
- Final report (45%).

*Your grade on this project will be **strongly** affected by your peer evaluations and my own observations on your level of participation and performance*

You are expected to rate each person of your team – not including you - on a 100-point scale. The rating scale is as follows:

- **90-100** Participated enthusiastically, exhibited strong leadership, attended regularly and was essential to meetings, performed tasks responsibly and on time, work was extremely high quality, took excellent initiative and was highly self-motivated;
- **80-90** Good participation, attended and contributed to meetings, exhibited leadership, performed tasks responsibly and on time, work of dependable high quality, took good initiative and was self-motivated;
- **70-80** Adequate participation, usually attended and contributed to meetings, exhibited some leadership, performed tasks responsibly and usually on time, work of dependable good quality, took reasonable initiative and was reasonably self-motivated;

- **50-70** Participation could have been better, performed tasks when asked but may have been late and/or needed reminders, quality could have been better, needed guidance and usually did not take enough initiative;
- **50 or lower** Participation was minimal or non-existent; any work that was turned in was of inadequate quality.

### Paper Review

Teams of 2 students will be assigned by the second week of class. Each team will choose a DSS article from either a peer-reviewed conference or an academic journal. Teams are expected to present their respective assessment and conclusions to the class via a 15 min oral presentation followed by a 5-min questioning session.

*Oral presentation.* The presenter must upload his slides to the Blackboard system no later than 2 p.m. Eastern Time ***of the day before*** his/her presentation. Minor changes to the slides after submission are allowed, but the submitted version must be very close to the actual presentation. All students are expected to read the abstracts and view the slides prior to each presentation. However, those really interested in maximizing their learning experience are advised to read the actual paper before the presentation and fully use their participation rights at the questioning session.

Teams are strongly advised to go beyond a mere description and exercise their critical side. Special attention should be given to a proper support for each critique, being it positive or not. As an example, “his idea of automating the data collection process is awful ... because I don’t think it would work” is a common instance of an “empty” evaluation. In this case, the reviewers should have supported their assessment with either facts (e.g. “this has been tried in system so-and-so and achieved such-and-such results) or references (e.g. “Smart, Maxwell; *et al.*, 1965, proved this approach to be sub-optimal”). You will be evaluated on your ability to provide a thoughtful and well-supported review.

**BEST WISHES FOR A GREAT SEMESTER!!!**

Fairfax, August 28, 2016.

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