

J. Cole ✓



Columbia University in the City of New York | New York, N.Y.

CENTER FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DIRECTOR

420 West 118th Street

March 15, 1980

Dr. Josh Lederberg, President  
Rockefeller University  
1230 York Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Josh:

I write to inquire whether you would be interested in joining a new workshop that we are developing at the Center. The workshop will focus on problems of "decision-making under conditions of uncertainty." We hope to have roughly 25 regular participants who are drawn from various departments and schools throughout the University, as well as from other universities in the New York Metropolitan area.

I believe that the various problems that fall under the general rubric of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty are central to the social sciences today. Much work is being done on these problems already, but much more needs to be done. The study of these problems also links potentially the various natural and social science communities. A central question that will guide much of our work will be: How do individuals, organizations, and institutions make significant social and economic decisions when they possess, at best, only partial information to formulate decisions and policy?

Plainly, decision-making on the basis of partial information takes place in a wide variety of domains including, among many others: medical research diagnostic practices; legal regulations and court decisions; government social program formulations and evaluations; public health hazard decisions; scientific resource allocation; hiring and promotion decisions in hierarchically arranged organizations; consumer behavior decisions and indeed, in the formulation of almost all public policy.

I hope that the workshop will not only result in interesting exchanges of ideas between people in different disciplines, but may also lead to a set of "satellite" research projects that further develop the interests of members of the workshop.

The workshop will be somewhat unusual in that it will draw upon very different theoretical orientations and technical skills. Consequently, part of the challenge of this workshop will be to have researchers talk about the most advanced work they are doing in problems of decision-making under uncertainty, and to do so in language that is understandable to individuals in other disciplines who may not be familiar with either the particular theoretical framework or mathematics used in specifying formal models.

Here are some additional specifics about the structure of the workshop. First, we hope to limit its size to no more than 25 or 30 people who will attend the sessions on a regular basis. Second, we will meet at the Center once every other week on Tuesdays at 4 p.m., with the normal session running roughly two hours. Third, one page abstracts of the talks will be circulated at least a week in advance of the session. These abstracts will include both a summary of the topics to be covered and one or two references to more technical papers on the subject that members of the workshop may want to examine before the session itself. Occasionally, speakers will discuss drafts of papers that have been circulated to the group in advance of the meeting. Fourth, the group will include guests from other neighboring universities, such as the Rockefeller University, who wish to be active participants in the workshop.

If you decide to participate in the workshop, would you please either write or call me (280-3093) to let me know the topic that you would like to speak to the group about and the best month of the next academic year for you to present some of your materials. ✓

Let me reiterate in closing what the central goals of the workshop are: (1) to bring together people in several disciplines who have common intellectual concerns who are interested in finding out what others are working on and in discussing each others' work. This is not intended to produce formal collaborations between members of the workshop, although if that should occur as a by-product of the seminar, so much the better; (2) to produce improved understanding of the problematics surrounding issues of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and/or in the absence of full information; (3) to help generate support for research projects that either are currently underway or are being contemplated and possibly for post-doctoral traineeships; and (4) to help develop, possibly, a collection of essays on general themes related to decision-making that will be published as products of the workshop.

If I have spoken to you informally about this workshop, then please take this as a formal invitation to join us. If I have not yet had an opportunity to speak to you about the workshop, I hope that you also will take this as an invitation to join us and to call me for further details about either the focus of the seminar or its operation. I have hopes that this workshop will be an informative and interesting one and that it will provide for needed exchanges of ideas between people who have not had sufficient opportunity to engage each other.

I look forward to hearing from you shortly, since I hope to have next year's schedule of talks set by the middle of April.

Sincerely,

*Jonathan*  
Jonathan R. Cole  
Director

*Josh,*  
*I thought you would be interested in this workshop.*  
JRC:ms *If you would like to come and participate occasionally, or even give a talk, we would more than welcome it.*