

# Soc110 Organizations and Institutions

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Summer 2012

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**Final Exam:** In-class, Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012

## Course Overview

This is a course on the sociology of formal organizations. Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy provides the foundation for a sociological understanding of modern organizations. More than traditional forms of social organization such as the family, bureaucratic organizations embody an instrumental rationality which—ideal-typically—gets things done efficiently. Yet the conventional wisdom about bureaucracy is precisely the opposite: we think of bureaucracies as slow, bloated, and mired in red tape. In a word, they are *irrational*.

The sociology of organizations asks why organizations behave the way they do while going beyond the simplistic opposition of rational vs. irrational behavior. In particular, we will pay attention to the roles that *social institutions* (culture!) and *power* play in how organizations behave.

The course is organized along two dimensions: (1) theory vs. practice; and (2) macro vs. micro. First, *theory vs. practice*. We will begin the course by looking at a number of seminal articles in the field of organizational sociology. Fair warning! These will be the most difficult readings of the course, right up front! The bulk of the course will consist of applying these theories to concrete case studies, including the fast food industry, the modern capitalist enterprise, the State, and our own UC Berkeley.

Second, *macro vs. micro*. Sociological analyses of organizational life can broadly be separated into two parts: the relationship between the organization and the world around it (the “environment”); and what happens *inside* the organization. In principle we'd like to have a grand theory that encompasses both but in practice those who study organizations consider either one or the other but not both simultaneously.

## Required readings

There are two required texts for this course:

- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*
- Bethany McLean & Peter Elkind, *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron*

If you have early editions of either of these texts, they will be perfectly adequate. Both are available at the ASUC bookstore.

The first week's readings will be in PDF format on the course bspace site. All readings thereafter will be either from the above books or from **a course reader** available at **University Copy Services** on **2425 Channing Way**, south of campus.

## **Grading**

Course grades will be determined by three components:

- ❖ **Take-home midterm exam (35%).** This exam will cover material from the first two weeks of the course. The format will involve three or four short essay questions, each possibly with multiple parts. It will be distributed over bspace on Thursday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, and will be due at the beginning of class a week later on Thursday, June 7<sup>th</sup>. This exam will make up 35% of your grade.
- ❖ **Micro-organizational theory exercise (30%).** This assignment is designed to help us understand the operation of power within an organization near and dear to us all, UC Berkeley itself. It will involve consideration of specific materials that will be distributed on Monday, June 11<sup>th</sup>. The exercise will be due a week later on Monday, June 18<sup>th</sup> and will make up 30% of your grade. (Further details about this assignment will be communicated as it approaches during the term.)
- ❖ **Final exam (35%).** The final exam will be administered in-class on the last day of instruction, Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup>. It will be a multiple-choice affair and will make up 35% of your grade.

The grading scale is as follows. '[' means including, and '(' means excluding, so '[83-87]' for example means everything including 83 up to but **NOT** including 87.

A+	[97+	A	[93-97)	A-	[90-93)
B+	[87-90)	B	[83-87)	B-	[80-83)
C+	[77-80)	C	[73-77)	C-	[70-73)
D+	[67-70)	D	[63-67)	D-	[60-63)
		F	[0-60)		

I will use the Assignments "tool" on the course bspace site to communicate the scores on your assignments to you. This will provide a record of your progress throughout the term.

*Late penalties:* For all applicable assignments, a penalty of -10 points per day will be applied to any late submissions. So get an early start and don't be late.

*Incompletes:* I do not allow incompletes except under very unusual circumstances. If you think you may need to take one, talk to me as soon as possible—please do not wait until the last week of class to tell me.

## Lecture, Reading, and Assignment/Exam Schedule

### The Organization and its Environment

- May 21 Mon Introduction; the managerialist approach  
*Readings:* none
- 22 Tue The population ecology approach  
*Readings:*
- Michael Hannan & John Freeman, “The Population Ecology of Organizations” (bspace). **Focus on pp. 929-940, 946-949, 956-962.**
  - Robert Birgeneau, “Access and Excellence” (bspace). **Focus on pp. 1-21, 30-34.**
- 23 Wed The resource dependence approach  
*Reading:* Jeffrey Pfeffer & Gerald Salancik, *The External Control of Organizations* ch 3, 10 (bspace)
- 24 Thu The institutionalist approach  
*Readings:*
- Paul DiMaggio & Walter Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields” (bspace)
  - John Douglass, “From Chaos to Order and Back? A Revisionist Reflection on the Master Plan for Higher Education @ 50 and Thoughts About Its Future” (bspace)

### Case study: The Fast Food Industry

- May 28 Mon **\*\*\* MEMORIAL DAY – NO CLASS \*\*\***
- 29 Tue The emergence of the fast food industry  
*Reading:* Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* ch 1, 2
- 30 Wed Expansion of the industry  
*Reading:* Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* ch 4, 5
- 31 Thu The reorganization of American agriculture  
*Reading:* Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* ch 6, 7
- ➔ MIDTERM TAKE-HOME EXAM DISTRIBUTED May 31, 2012

## Internal Organizational Design

- Jun 4 Mon The managerialist and Marxist perspectives of internal organizational design  
*Reading:* Richard Edwards, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century* ch 1, 2 (reader)
- 5 Tue The labor process in the fast food industry  
*Reading:* Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* ch 3, 8
- 6 Wed Resource dependence  
*Reading:* Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations* ch 4 (reader)
- 7 Thu Who gets power?  
*Reading:* Neil Fligstein, “The Intraorganizational Power Struggle: Rise of Finance Personnel to Top Leadership in Large Corporations, 1919-1979” (reader) **Focus on pp. 44-50, 53-57.**



**Midterm Take-Home Exam DUE In Class June 7, 2012**

## Social Movements, Social Networks, Shareholder Value

- Jun 11 Mon Social movements in organizational theory perspective  
*Readings:*
- Frances Fox Piven & Richard Cloward, “The Structuring of Protest” ch. 1 from *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (reader)
  - Kim Voss & Rachel Sherman, “Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Tactical Innovation and the Revitalization of the American Labor Movement” (reader)
- ➡ MICRO-ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED June 11, 2012
- 12 Tue Social networks, Part I: organizations embedded within networks  
*Reading:* AnnaLee Saxenian, *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128* ch 2, 3 (reader)
- 13 Wed Social networks, Part II: networks embedded within organizations  
*Reading:* Mario Small, *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life* ch 1, 2 (reader)
- 14 Thu The shareholder value conception of the firm  
*Reading:* Roger Lowenstein, *Origins of the Crash: The Great Bubble and Its Undoing* ch 1, 2 (reader)

### Case study of shareholder value: the Enron Corporation

Jun 18 Mon The rise of Enron  
*Reading:* McLean & Elkind, *The Smartest Guys in the Room* ch 1-3

<b>☞ Micro-Organizational Theory Exercise DUE In Class June 18, 2012</b>
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19 Tue The Enron model of making money  
*Reading:* McLean & Elkind, *The Smartest Guys in the Room* ch 4-7, 15

20 Wed The flaws in the Enron model  
*Reading:* McLean & Elkind, *The Smartest Guys in the Room* ch 8-11

21 Thu What effect has shareholder value had on employment?  
*Reading:* Arne Kalleberg, "Economic Transformation and the Decline of Institutional Protections" ch 2 from *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s* (reader)

### Case study: The State in a post-9/11 world

Jun 25 Mon The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its organizational environment  
*Reading:* Christopher Cooper & Robert Block, *Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security* ch 3, 4 (reader)

26 Tue Whose security is the Department of Homeland Security securing?  
*Reading:* Cooper & Block, *Disaster* ch 5, 6, 8 (reader)

27 Wed The other side of the story: Top Secret America  
*Readings:*

- Dana Priest & William Arkin, "Top Secret America: A hidden world, growing beyond control" *Washington Post* 20 Jul 2010 (reader)
- Priest & Arkin, "National Security Inc." *Washington Post* 21 Jul 2010 (reader)

Jun 28 Thu **FINAL EXAM (in-class)**