

**FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL**  
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or any other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first-year seminar requirement.

<b>COURSE NUMBER:</b>	<b>FSEM</b>		
<b>COURSE TITLE:</b>	<b>FINDING BAD</b>		
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Kashef Majid	<b>DATE:</b>	Feb. 1, 2016
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** In the space below, provide a one- to two-sentence description of this course. The description will be entered in Banner and will also be used in other publications about the first-year seminar program (such as the “Eagle Essentials” booklet).

**When people face two choices, one choice is better than the other. One smartphone is better than the other, one employee is better than the other, one potential spouse is better than the other. Using economic theories (which won their authors the Nobel Prize) we will examine what happens when you cannot distinguish between the good and the bad.**

**RATIONALE.** Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM’s basic components, explaining *specifically* how it will meet the common FSEM student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above), and arguing why this course should be approved to meet the FSEM General Education requirement. Please point to specific readings, assignments, and exercises and show how they will meet the learning outcomes.

This class is intended to fulfill the FSEM pedagogical goals of participatory and exploratory learning through group reflections of the theories of asymmetry and signaling. The class will first learn about information asymmetry and signaling by studying the seminal works by Akerlof (1970) and Spence (1973) respectively. We will learn about the context that these theories were introduced, the mathematics behind them, as well as the implications of these theories. After we learn about the theories we will then learn about their application through several relevant examples to the students. We will explore what happens when a person cannot ascertain the quality for products that they purchase, services they use, jobs that they apply for, or even relationships they are (will be) in. Following a thorough discussion and analysis of the theories we will put them in a more contemporary format by studying them from the perspective of the seller (when sellers can not differentiate between good and bad customers).

Readings will include the original works by Akerlof (1970) and Spence (1973). Including more contemporary works from business and psychology. The readings will be practitioner oriented which should make them easy to absorb by the first year students.

Throughout the course students will present on one area of the course that is of interest to them. The students will also model asymmetry in a contemporary setting from the perspective of the seller. By the end of the course, the students will have learned oral communication skills through in class presentations and discussion leadership. Students will also refine their research and writing abilities by modelling a contemporary instance of asymmetry and signaling.

Akerlof, G. A. (1970). The market for "lemons": Quality uncertainty and the market mechanism. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 488-500.

Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *The quarterly journal of Economics*, 355-374.

**SYLLABUS**. *See attached file.*

**SUBMIT** this form and attached syllabus **electronically as one document** to Will Mackintosh ([wmackint@umw.edu](mailto:wmackint@umw.edu)) by 5 PM on February 1, 2016. All submissions **must** be in electronic form.

# Finding Bad: What happens when we can't distinguish between good and bad?

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## **Course Description**

Using Nobel Prize winning theories of asymmetry and signaling, this class is an exploration of the challenge of identifying true quality and how bad quality can harm some and benefit others. In any scenario where we have two choices, one will be a better choice than another, in other words one option is better quality than the other. When we are unable to recognize which choice is better quality than the other we risk choosing the less optimal outcome. This scenario occurs every time we make a purchase, every time we choose how to spend our time or even with whom we choose to spend our time with.

Looking through the lens of the customer we will discuss how consumers distinguish between good and bad products, good and bad service providers, even good and bad colleges. We then switch perspectives and examine asymmetry from the perspective of the seller who is trying to distinguish between good and bad customers. We discuss differentiating between good and bad in the context of personal privacy, personal freedoms, and personal relationships. Specifically, how authorities distinguish good people from bad, how firms track consumers to identify good ones, and what happens when we are in a relationship with a bad partner.

A requirement of this class will be to keep a journal which where students reflect on the readings of the week. In the journal they will keep track of choices that they made and reflect on whether it was a good choice or a bad choice. In addition, each student will reflect upon the work of the class through the sharing of their ideas and work in class.

**Course Goals:** This course satisfies the general education curriculum's **First-Year Seminar** requirement. This course strives to fulfill the FSEM pedagogical goals of participatory and exploratory learning through discussions and workshops. Readings and videos expose students to multiple viewpoints regarding the choices that we make and our ability to distinguish

good from bad. Projects and presentations expose students to the care one must make when engaging in research, writing, speaking, and debate.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of this FSEM, students will be able to:

- utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments;
- improve development and organization of written arguments;
- demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process;
- apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication; and
- communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.

### **Course Requirements**

Students are expected to attend all classes, read/view all assigned texts/videos, take a midterm, create a digital project, present their work, and participate in class. They are also expected to create their own journal, and use that space to reflect on their work in the class.

### **Final Grades**

Final grades will be determined based on class participation/ class reflections (20%), on the Canvas-based modules (5%), on the discussion leadership (5%), on the midterm exam (15%), on the in class quizzes (20%), on the research-based, paper from the perspective of the customer (10%), on the research-based paper from the perspective of the seller culminating digital project (15%), and formal presentation of the second project (10%). [Unsatisfactory mid-semester reports will be reported for anyone with a grade of D or below on work completed at that time.] Completion of all assignments is required to pass the class.

### **Grading Scale:**

95-100 = A	87-89 = B+	80-83 = B-	74-76 = C	67-69 = D+	Below 60 = F
90-94 = A-	84-86 = B	77-79 = C+	70-73 = C-	60-66 = D	

### **Basic Structure of Class**

Each week will center around a topic and a set of related readings, videos, sites, or other primary and secondary sources. You will be expected to read and review these resources before the week of class. You will be quizzed on the content of the upcoming week, you will then provide a reflective summary of the readings at the end of the week. Time will also be set aside each week in class to discuss the topic.

In the second half of the week the class will engage in a workshop or some other “lab” activity intended to explore and apply the concepts raised in discussion.

Prompts and instructions for both the pre-week post and the end-of-week wrap-up will be provided each each, as will instructions for completing the group workshop/activity.

### **Participation**

Part of class participation requires attending class and actively participating in reading discussions and workshop sessions. In addition, class participation requires weekly engagement in terms of active discussion, reflection through journal entries, discussion leadership, and quizzes.

### **Mid-Term Exam**

The mid-term exam will be created based on our discussions up to that point. It will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay exams. The mid-term exam will be open book so students will be allowed to bring in their notes, but the student will not be allowed to bring in any published works.

### **Discussion Leadership**

Each week, for one class, a student will be selected as the discussion leader. What this means is that is the student will choose 3 for 4 questions that will guide the class on the topic that week. The student will facilitate the discussion and maintain the topic during the class session. The purpose of this exercise is to improve your oral communication skills and your leadership within groups.

## **Research Projects**

Each student in the class will create two research projects (in the format of a research paper) on a topic related to asymmetry from the perspective of the customer. After the mid-term you will write your second research paper from the perspective of the seller.

1. **Topic idea** – By the end of week 3, you will submit your topic idea for your first research paper. By end of the first week following the mid-term you will you submit your second topic idea.
2. **Research project** – By the end of week 3 submit your topic idea, your first research project is due by the end of Week 7. This paper will be approximately 4-6 pages, it is intended to prepare you for the final project. The final project is due before the final presentations (the end of Week 14). More information on the research projects is available in a secondary document.
3. **Revision** – In order for you to develop your writing abilities you will have to the opportunity to revise your papers for a grade improvement. One week after each is submitted all students will receive feedback on their papers. Students then have the option of revising their papers based on the feedback received, projects are due students will receive feedback on the writing of their papers. They will then have one week to revise their paper and submit for a revised grade. Students are strongly advised to make appointment with the writing center to use the professor's comments in order to improve the paper before it must be submitted for a grade
4. **Presentation** – All projects will be presented to the class during week 15. Presentations will be 5-7 minutes long.

## **Honor Code**

I believe in the Honor Code as an essential, positive component of the Mary Washington experience. You should know that if you cheat or plagiarize in this class, you will fail, and I will take you to the Honor Council. So, do not do it. On the other hand, I also believe that having friends or family read and comment on your writing can be extremely helpful and falls within the bounds of the Honor Code (assuming the writing itself remains yours). If you have questions about these issues, then you should talk to me sooner rather than later.

## **Accommodations**

If you receive services through the Office of Disability Services and require accommodations for this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Bring your accommodation letter with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in the strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise. If you need accommodations, (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.), please consult with the Office of Disability Resources (x1266) about the appropriate documentation of a disability.

## **Course Policies**

1. **Readings.** Students are expected to read the assigned chapters and cases prior to class and thus, be fully prepared to participate in class discussions.
2. **Class Participation.** You are expected to attend class and are responsible for the academic consequences of absence. For this class, due to the importance of being available to your group for the project, and because of the participation requirement, attendance is particularly important. You are responsible for obtaining notes for any material missed due to class absence. You should check with your classmates in case that you miss any important announcements and for fulfilling your obligations to your group. Students are responsible for completing assignments, obtaining notes and any handouts, and keeping themselves informed of any announcements made in class, irrespective of attendance.
3. **Tardiness, etc.** Being on time to each class period is important. Because this class has case discussions and presentations, late arrivals are extremely disruptive and unprofessional. Students who are more than 5 minutes late without making prior arrangements with the instructor will be counted as absent. If you are habitually tardy, this will result in a 0% class participation grade. Other unacceptable class conduct includes early departures, sleeping in class, reading extraneous material in class, and initiating/participating in sidebar discussions.
4. **Distractions.** All cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during class hours. Laptops and tablets are permitted if these are used for note taking.
5. **Due Dates.** As in the business world, due dates will be strictly enforced. Papers are due at the beginning of the class on the specified date. A broken computer is not an excuse. Papers handed in late will not be accepted and given a grade of 0. All papers must be completed or a failing grade will be assigned. All assignments are due on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Late assignments or emailed assignments will not be accepted, unless you receive prior approval from me. In general assignments are uploaded to Canvas.
6. **Make-up exams.** Make-up exams will only be permitted as required by University Policy. Therefore, you must have a University approved excuse (e.g. Doctor's excuse or University sponsored event.) You must notify me 24 hours prior to the

scheduled exam to explain why you miss the exam (and also provide the University approved excuse when we meet the next time as a class). Once proper documentation is provided, a make-up exam date will be scheduled. Exam answer keys will be made available once all students have taken the exam.

7. Grade Appeals. Any questions or appeals about grades must be made in writing within 7 days after the assignment has been graded. Examples of how to develop a request for grade change and how NOT to develop a request for grade change are posted on Canvas.
8. Cheating. Any form of bribery, cheating, lying, or plagiarism will not be tolerated. This applies to exams, quizzes, and assignments. All students are expected to adhere to the University's Code of Academic Integrity. All acts of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of this code. On each exam and assignment, you will be asked to sign the following pledge: *"I pledge on my honor that I have not given nor received any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."* Doing any of the aforementioned actions is considered a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity.
9. Accommodations/IEP. Any student with special needs (e.g. documented learning or physical disabilities that may impact performance) should discuss this with me at the start of the course. This information will be kept confidential.



## **TOPICS & SCHEDULE**

### **WEEK 1 (8/29-9/02): INTRODUCTION**

- Introduction to the course and expectations
- Asymmetry – George Akerlof
- Auto industry

### **WEEK 2 (9/5 - 9/9): A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY ON AND OFFLINE**

- Library Visit
- Signaling – Michael Spence
- Job market signaling

### **WEEK 3 (9/12 - 9/16): ASYMMETRY AND SIGNALING, SEPARATING GOOD COLLEGES FROM BAD**

- Topic idea due at end of week
- How colleges differentiate themselves from others, the risk of choosing a bad college

### **WEEK 4 (9/19 - 9/23): ASYMMETRY AND SIGNALING IN AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT**

- Writing center visit
- How online environments (markets, reviews, certifications) create asymmetry and alleviate it

### **WEEK 5 (9/26 - 9/30): GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES, ASYMMETRY AND SIGNALING IN AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

- Speaking center visit
- How do we alleviate asymmetry in foreign environments
- Country of origin, global signals

## **WEEK 6 (10/3 -10/7): FALSE SIGNALS**

- Illegitimate signals
- Counterfeit goods
- False idols

## **WEEK 7 (10/10- 10/14): CUSTOMER ASYMMETRY**

- Asymmetry from the perspective of the seller, differentiating between good customers and bad customers
- The cost of not differentiating between good and bad customers

## **WEEK 8 (10/17 - 10/21): FALL BREAK/MID-TERM AND PRESENTATIONS**

- **MID-TERM**

## **WEEK 9 (10/24 - 10/28): ASYMMETRY IN OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

- Personal relationships
- The costs that we incur in our personal relationships

## **WEEK 10 (10/31 - 11/4): ASYMMETRY IN COLLEGE SPORTS**

- College recruiting
- Colleges as sellers, recruits as buyers

## **WEEK 11 (11/7 - 11/11): ASYMMETRY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS**

- Hiring the wrong employee
- The cost of bad employees
- What makes a good/ bad employee

## **WEEK 12 (11/14 - 11/18): ASYMMETRY AND PRIVACY**

- Identifying bad people
- Cost of being a good person
- The privacy/ cost trade off

**WEEK 13 (11/21 - 11/25): ASYMMETRY AND PRIVACY (THANKSGIVING BREAK)**

- The future of privacy

**WEEK 14 (11/28 - 12/2): ASYMMETRY AND POLITICS**

- The cost of bad representatives
- Differentiating good officials from bad

**WEEK 15 (12/5 - 12/9): FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

**Final Class Meeting Will Be During Exam Week – Wrap up summary discussion**