Many features in Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) discussion forums are adapted from other, non-learning contexts. However, an interactional archetype designed for auction and review websites has unintended effects on learning-relevant behaviors in MOOCs. In this thesis, I connect Expectancy Value Theory for Help Sources and evaluation anxiety to existing MOOC forum features and student behavior. I specifically ground my research questions in the investigation of common reputation system features, peer helper selection, and other forum behaviors in a MOOC.

In this talk, I discuss a two-part online survey experiment to explore the connection between theory and help seeking. I also describe a MOOC field experiment examining features of a reputation system (i.e., up- & down-voting, badges, and peer helper expertise information) and how theory might explain peer helper selection in a help exchange system. Finally, I describe a second field experiment in a small private online course with less tightly controlled variables.

This thesis contributes initial evidence to partially support the claims of Expectancy Value Theory for Help Sources, encourages the inclusion of evaluation anxiety in help seeking models, suggests methods for reducing the negative effects of up- & down-voting, and provides design recommendations for instructors of online courses.