SI 334: Persuasion and Social Influence

University of Michigan
Winter 2019

This version: 1/19/2019
The syllabus will be updated regularly. Please make sure to check for the latest version.

Time and Location:
Tuesdays, 10:00-11:30am and Thursdays 10:00-11:30am
2255 North Quad

Instructor:
Alain Cohn
Assistant Professor, School of Information
Office: 4340 North Quad
Email: adcohn@umich.edu
Office hours: Wednesdays, 1-2pm or by appointment

GSI:
Mohamed Abbadi
Ph.D. student, School of Information
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Office hours: Mondays, 9:30-11:30 am or by appointment, 1270 North Quad

IA:
Denis J. McGrath
B.A. student, Ford School of Public Policy

Required Textbooks:
- All other readings will be available on Canvas under “Files/Readings”
**Course Description**

Social influence is one of the most pervasive and powerful tools for behavior change—whether you are an informatics professional who is building up your design toolbox, designing a new information system, or managing a team. In this course, you will learn why and under what conditions people’s thoughts and actions can be **influenced by those around them.**

The primary goal of this course is to introduce you to some of the recent theories and key research findings in the field of persuasion and social influence through the lens of economics and social psychology. The second goal is to have you applying the tools of influence from day one of the course; you will learn techniques for persuasive speaking, writing, and designing. All written and oral assignments will use short and targeted exercises to gain fluency in applying the techniques and ideas of persuasion. Finally, the course will culminate in an application of these techniques using two case studies.

Though we will rely on theories, and learn about the key research findings, this course is suitable for anyone with any background but tailored directly to the needs of informatics students. The class will be heavily directed toward applying what we learn to practice and real world situations. Class meetings include a mixture of lecture and exposition through the use of experiments, an assortment of group activities and class discussions so that you can see and test some of the theories and techniques of social influence first hand.

**Learning Objectives**

After completing this course, you will be able to:

1. Describe and recognize key ideas and theories in the social influence literature
2. Detect and analyze techniques of influence
3. Apply these theories to a design problem (see case studies)
4. Apply these theories to a management problem (see case studies)

In addition, you will also have:

5. Exposure to some key differences between how economists and psychologists think about human behavior
6. Exposure to experimental methods in economics and psychology
Expectations

There are no prerequisites for this course, although some fluency in economics or psychology can be helpful. Students are expected to come to class punctually (classes will begin at 10:00am sharp), having read the assigned readings beforehand. THIS IS IMPORTANT. Indeed, on many days there will be graded assignments handed out and completed in class. Missing these can add up. On other days, we will discuss practice questions for the exams and (graded) questions submitted by the students.

Note that I have indicated the number of pages of the assigned readings for each class so that you can pace yourself. I expect you to work about 6 to 8 hours a week outside of class. In weeks where there is less reading, it means that the reading may be harder and that I believe it will take you more time.

A note on how I figure out the hours of work I am assigning: I aim for about 4 to 5 hours of reading time outside class. The average college student reads about 350 words per minute (I am assuming this is an estimate for non-technical reading). The average words per page for most things I am assigning is about 600 words per page and the reading is technical—so let’s double the time it takes. Thus, this works out to you spending about 4 minutes per page if you were an average college student reading a technical paper. What this means is that on a week where I assign 60 pages, or 4 hours of reading, I am assuming that the reading is straightforward and, though voluminous, simple enough to grasp. On a week where I assign 30 pages of reading it means that I think the reading is twice as hard and that you will spend more time per page because of that—i.e., that it will still take you about 4 hours. So, please, pace yourself. In addition, there will be 2 short essays (respectively 3 with the optional essay) as well as extra points activities. I therefore added 2 to 3 hours of work outside class per week.

Class Format

Classes will consist of a mixture of lectures, discussions and in-class activities. Readings should be finished before class in order to conduct an informed conversation. During discussions and exercises, your active participation is important both for your own learning and for creating a stimulating class environment. IMPORTANT: I expect 100% attendance. Please have the relevant readings (hard copy or PDF) with you in class. I expect you to have the textbooks and papers at hand so that we can refer to them during class.
Laptop Policy

Electronic devices such as laptops and tablets are useful technologies, but they may also interfere with learning when used for non-class activities. People tend to overestimate their ability to process in parallel and they have limited self-control, both of which may undermine their learning. The use of electronic devices during class may also distract other students. Consequently, I have established an “opt-in” laptop policy. We will have a seating section for students who decide that they want to use their electronic devices in class. If you are interested in sitting in the laptop section, please send email to the GSI no later than 12:00pm, Jan 14. Note that you cannot sign up for the laptop section after the deadline.

A Word on My Teaching Philosophy

I strongly believe in Albert Einstein’s principle “You do not really understand something unless you can explain it to your grandmother.” What this means is that when you walk out of the final exam, you should be able to identify the core concepts from class, explain them to anyone you talk to (including your grandmother), and know how to apply those concepts to do positive things in the world. I also believe that all students are individual and everyone learns in their own unique way. To this end, I will have you do a variety of HW assignments and in-class activities, including reading papers, taking quizzes, solving case studies in teams, and submitting questions, which we will then discuss together in class. Despite the different pathways to success, I strongly believe in systematic processes and organization. This means that you should first think about the process before you start working on a problem. For example, if you are asked to comment on an article, you should first identify the key steps. This could be (1) reading, (2) identifying the problem, (3) organizing, (4) synthesizing, and (5) articulating your ideas. In any case, feel free to seek help from us not just about the lecture content, but also on how to organize yourself. Finally, everyone in the classroom is encouraged to contribute in order to maintain an inclusive and stimulating learning environment.
Assignments, Exams and Grading

Assignments:
- **Students ask “A” (homework, 5*3 points):** by the end of the day (5 p.m.) of certain lectures (see schedule), you will be asked to submit one question (in writing) about the content of that lecture or the previous lecture (including readings). There will be six question assignments in total. Although each question assignment will be graded, only your five best questions (in terms of points) will count toward your final grade. You can earn up to 3 points per question. Points will be awarded based on a question’s (i) clarity, (ii) importance, and (iii) depth. For each question assignment, I will select one question out of all submissions and discuss it at the beginning of the next class.

- **Quizzes “Q” (in-class, 5*5 points):** there will be six quizzes (open book) at the end of certain lectures (see schedule). The quizzes will cover basic comprehension of the lecture and/or readings. Although each quiz will be graded, only your five best quizzes (in terms of points) will count toward your final grade. You can earn up to 5 points for each quiz. Note that there will be no make-up quizzes. If you are absent, then you will automatically receive 0 points for the quiz.

- **Case studies (in-class, 2*15 points):** you will analyze two case studies (design, management). You will work together in teams and prepare a short presentation (max. 10 minutes) that you will deliver in class. We will form a committee to evaluate the presentations and assign points to each team (up to 15 points per case study, awarded to each team member). The committee will consist of me, and a subset of your classmates. You will receive more information about the case studies in due time.

- **Short essays (homework, 2*15 points):** you will write two short papers that address the question “Does information about election polls influence voting behavior?” In a first step, you will write a paper (max. 3 pages, 12pt. font size, 1.5 spaced; excluding figures and tables) that develops an informed opinion about that question. In particular, you will provide a recommendation from the perspective of a policy maker by discussing the underlying mechanisms of how and why people may respond to poll information, and what it means for democracy (pros and cons). Use insights from the course, search for relevant research papers (using scholar.google.com), op-eds, media articles and other sources (be critical! about the source of your information even if it’s a research paper). You will then receive feedback to write a second, shorter paper (max. 2/3 page, 12pt. font size, 1.5 spaced; excluding figures and tables) that synthesizes your arguments from the first paper, perhaps even adding new ones (be concise and succinct!). You can earn up to 15 points for each paper. Finally, you will have the opportunity to submit an optional “reflective essay” (max. 2 pages, 12pt. font size, 1.5 spaced; excluding figures and tables) where you will look back at the process and what you have learned when synthesizing your first paper. Questions could be “Did your perspective change? If so, how and why?”, “How did you assess the relative strength of your arguments?”, or “What rules did you use to make the text more concise?” You can earn up to 5 extra points for this
third, optional paper. Deadlines are: first paper 12:00pm, Feb 25; second paper 12:00pm, Apr 4; (optional) third paper 12:00pm, Apr 23.

Exams:
- Exam practice questions “P” (0 points): you will receive exam practice questions at the end of certain lectures (see schedule). They are meant to help you process the material and familiarize yourself with the question style of the exams. There will be 6 practice questions in total. You will answer these questions individually or in groups, whatever you prefer. Your answers will not be graded, but you will have to hand them in. We will then discuss the practice questions together in class.
- Midterm exam (40 points): closed book, 80 minutes.
- Final exam (60 points): closed book, 120 minutes.

Extra Points:
- Finding everyday examples (homework, 5 points): email me if you see something (newspaper article, ad, picture you took, study you read about etc.) that you think is related to the content of the class and worth sharing with your classmates. If I think it’s appropriate for sharing, you can earn extra points (up to 5 points). All you have to do is to either give a short presentation (max. 5 minutes) or do a short write-up (max. 250 words). Each student can submit a maximum of three proposals, but only one (accepted) proposal will be considered for presentation or write-up and give you extra points. Due to time constraints during the lecture, and depending on the number of submissions, I may have to decide about the format of your contribution. Regardless of the format, you will have to provide proof of the example (e.g., by adding an article link or image; if it’s just something you have heard, this is not sufficient), cite the relevant work, and explain why it is an example of a concept discussed in class. You can submit proposals no later than 12:00pm, Apr 8.
- Reflective essay (homework, 5 points): see bullet point “Short essays” above for more details about this assignment.
- Catch Me if You Can (homework, 5 points): Watch the movie “Catch Me if You Can” (2002) by Steven Spielberg and write a short paper (max. 2 pages, 12pt. font size, 1.5 spaced; excluding figures and tables) about how characters (especially the lead character, Frank Abagnale Jr.) employ persuasion tactics to convince others. In particular, I want you to focus on the following six persuasion tactics from Cialdini: (1) reciprocity, (2) consistency and commitment, (3) social validation, (4) liking, (5) obedience to authority, and (6) scarcity. Identify the various persuasion strategies applied in the movie, discuss how effective they are relative to each other (in the movie), comment on how ethically sound or questionable they are, and finally, whether and how you have encountered them yourself in your life. Deadline for this assignment is 12:00pm, Apr 23.
- Expose yourself (homework, 5 points): a common belief among people is that they are less vulnerable to persuasion that the average person. This assignment requires you to set yourself up as a target of a professional salesperson (e.g., a car dealer) or other persuasion expert and to
analyze your experience using the concepts that you have learned in class. Examples include the foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, and that’s not all technique as well as illusion of authority, scarcity, honesty, and likeability. Write about (i) how these persuasion tactics have been used on you, (ii) reflect on how you responded to these tactics, and (iii) how you could, in hindsight, resist more effectively to these persuasion attempts in the future (max. 2 pages, font size 11, 1.5 spaced; excluding figures and tables). Behave as naturally as you can, however, you are not allowed to buy or commit to anything during that interaction. IMPORTANT: you must obtain approval by me before carrying out the assignment. Deadline for this assignment is 12:00pm, Apr 23.

- Course evaluation (in-class, 3 points): you can earn extra points by filling out the course evaluation form. You will be given class time to do this. Points will be awarded based on the percentage of students who complete the evaluation:
  ✓ ≥75% completion rate: everyone earns 1 extra point
  ✓ ≥90% completion rate: everyone earns 2 extra points
  ✓ ≥100% completion rate: everyone earns 3 extra points

Grading:
I use a point-based grading system with no curving. This means that every student in the class can earn an A if he or she accumulates 185 points or more during the semester. Note this also means that failure is possible. Close calls: if at the end of the semester you are within 0.5 points of a higher letter grade, I will bump you up to the higher grade. Please note that I don’t discuss grades, but I can explain them.

Overview of Point Structure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students ask (5/6), 3 points each</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes (5/6), 5 points each</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies (2), 15 points each</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short essays (2), 15 points each</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total points</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extra points:
- Finding everyday examples (1)   5
- Reflective essay (1)            5
- Movie (1)                       5
- Expose yourself (1)             5
- Course evaluation (1)           3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 200</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185-200</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180-184</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>175-179</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>165-174</td>
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<td>135-139</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>125-134</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 125</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Submitting Assignments etc.

- All HW assignments have to be submitted via Canvas.
- Labeling: each assignment sheet should have your name on it.
- Labeling if you worked together: each of you should submit a separate assignment. The assignment should have your name first and then should list all the people with whom you worked.
- Font: for written documents please use Times New Roman (or a similar font) in 12pt. font size, 1.5 spaced.
- I am committed to return graded questions to you no later than two weeks after the original due date.

### How to Communicate with Us

**Office Hours:**

We are here to help if you need some assistance during the course. Please contact first the GSI before reaching out to the instructor. Note that for graded HW assignments, we will typically not provide feedback about the content before you hand it in. However, you can always ask clarification questions. But don’t worry, I will spend some time in class on the HW assignments (detailing what is expected, talking about the format etc.).

Also, one of the benefits of open office hours is to accommodate many students at once; if fellow
students are in the GSI’s or instructor’s office, please join in (we’ll say so if for some reason we need to talk privately to a current visitor), and feel very free to show up in groups. Just email us and we can set up a time. As a general rule, do not use individual meetings outside of office hours for course-related help. If our scheduled office hours are always infeasible for you, let us know and we will find a solution.

Some gentle requests regarding office hours and on contacting us. First, our office hours end sharp at the end. Please arrive early if you have lengthy questions, or if you don’t want to risk not having time due to other students’ questions. Also, you are free to ask us some stuff by email, especially to schedule things. But please be aware that email is terrible for answering many types of questions. For example, questions like “What is conformity?” are short questions with long answers. Also, please be aware that we typically don’t respond at all to any email concerning substantive course material right before major assignments are due (though accessible for panic attacks, emergencies etc.). Please do come to our office hours.

Note that the IA’s role is to grade your assignments, not to provide instruction or to defend grade decisions. You may contact the IA to get clarification regarding his/her rationale for a grade, but it is inappropriate to ask the IA to change your grade. If you really want the grade changed, or if you have substantive conceptual questions or problems with your grade, contact me. Unfortunately, the UofM policy is that you may also not meet out of class with the IA—but that’s what our office hours are for. So, come see us.

**Email Format:**
When you write an email to one of us, please make sure that you write “[SI 334]” in your subject line, so that we can easily find emails related to this class.

**Academic Integrity and Misconduct**

**Academic Integrity:** All students in this course will be held to high standards of scholarship and integrity. Personal responsibility and integrity are assumed, and all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct are prohibited. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for you or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the class. The instructor will not tolerate any conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards of the University community. Issues of academic integrity will be handled according to the policies established by Rackham.

**Collaboration:** strongly encourages collaboration while working on some assignments, such as homework problems and interpreting reading assignments as a general practice. Active learning is effective. Collaboration with other students in the course will be especially valuable in
summarizing the reading materials and picking out the key concepts. You must, however, write your homework submission on your own, in your own words, before turning it in. If you worked with someone on the homework before writing it, you must list any and all collaborators on your written submission. Each course and each instructor may place restrictions on collaboration for any or all assignments. Read the instructions careful and request clarification about collaboration when in doubt. Collaboration is almost always forbidden for take-home and in class exams.

**Plagiarism:** All written submissions must be your own, original work. Original work for narrative questions is not mere paraphrasing of someone else's completed answer: you must not share written answers with each other at all. At most, you should be working from notes you took while participating in a study session. Largely duplicate copies of the same assignment will receive an equal division of the total point score from the one piece of work. You may incorporate selected excerpts, statements or phrases from publications by other authors, but they must be clearly marked as quotations and must be attributed. If you build on the ideas of prior authors, you must cite their work. You may obtain copy-editing assistance, and you may discuss your ideas with others, but all substantive writing and ideas must be your own, or be explicitly attributed to another. See the (Doctoral, MSI, MHI, or BSI) student handbooks available on the UMSI intranet for the definition of plagiarism, resources to help you avoid it, and the consequences for intentional or unintentional plagiarism.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

The University of Michigan is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Request for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Office (http://ssd.umich.edu) located at G664 Haven Hall. The SSD phone number is 734-763-3000. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (VISA) form. Please present this form to me at the beginning of the term, or at least two weeks prior to the need for the accommodation (test, project, etc…).

**Student Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (734) 764-8312 and https://caps.umich.edu/ during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult University Health Service (UHS) at (734) 764-8320 and https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvc or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources. For a
listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit:  http://umich.edu/~mhealth/.

**Absences**

It’s your responsibility to notify me when you will be absent. I assume that if you are not in class, you will email me. I don’t need to know why you are not attending, but it is easier to plan in class activities if I know how many people will be in class that day.
Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A# = Students ask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P# = Practice questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q# = Quizzes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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[Jan. 10] Lecture 1: Introduction

In class:
Readings: 86 pages

Optional Readings:

[Jan. 15] Lecture 2: Persuasion

In class:
Readings: 37 pages
✓ GIL, chapter 8 (pp. 267-285)

HW Reminder:
✓ Sign up for laptop section (deadline: 12:00pm, Jan 14)

[Jan. 17] Lecture 2: Persuasion (cont’d)

Assignment:
✓ A1 (deadline 5:00 pm)

[Jan. 22] Lecture 3: Media and Persuasion

In class:
✓ Q1
Readings: 51 pages
✓ GIL, chapter 8 (pp. 288-300)

**Optional Readings:**


**[Jan. 24] Lecture 3: Media and Persuasion (cont’d)**

**In class:**

- P1

**[Jan. 29] Case Study I: Design**

**In class:**

- Work on case study in teams

**Readings:**

- Read handout for case study I

**[Jan. 31] Case Study I: Design (cont’d)**

**In class:**

- Case study presentations

**HW Reminder:**

- Prepare your presentation slides

**[Feb. 5] Lecture 4: Advice**

**In class:**

- P2

**Readings:** 17 pages


**[Feb. 7] Lecture 4: Advice (cont’d)**

**Assignment:**

- A2 (deadline 5:00 pm)

**[Feb. 12] Lecture 5: Conformity**

**In class:**

- Q2

**Readings:** 27 pages
[Feb. 14] Lecture 5: Conformity (cont’d)
In class:
✓ P3

[Feb. 19] Lecture 6: Reciprocity
Assignment:
✓ A3 (deadline 5:00 pm)
Readings: 35 pages
✓ CIAL, chapter 2 (pp. 13-42)
✓ GIL, chapter 9 (pp. 321-325)
Optional Readings:
✓ Berg, Joyce, John Dickhaut, and Kevin McCabe. “Trust, reciprocity, and social history.”

[Feb. 21] Lecture 6: Reciprocity (cont’d)
In class:
✓ P4

[Feb. 26] Midterm Exam
Where: NQ 2255
When: 10:00-11:30am
HW Reminder:
✓ “Short essays: first paper” (deadline: 12:00pm, Feb 25)

[Feb. 28] Documentary “I am a Killer”
In class:
✓ Screening and discussion of Netflix’s “I am a Killer” (Season 1, Episode 2).
  Plot: Kenneth Foster Jr. is said to be involved in a fatal shooting in San Antonio, Texas, although he never fired a shot. His death sentence is commuted just hours before his execution, but he asserts that his punishment under an unusual Texas law is unfair.

[Mar. 5 & 7] Break

[Mar. 12] Lecture 7: Consistency
In class:
✓ Q3
✓ Midterm exam: I will select several questions from the midterm exam and discuss the solutions in class.

Readings: 66 pages
✓ CIAL, chapter 3 (pp. 43-86)
✓ GIL, chapter 7 (pp. 239-255) and chapter 11 (pp. 412-416)

Optional Readings:

[Mar. 14] Lecture 7: Consistency (cont’d)
Assignment:
✓ A4 (deadline 5:00 pm)

[Mar. 19] Lecture 8: Liking and Scarcity
In class:
✓ P5
Readings: 57 pages
✓ CIAL, chapter 5 (pp. 126-156) and chapter 7 (pp. 178-203)

[Mar. 21] Lecture 8: Liking and Scarcity (cont’d)
In class:
✓ Q4

[Mar. 26] Lecture 9: Social Validation
Assignment:
✓ A5 (deadline 5:00 pm)
Readings: 55 pages
✓ CIAL, chapter 4 (pp. 87-125)
✓ GIL, chapter 3 (pp. 81-96)

Optional Readings:

[Mar. 28] Lecture 9: Social Validation (cont’d)
In class:
✓ P6

[Apr. 2] Lecture 10: Conditional Cooperation
In class:
✓ Public goods experiment
[Apr. 4] Lecture 10: Conditional Cooperation (cont’d)

Assignment:
✓ A6 (deadline 5:00 pm)

Readings: 5 pages

Optional Readings:

HW Reminder:
✓ Implicit Association Test (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)
✓ “Short essays: second paper” (deadline: 12:00 pm, Apr 4)

[Apr. 9] Lecture 11: Applications

In class:
✓ Q5

Readings: 21 pages
✓ GIL, chapter 9 (pp. 328-332)

Optional Readings:

HW Reminder:
✓ “Finding everyday examples” (deadline: 12:00pm, Apr 8)

[Apr. 11] Lecture 11: Applications (cont’d)

In class:

[Apr. 16] Lecture 12: Authority

In class:
✓ Q6

Readings: 33 pages
✓ CIAL, chapter 6 (pp. 157-177)
✓ GIL, chapter 9 (pp. 333-344)

[Apr. 18] Case Study II: Management
In class:
✓ Work on case study in teams
HW Reminder:
✓ Read handout for case study II

[Apr. 23] Case Study II: Management (cont’d)
In class:
✓ Case study presentations
HW Reminder:
✓ Prepare your presentation slides
✓ “Expose yourself” (deadline: 12:00pm, Apr 23)
✓ “Catch Me if You Can” (deadline: 12:00pm, Apr 23)
✓ “Short essays: (optional) third paper” (deadline: 12:00pm, Apr 23)

[Apr. 30] Final Exam
Where: NQ 2255
When: 1:30-3:30pm