

Feedback on Ignorance! MOOC (from the Discussion Forum)

January – March 2017

(Many responses were to the question “What has struck a chord”. There is sometimes more than one response from the same person, marked by spaces; *** differentiates participants.)

I LOVE the content of your course but there is one thing that frustrates me very much: the obligation to use the discussion forum, to provide messages of more than 100 words and to provide citations... I intend to do the whole course and all tests, I will occasionally provide feed-back in the discussion forums, but not more. These discussion forums are useless to my opinion, I feel like waisting my time. What kind of analysis you do with the feed-back? I have already completed a lot of MOOCs on the EDX platform but those that are the best to my opinion do not oblige participants to communicate, it is rather optional.

[Response made]Thank you for the answer. Don't take me wrong, the contents of your course is absolutely great, one of the best I did so far, besides "The science of everyday thinking" that I also enjoyed taking. I am learning a lot. I am not at all working in this field, however I am a scientist (biology) and this course raises some fundamental questions that I never thought about.

For me, chapter 7 was the most useful. It happens very often that in my work I have to make decisions about risk management and not everything is known.

Thank you for creating this course. It's works on a lot of different levels. I enjoy studying the course material. I feel challenged by the material. I gain insights into myself through studying the material. I ask myself "How am I going to keep my ignorance level low?"

Hi . It is the second time I a, taking this course, because I find it very interesting and eye opening. I would like to add two comments, just in case they may be useful. One, it is that I would like to able to decide if want to pay for verification or not later in the course, when I am sure I can make it. Second, I find that the requiring to participate in discussions takes away from really interesting discussions for the sake of fulfilling the requirement. I found that if was to write more, I would be just repeating other people's comments. Third, could it be possible to have a live session???? Thanks again

@ the teaching team. Thank's to Mike and his team for this amazing course. This MOOC brings me new ways for thinking and considering the world. This is really useful and practical. However I thought to be more fluent in English before this MOOC. Especially for week 5 it has been very hard to keep it because it was both very technical and also too many words that I didn't know have been used. I missed to loose my self . Anyway I'm holding on. Obviously the ideal would be a French translation to upload but some slides (even in English :-)) summarizing each video to upload could be enough. Sincerely

Obviously this course is a useful tool to be prepared for VUCA [volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity] time. But at the same time I'm worried about people voting for politicians (like in US and maybe next in France) who give them simple answers to complex problems. People generally should learn to live with complexity and uncertainty, but is this human? Maybe humanity will have to change.

Hi, I have found this class to be interesting and am taking PN-17.3 Communicating Strategically. This class is not quite as interesting, but explains how to communicate information to other groups of people. It seems to fit well with this course that explains ignorance, by offering ways to communicate information to people. One of the best ways to get rid of ignorance seems to be by educating other people and opening a dialogue. Another good class is The Science of Everyday Thinking, they explain why it is so hard to get people to change beliefs and information that involves values. It explains why ignorance many times is more than just a lack of information.

Upon reviewing the content of this course and doing a lot of the prescribed readings, I have decided that my interests lie elsewhere. I was hoping that discontinuing the course would not compromise my enrolling in other MOOC courses. Could you advise me on the topic?

Am I the only one who struggles with quizzes containing double negatives? The question "which of these is NOT..." followed by a negative in the answer makes it difficult to understand.

[A number of other respondents made the same point – these are not repeated here.]

The typology of unknowns provided me with a tool to appreciate the vastness that is ignorance. The six ways of managing ignorance provided me with ways to consider approaching ignorance and hopefully deal with it better in the future. I am imperfect and emotional but know there is always room to grow to better handle the flow of unknowns. Learning about how complex problems deal with unknowns was interesting. While I felt the course was difficult I kept persisting to understand.

that ignorance is not always negative and it might even help you live better and all those methods of how to take a decision when you know almost nothing. Thank you very much, team. was a very intelligent course and not easy at all (at least not for me).

Before I took this course, I was considered ignorance as something strictly negative. I now view it very differently. I think that without ignorance there would be no discovery, no invention, and no development. I'm glad I'm ignorant because it pushes me to find out about

the matters that interest me. It's very exciting and satisfying to discover that you're passionate about something. And all that thanks to ignorance. I'm very glad I took this course. Big thanks to all the staff and to our professors!

Before I took this course (the first time around), I'd only ever thought of ignorance as being something negative. After going over examples of how ignorance can be adaptive, it seems clear that we all have tacit knowledge of the utility of ignorance, and that we utilize it without being aware of it.

We agree with all these comments [see above] as we also were biased that ignorance was a negative concept. As a continuous learner, we become very excited when we learn and become more aware of "what we do not know".

I have learned different ways of thinking about ignorance and the strategies for dealing with it. I have a better understanding of its relationship with complex problems that come from complex systems. Dynamic problems have no perfect solutions but we attempt to attain a balance through trade offs. This balance can be upset by unknowns that tip it into catastrophic failure. An example of this and interrelatedness is the financial system that can be brought to global collapse with the failure of several large banks. Unpredictable changes can produce a magnification and larger changes in a complex system. This emphasises the need to develop flexibility in systems and to change and adapt quickly when unpredictability happens. It also shows the importance of decisiveness when there is a need to make decisions even when all the information is not known.

Enjoyed seeing where unconscious bias figures in I was amazed by the lecture on down syndrome, and how the calculations played out - because the frequency of occurrence is very low Also hearing how politicians use ignorance as a stall tactic And understanding instances (like fire detector) where false positives are good. This was a very thoughtful and useful class - Thanks to all who created and supported it!

El brillante equipo de profesores con sus argumentos y explicaciones hacen el curso interesante, los ejemplos enseñan a adaptar la incógnitas al medio donde están los problemas y buscar solución a las dificultades.

Translates as: The brilliant team of professors with their arguments and explanations make the course interesting, the examples teach to adapt the unknowns to the environment where the problems are and seek a solution to the difficulties.

Aprendí que las incógnitas son útiles en la resolución de problemas ,Comprendí la importancia de reducir incógnitas me parece que la reducción ayuda a despejar el camino para darle un mejor tratamiento y orientacion al problema

Translates as: I learned that the unknowns are useful in solving problems, I understood the importance of reducing unknowns it seems to me that the reduction helps to clear the way to give a better treatment and orientation to the problem

Aprendí que la ignorancia es la base para llegar a la isla del conocimiento, pero este no se puede quedar ahí toca seguir hasta llegar a la costa para saber que hay allí. Sin embargo me asalta una preocupación, es que la tecnología nos vuelve la vida muy fácil que en todo nos volvimos automáticos y pensamos muy poco

Translates as: I learned that ignorance is the basis to get to the island of knowledge, but this can not stay there to continue until arriving at the coast to know that there is. However I worry a concern, is that technology turned our life Very easy that in everything we became automatic and we thought very little

Los temas del comienzo del curso fueron interesantes me pareció difícil la comprensión de algunos términos sin embargo persistí y al final me agrado mucho, el curso me enseñó a tomar conciencia de mi propia ignorancia y reflexionar en tomar decisiones a cerca de mi propia vida.

Translates as: The topics of the beginning of the course were interesting I found it difficult to understand some terms however I persisted and in the end I was very pleased, the course taught me to become aware of my own ignorance and reflect on making decisions to wax my own life.

Escuchar la Doctora Sarah hablar del desarrollo empresarial genera motivación de lanzarse a emprender siempre asumiendo los riesgos, me parece que es una forma de no conformarse con pequeños resultados y atreverse a conseguir lo que se ha planeado

Translates as: To listen to the Doctor Sarah [Sarah Pearson, week 6] talk about the business development generates motivation to launch to undertake always assuming the risks, it seems to me that it is a way of not being satisfied with small results and daring to get what was planned

Profesores muchas gracias por todo me encanto el curso

Translates as: Teachers thank you very much for everything I loved the course

I appreciate the value of the unknowns. It pushes us to learn more about an issue and not accept the status quo. Thank you for the course. It is great 'food for thought' and now I am not afraid to be stranded on an Island. Cheers

For me, the list of ways to cope with ignorance is an extremely valuable framework to recognize how we deal with them and work on. I am personally still using Reduction too much and wanting to know everything, so it is an important way for me to see it and change. thanks a lot!

I too have found the "Six Coping Strategies" particularly interesting along with the examples of taxonomy of Ignorance presented at the beginning of the course. I found I needed to return

to these frameworks on a number of occasions. On reflection I think my approach leans most naturally towards toleration along with reduction however the idea of all of these strategies having an adaptive and a maladaptive facet is deserving of some additional scrutiny and further consideration.

The Complex Problem presentations I found stimulating even though I have to acknowledge my focus, and preference, is usually on the individual and the effects of social norms and mores rather than the more expansive area around politics and science, research etc. However, the systems approach did result in me revisiting some power point material which was created a few years ago [on weak and strong ties].

I took this course in order to improve how I think about ignorance, why people are ignorant of one thing but not another, and how ignorance is deployed as a tool for certain purposes. The typology of unknowns certainly was helpful to structure some of that thinking. As a retired person who worked as a laboratory scientist and later in a safety/risk management capacity, Mike's 5 Plain Language Principles resonate very strongly for decision making and planning under uncertainty, and I would recommend them to others.

The six strategies that Dr. Mike's developed are most useful to me, it is like a light in my ignorance tunnel is guiding me to manage it, Banishment: setting unknowns aside and not dealing with them, Denial: refusing to admit the existence of unknowns , Reduction: caring more to know than to be unknown all the time, Toleration:is this a wonderful way to taking unknowns into account, it is a human way, very simple and clear, Relinquishment: to letting unknowns determine one's fate, it is a magic way , Generation : the creative way in arts and music, this the best target of unknowns, to creat unique arts and making people happy.

Very Thanks

Really I am enjoying this course and learned much from it and this course like a new window to know the meaning of ignorance.I don't have the words to tell both of you how grateful I am for what I learned from both of you, really very thanks, DrMike and Dr. Gabriele.My best wishes.

Developing a culture that embraces complexity and uncertainty

Hi. I think all of the discussions and concepts discussed throughout the lectures really struck a chord with me. But it's probably a rather dissonant chord at this point.

I'm trying to understand it at both the individual and social level - both from my own perspective in my everyday job, but also at the organisational and societal level. I've found that although society does appreciate the benefits of creativity and innovation, the appreciation of the investment and effort that is needed as a society, as well as the individual, is not appreciated. Because of the complexity of society and the relationships to the individual, it is difficult to understand how much impact society might have on the individual and the individual's success or failure. Individuals who succeed are held up as exceptional, and most likely deservedly so, but in other circumstances, at another time or place, would they have been so successful? I've met lots of exceptional people in my life who I are just as deserving of praise.

Mike's comment in the last lecture about Mozart certainly struck a chord for this reason. He obviously had prodigious talent, but also a musically gifted father, with good social connections in a society with a culture that appreciated his music. But surely it could have been very different.

There are a lot of BIG ISSUES in the world today and all of these are very complex issues and there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding them, but I just worry that society, generally, may not have the stomach for dealing with that complexity and uncertainty and that this is a problem that unfortunately can't be resolved through doing a course on complexity or ignorance. It really is a cultural problem.

If you look at many politicians today, they really aren't interested in having dialogue that unpacks the complexity, acknowledges the imperfection, or discuss the trade-offs. It seems to be either-or, right-wrong, black-white language. How is it that politicians can get away with this simplistic level of analysis? Isn't it because that is all that is necessary for them to succeed as politicians? Are the majority of voters really satisfied with such a lacklustre approach to important policy issues?

How has society come to such a state of affairs and what can we do to change this?

I think for me the idea that there are known unknowns and unknown knowns is useful. Also the idea that some wrong things are less bad than others.

The first lectures were for me the most important because they made me aware of what ignorance is. But all of them have their own meaning.

It would be impossible to write it all down but here are a few selections: The island metaphor is wonderful. I've used it with several people and it helps get away from the negative impact of ignorance. The typology for Ignorance is a great aid in analyzing situations. The interviews of people from various disciplines and how they work with ignorance was enlightening. Some phrases were new to me and I hope to use them again and again including differing thresholds for action, testable hypothesis and adaptive governance, adaptive management, robust decisions. Some oldies but goodies were refreshed including satisficing, incrementalism, confirmation bias.

It was a great educational experience and this only lists some of the odd bits that are floating around in my head.

I find very useful a framework for research and action, which consists of three domains: synthesizing knowledge from different disciplines and stakeholders; understanding and managing diverse unknowns; providing integrated research support for policy and practice change. I especially enjoyed videos from Lecture 6. This course will help me in the future with making decisions under uncertainty, I will not be trying to get all information possible, and now I in general realize how many people have to deal with unknowns and that there are useful strategies to deal with them.

Ignorance can be good. That is, probably, the item that made the strongest impact on me during the course.

All the content of the course has been interesting, and made me stop and think on things I had never considered and which have been useful for me, so I have to say thank you for it.

I am very interested in the concepts of racism and ignorance. This course has identified for me the depth of understanding and the need to acknowledge racism as a form of ignorance both negative and positive. It highlights for me where and how racism started and ways to combat this horrible social disease. Everyone is a victim and perpetrator of racism by the simple of our ignorance. I very much enjoyed this course and have requirement this course to a friend overseas. The statistical 'stuff' for me I found difficult to gasp.....but that's because I am ignorance about statistics.

Professor Smithson's Ignorance Taxonomy was an extremely valuable reference tool. I also enjoyed his insight's into how to cope with making decisions under ignorance. Professor Bammer's lectures and discussions were always quite interesting and thought-provoking. But, the issue that most struck a chord with me is conflict of values among stakeholders and trade-offs in decision-making.

The journey of life is the search for enlightenment - the starting point is ignorance. I found the course content readings and discussions very enlightening as I recalled a poem from my childhood : Men are four - "He who knows not and knows not he knows not - he is a fool shun him He who knows not and knows he knows not - he is simple teach him He who knows and knows not he knows - he is asleep wake him He who knows and knows he knows - he is a wise man follow him. Anon - an Arab proverb My parents diligently encouraged the pursuit of knowledge - so one could be wise. The loudest chords were struck by the lectures on - effective thinking about ignorance , how unknowns are dealt with in different domains and ways of coping with ignorance. As the sociopolitical order in the USA and in the world is challenged , ignorance and the relationship to consequences and outcomes are being played out. The manner in which decisions are made in this time hype - information attribute to our individual and collective anxiety. Our collective futures seem to have more complex problems and may require tunes yet to be composed.

I was surprised at first to see that much kind of unknowns and their positive and negative aspects. I appreciated the fact that creativity is linked to unknowns as sometimes when we create we tend to "prepare" for it by essays, trials . In fact, it's useless.

I thought that Dr. Sarah Pearson's information about entrepreneurs was fascinating. While she discussed how they are familiar with the unknown and that they accept that they don't know the answers, welcome failure, and love to live in that territory, I have since wondered what makes a person that way. You can have two children, both brought up in the same home, same experiences, same everything, but at a very early age, you can see signs that one is inherently different. Different from the standpoint of taking risks, not worrying so much about the consequences. It was touched on in this course somewhat how that may happen, but I find the inherent capacity for risk taking, curiosity, and creativity to be fascinating.

There was much stimulating and useful material in the course. With regard to complex problems, the various techniques discussed such as boundary setting, classifying unknowns and the six unknown management strategies were very helpful as these system problems can appear unmanageable and dysfunctional. I was particularly interested in the research that showed a group can outperform an individual in the right setting. Finally, for public policy problems, the emergence of value conflicts seems inevitable but healthy in a democracy.

Thanks to all the ANU staff and other contributors who've put together this course, both in front of and behind the lens, and also my fellow students for their comments. It's been very enlightening learning about the many facets of ignorance, including situations in which it is useful. Wishing the course team all the best for future iterations of the course.