FYSP 067 – Agreeing to Disagree (Fall 2014)

Instructor: Kevin Woods, King 220B, Kevin.Woods@oberlin.edu.

Class: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:30-3:20pm, King 121.

Office Hours:
Monday 10:30-11:30am, Tuesday 12-2pm, Wednesday 10:30-11:30am, Friday 3:30-4:30pm, and by appointment. Also, feel free to stop by any time my door is open (but be understanding if I say I am too busy).

Readings:
* Why We Cooperate*, by Michael Tomasello. You will need this as soon as possible.
* The Art of Strategy: A Game Theorist’s Guide to Success in Business and Life*, by Avinash Dixit and Barry Nalebuff. You will need this by the end of next week.
* Survival Strategies: Cooperation and Conflict in Animal Societies*, by Raghavendra Gadagkar.
* Games in Economic Development*, by Bruce Wydick.
Any other readings will be given as handouts or posted electronically.

Blackboard:
I will post reading assignments, homework, and other announcements on Blackboard.

Outline of course:
The basis of the course is this tension: cooperation is much easier when it’s in your individual best interest, but often you pay a price. So how do we get past this? We will examine this problem from various disciplines, for example:
- Animal behavior: How do primates cooperate?
- Developmental Psychology: How do children learn to cooperate?
- Evolutionary biology: How might altruistic instincts have evolved, when natural selection is supposed to favor the (selfishly) fittest?
- Philosophy: What do political philosophers say about how we form a society?
- Experimental Economics: How do people react in laboratory settings when money is on the line?

We will have daily readings and discussions about these topics. You will also write several papers on these topics. Interleaved will be a mathematical strain. A subject called game theory seeks to quantify how people interact when they have their own preferences about what happens. There will be a few assignments that are straight-forwardly mathematical, but you will also work on integrating quantitative evidence into your other writings.

Grading:
Class participation (30%),
Assignments (70%)
Class participation (30%).
This counts so much because it is a vital part of this discussion-based course. It is important that you be actively engaged in the discussions: listening, thinking, and talking. It is important that you have done the reading or the assignment for that day. It is important that you be in class each day, on time.

We will be using the Discussion Board on Blackboard. For each day, I will create a post, including the information for the assignment or reading to be done before class. By 8am before each class, you must post a short paragraph commenting on the assignment/reading, or on another student’s previous comments. Also I encourage you to continue the discussion with more posts, but you’re only required to post one. Your posts should be focused: more than just “I didn’t get ___” or “I really liked ___”. Explain why you liked it or where your confusion starts. To do the one for Friday, sign in to blackboard.oberlin.edu, click the link for this class under “Courses where you are: Student”, click on the forum “Daily Assignments and Announcements”, and click on the thread “Friday, Sept 5”. You can reply to my first message here with your short paragraph comment.

Writing Assignments (70%).
I will detail what they are and give you a better feel for how much each is worth, as we go. Roughly, there will be about 4-5 papers totaling 20-25 pages (double-spaced) and a number of short mathematical assignments dealing with game theory. There will be no exams, and no final exam (the last paper will be due during the final exam week).

Writing Help:
Mudd 101A has a great, free writing center. You can simply drop in and ask for help. I expect them to be open Mon-Thurs 7pm-midnight and Sunday 2pm-midnight, but I will confirm later. Of course, I’ll be helping you with your writing, and we’ll do a number of activities as a group as well.

Honor Code:
See your Student Policies handbook for the complete Honor Code. The general theme is that discussion with other students is great, but the final work must be your own, though you may “use sources of assistance routinely offered to all students, such as reference librarians and writing tutors” (Honor Code text). You should never be copying text from anywhere with out citing and putting it in quotes, you should never have someone else doing any of the writing for you, and you should be careful that paraphrasing is more than just looking through a thesaurus.

Disabilities:
If you have a disability of any sort that may affect your performance in this class, please consult with me and with Jane Boomer in the Office of Disability Services. All requests for accommodation must go through that office.