The class will offer a “tool-box” approach or “mechanism” approach to social-science explanations. We will discuss basic issues in the philosophy of explanation as well as selected tools or mechanisms. The requirement for a quality grade in the course is a 15-20 page term paper, on some topic approved by the instructor. Students can write about a purely theoretical issue or they can choose an empirical problem to illustrate methodological controversies.

Required reading for the course is the instructor’s book *Explaining Social Behavior* (ESB). This book is now being extensively revised and updated. Revised versions of the assigned chapters will be available on Courseworks.

Classes meet at Thursdays, 2.10-4.

**Statement regarding academic integrity**

The course endorses the faculty statement on academic integrity, found here: [https://www.college.columbia.edu/faculty/resourcesforinstructors/academicintegrity/statement](https://www.college.columbia.edu/faculty/resourcesforinstructors/academicintegrity/statement) and reprinted here:

**Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity**

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars’ work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others’ ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always
submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

Course plan and reading assignments

January 22. Introduction and overview.
March 5. Emotional-choice explanation. Readings: Rick and Loewenstein; ESB Ch. 8; Elster (2010).

Spring break
March 26. Mechanisms of individual belief formation. Readings: Festinger and Carlsmith; Kunda; Quattrone and Tversky; ESB Ch. 7.
April 2. Mechanisms of collective belief formation. Readings: Knapp; Bikchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch; ESB Ch. 23
April 9. Game theory and bargaining theory. Readings: Goeree and Holt; Muthoo; ESB Ch. 19, Ch. 20, Ch. 25.
April 23. Student presentations.

Readings


