Objectives

The purpose of the course is to provide graduate students with an overview of the work in Sociology on formal or complex organizations. The course is built on the premise that there is a constant dialogue between theory and empirical research and across the generations and disciplines. Our basic purpose is to explore and evaluate - and possibly even contribute to - the development of theoretical knowledge of macro organizational behavior.

The course begins with a review of rationalist theories of organizations. Here we are introduced to Weber's bureaucratic ideal type and theories of scientific management. We also review work on the limits of rationality. Next we discuss naturalist theories and review the work of the human relations school. Much work today is still influenced by this perspective. We focus on inter-group relations, culture, power, and networks. We finish with open systems models and examine organizational ecology, neo-institutional theory, and political economy theory. The course is necessarily an overview of what has been done and does not go into great deal on any one topic. Hopefully your appetite will be whetted, and you will be inspired to explore the various theories more in your other coursework and possibly your dissertation.

Format and Assignments

The format for the class is very simple. All students are expected to read all the required material on the syllabus for the class period. The instructor will begin the discussion with an overview of the readings for the day and summarize the discussion at the end. In between there will be student presentations on the readings for that day. All students are required to make three class presentations. The presentations should be descriptive and analytic. Presenters are expected to prepare a one-page (single-spaced, one inch margins, 11-pt font) review essay for each reading that they present. After a brief summary of the main points (about 1/3 of the text), the essay will point out something ‘nice’ and ‘naughty’ (about 2/3 of the text) about each reading. The ‘nice’ highlights how this reading contributes to our understanding of the topic for the week; the ‘naughty’ highlights what is wrong with the article or what it has ignored. These are to be distributed at the beginning of the class on the day of the presentation. I will make copies for you if you email them to me 24 hours before class, otherwise it’s your responsibility to
make copies. They will be posted on D2L afterwards after I read and make corrections. Points will be deducted for anything outside these parameters. 45% of the student's grade will be based on the presentations and essays (15% for each presentation/essay). Students who fail to make a presentation on the assigned date will get a C on the assignment, if an essay is turned in late but within one week of the presentation, or an F, if there is no essay turned in.

Finally, students are required either to a complete a take-home exam (there will be word limits) or a research paper. The purpose of the exam is to see how well students have been able to master the theory and research in the field. You will get the exam on April 24th and it is due May 8th at 3:30 PM (paper copy in my mailbox). 50% of the student's grade will be based on the exam. You can get an extension and an incomplete, but only for a serious illness/tragedy which makes turning it in on the 8th impossible. However, exams turned in late will be graded in August before the fall semester begins. To get the maximum amount out of the course material, the exam is an excellent option.

Alternatively, students can do a twenty-page literature review (not including references) comparable to something which might be published in the Annual Review of Sociology (see recent volumes for examples) or a research proposal. We will discuss the details of the paper in class. Students who elect this option need to prepare a one page abstract (250 words) by February 13th and will have ten minutes to describe their project in class that day. Students will make a 20 minute presentation on their paper during the last two sessions (April 24th & May 1st). Students who select this option will be expected to turn in their paper at 3:30 pm on May 1st. Please submit a hard copy and an e-copy. For these students the paper’s grade will count for 50% of their grade. You can get an extension and an incomplete, but only for a serious illness/tragedy which makes turning it in on the 1st impossible. However, papers turned in late will be graded in August before the fall semester begins. The paper is for an advanced student who has take org theory classes before and is already familiar with the canon of work.

For everyone, 5% of your grade is based on attendance. This is an easy ‘A’. If you are sick, have a personal emergency, or a professional commitment and cannot attend, please notify me ahead of time for an excused absence. However, everyone gets one ‘party day’ (last minute TA assignments, a visit by mom, hangovers). Thus one unexcused absence results in no penalty, two lowers your grade to a ‘B’, three lowers your grade to a ‘C’, four lowers it to a ‘D’, and five or more lowers it to an ‘F’ for attendance.

Readings

These books are for sale in the bookstore and are on reserve in the library.


Required readings which are articles and book chapters can be accessed using D2L.

The reading list is not as dense as your other seminars, but the class is premised on the assumption that you do all the readings. If you don’t intend on doing the readings, you should take another class or audit. A common complaint is that courses like this skim over a great deal of material without ever getting in depth. There is no sure-fire way to prevent this from happening, and this is one reason why I am requiring fewer readings each session and offering an integrative exam. Hopefully, this will help you get some closure on the literature. Still, be forewarned and give yourself enough time to enjoy and appreciate the intellectual debates within the field.

**This and That**

I will use D2L to communicate with students this semester (announcements, postings, etc.), but I will email you through Outlook, not D2L. That means that you should check often for messages. You never know when I will unexpectedly call off class!

I will not tolerate any cheating or plagiarism of any kind. You will not only flunk the assignment but you will be reported to the Graduate School and disciplinary procedures will be initiated. Also I will not tolerate any aggressive remarks toward other students during the seminar. My first obligation is to provide a safe environment for the exchange of ideas and there will be no harassment or intimidating behavior in my classroom. Finally, please turn off the cell phones and no emailing or text messaging during class. We will have a break halfway through the class, and you can call mommy then.
Schedule of Classes

Introduction

January 16th  Living in a Society of Organizations


Organizations as Rational Systems

January 23rd  Bureaucracy


January 30th  Contingency Theory


**February 6th  
Transaction Cost Analysis**


**February 13th  
Bounded Rationality and the Behavioral School**

**Paper abstracts due**


Organizations as Natural Systems

February 20th Organizational Power


February 27th Organizational Cultures


March 6th Social Networks - Micro


March 13th  
**Social Networks - Macro**


**Organizations as Open Systems**

**March 27th  
The New Institutionalism**


April 3th

Collective Action Perspective on Organizational Behavior


April 10th  Organizational Ecology and Niche Theory


April 17th  Organizational Identities


The Political Economy Approach

April 24th  Marxian Perspective


May 1st 

Markets as Politics

Papers Due


May 8th 

Exams Due