Course Objectives

Organizations are the basic building blocks of modern society. From birth to death, the lives of people in modern societies play out in formal organizations. Thus, organizations have an enormous impact on social life; they wield tremendous power and distribute innumerable benefits. All interests – economic, political, social, and cultural – are pursued through formal organizations. It is only through organizations that large-scale planning and co-ordination in modern societies – for the state, economy, and civil society – become possible. To understand the world we inhabit, then, we must appreciate the power and scope of organizations.

This course is an introduction to the sociological study of organizations. It will familiarize you with the main theoretical orientations and show you how they are used to investigate important phenomena. To that end, we will review the classics, but only briefly and with an eye to understanding how these foundational studies continue to reverberate in contemporary research on organizations. The bulk of our time will be spent considering current debates. I also want to help you learn how to use these ideas and findings in your own research. Therefore we will spend a lot of time trying to get inside the minds of the scholars whose work we read – figuring out why they did what they did, what you would have done differently, and what you could do next.

The literature on organizations is vast and our time is limited. Therefore, the course touches lightly on many important topics and approaches (e.g., corporate governance) and neglects others entirely (e.g., the social construction of organizational fields). To help you navigate the literature without overloading you, I have assigned a reasonably small set of required readings each week; these were chosen carefully to cover key ideas and findings and to introduce you to the scholars in this field. These readings will be the basis of our in-class discussion. To gain a full understanding of the field, you are going to have to read far beyond this syllabus. To guide you in this, I have listed optional background readings for every session. I have also created a reading list that covers older research traditions (pre-1975 or so); it is available on my website, www.heatherhaveman.net, on the teaching page.

Course Culture and Pedagogy

You should read the required readings carefully for each session. As you read, ask yourself these questions:

1) What is being explained – the dependent variable (DV)?
2) What is purported to explain the dependent variable – the independent variable (IV)?
3) What is the basic argument – the reason(s) why the IV affects the DV? What assumptions underlie the argument? What are the argument’s strengths? Its weaknesses?
4) What are the argument’s scope conditions? Under what circumstances and to what kinds of organizations is it meant to apply?

5) What differentiates this argument from others we have read in past weeks or are reading this week? Can these differences be resolved through an empirical test?

6) If you disagree with the argument, what would it take to convince you?

7) For empirical articles: How, and how well, is the research designed? Consider sampling frame and measurement (construct validity, internal validity, and reliability), external validity, and statistical conclusion validity (spurious causation and selection/endogeneity). What, if any, alternative explanations could account for the findings?

Assignments and Evaluation

1. Class participation and session leadership 20%
2. Hypothesis development papers (9 during weeks 3-13) 20%
3. Research paper 60%

Class participation. To make this seminar successful, you must participate. My role in class sessions is to facilitate and direct the discussion; your role is to engage each other in developing the best critical understanding of each paper. I will lecture only a few times, mostly at the start of the semester to provide you with some background to the readings. If you are uncertain about what constitutes effective participation in class discussions, try anyway (after all, it’s only school – a safe place to make mistakes) or ask me for guidance.

Each of you will have the opportunity to lead the discussion. We will assign pairs of discussion leaders during the first class meeting. As session leaders, you should come to class prepared to ask 3 questions to start the ball rolling, and step in to steer the discussion when it gets off track (tangents abound in the discourse of PhD students and at least this faculty member) or gets bogged down.

Hypothesis development. Starting in class 3, you will turn in a 2-page assignment detailing 1 (just 1!) hypothesis inspired by the readings. I’m looking for 3 things here: (1) A testable hypothesis that builds on at least 1 of the day’s readings, (2) a logical argument to support the hypothesis, and (3) a sketch of how you would measure the constructs in the hypothesis. You may opt out of 2 of these if you are really not inspired by the week’s readings. They will be graded as check-minus (0 points), check (1 point), or check-plus (2 points).

Before you write your first hypothesis statement, please read “How to develop arguments and convince readers,” a document that previous cohorts of graduate students have found useful. It is my website (www.heatherhaveman.net), on the teaching page.

Research paper. This is to take the form of a research proposal – basically, the front half of an empirical paper. It should contain the following generic sections: introduction, theory development (ending with an explicit statement of 1 or 2 hypotheses – don’t try for more), and research design (sampling plan, data sources, measures, and methods of analysis). The paper should be 20-25 pages long, including bibliography but excluding any tables and figures. (As a rule
of thumb, 15 pages is not sufficient to delve into any topic in sufficient depth and 30 pages wears out the reader – at least this one.)

If you have data, you instead write a final paper that summarizes your actual research design (sampling plan, data sources, measures, and analysis techniques – 5 to 10 pages) and a brief presentation of your results (4 to 6 pages), and a conclusion (2 to 3 pages) that explains the theoretical and empirical implication of your results. Such papers should about 30 to 40 pages, including bibliography but excluding tables and figures.

Before you start working on your paper, read this short but extremely helpful paper:


Available on Daryl Bem’s personal web page: http://dbem.ws/online_pubs.html#writing.

It’s the clearest brief guide to writing social-scientific papers.

The final paper will be due 9 days after the end of our class meetings, on Wed., 7 Dec., by 2pm. Please email the paper to me as a Word document or Adobe pdf. Label it lastname_firstname.

Readings

The following books will be available at the ASUC Bookstore. You may find second-hand copies at Moe’s on Telegraph or at these second-hand web-stores: abebooks.com, powells.com, or alibris.com.


This is suggested, not required. It is very expensive. You can easily find a second-hand copy an earlier edition, all written by Scott alone and titled Organizations: Rational, Natural, & Open Systems.

In addition to these books, we will read many journal articles and several chapters of books. For journal articles, I listed URLs that are accessible through the UC Berkeley library. All book chapters are on the Soc 280D bcourses site, including book chapters from among the background readings.
1)  29 Aug.  Introduction to the Course

2)  12 Sept.  Bureaucracy and Its Discontents

Background readings


Provides an overview of pragmatic, rationalist theories of bureaucracy and management from the early twentieth century to the 1970s -- the time period before what I am calling “contemporary theoretical orientations” in the sociology of organizations were developed.  These managerialist theories are only tangentially related to early sociological theories of complex organizations formulated by Weber and Marx, and developed further by American and European sociologists.  We will not read or discuss these managerialist theories in class but you should be aware of these lines of thought.


Good representative of a huge literature of the 1960s and 1970s.  As the title says, the DV=formal organizational structure.

Davis, Gerald F.  2015.  What is organizational research for?  *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 60 (2): 179-188.  (http://asq.sagepub.com/content/60/2/179)

Required readings

Note:  These readings cover 2 related lines of organizational research, Weber’s highly influential formulation of a theory of formal organizations and reactions to the limits of that theory for explaining real, live organizations.


Gouldner was one of the students of Robert Merton who conducted the first deep sociological studies of organizations (see the companion book, *Wildcat Strike – 2 books from 1 dissertation!*).  Several other Merton students -- Philip Selznick (*TVA and the Grassroots*), Peter Blau (*Dynamics of Bureaucracy*), and Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman (*Union Democracy*) -- also produced pioneering work.
3) 19 Sept. Contemporary Theoretical Orientations (I): The Position & Demography of People in Organizations (aka Internal Organizational Demography)

**Background readings**


Early example of applying demographic theory to understand the internal dynamics of organizations.


This is really a theory of the demographic distribution of people in society, but applies beautifully to organizations.


Original theoretical statement, although it mostly focuses on a single dimension of demography (distribution of tenure/time in the organization).


**Required readings**


4) 26 Sept.  Contemporary Theoretical Orientations (I): Organizational Position and Demography (aka Organizational Ecology)

Background reading

Summarizes their original theoretical formulations (and some empirical tests) on the dynamics of 
organizational populations (Hannan and Freeman 1977 AJS), structural inertia (Hannan and Freeman 1984 
ASR), the origins and nature of organizational forms (Hannan and Freeman 1986 Sociological Forum), and 
density dependence in founding and failure (Hannan and Freeman 1987 AJS, 1988 AJS).

(https://www.jstor.org/stable/2779636)
The original formulation of resource-partitioning theory (aka niche-partitioning theory) – IM(NS)HO, one 
of the two most interesting components of the original constellation of ecological theories (the other being inertia theory).

Required readings


(http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/318962)

(http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/ajs/2014/119/5)

(http://asq.sagepub.com/content/59/1/109)

5) 3 Oct.  Contemporary Theoretical Orientations (II): Power & Politics Within Organizations (aka Resource Dependence and Networks)

Background readings

31-41. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/2089716)


**Required readings**


**Background readings**


Summarizes a series of articles and provides a coherent overview. Builds on Emerson (1962 ASR). Chapter 6 is on bcourses.


Summarizes a series of articles and demonstrates the clear logical connection between resource-dependence theory and social-network analytical methods. (Note: There is no such thing as network “theory”!)

**Required readings**


**Background readings**


Classic sociological definition of institutions: “establishment of relative permanence of a distinctly social sort” (p. 180); “those features of social life which outlast biological generations or survive drastic social changes that might have been expected to bring them to an end” (pp. 283-284.)


Although this paper is not about organizations or people in organizations, it has powerfully shaped the way organizational theorists think about culture.


A very different view of culture in action – also not organizational but quite influential.

**Required readings**


You should read the rest of this book as a background reading.


The authors are currently revising this paper for resubmission to *ASR*. The revised paper will be available on bcourses by mid October.

**Background readings**

Foundational study of how organizations actually work. A deeply sociological meditation on leadership.


**Required readings**


9) 31 Oct.  Selected Topics (I): Entrepreneurship

**Background readings**


Soc 280D – Organizations – Class Schedule and Reading List


Required readings


10) 7 Nov. Selected Topics (II): Institutional Logics

Background readings


The original theoretical formulation.


An influential reformulation of the theory. Summarizes much research that has built on the foundation laid by Friedland and Alford. Has many good points, but the analysis has shortcomings.

Required readings


11) 14 Nov. Selected Topics (III): Social Movements

**Background readings**


**Required readings**


12) 21 Nov. **Selected Topics (IV): The Impact of Organizations on Society: Power and Inequality**

**Background readings**


Admirable. But note the almost complete absence of organizations from this story. Clearly, there’s work for organizational sociologists to do!

**Required readings**


13) 28 Nov. **Selected Topics (V): The Impact of Organizations on Society: Community and Cohesion/Division**

**Background readings**


Distinguished between two types of society: one a close-knit group united by bonds of blood, soil and tradition which was “natural” and therefore “organic” (*Gemeinschaft*), the other one an “artificial” society which was characterized by opportunistic contact and self-seeking behavior in which individuals only
connected with one another for purely instrumental purposes (*Gesellschaft*), because this type of social arrangement is not natural but a product of man-made conventions, Tönnies referred to it as “mechanical.”


This was his doctoral dissertation – still in print >120 years later. In an explicit attempt to confuse generations of sociology students, he used the same terms as Tönnies (*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*), but gave them opposite meanings. For Durkheim, *mechanical solidarity* was based on shared religious beliefs that integrated traditional societies, while *organic solidarity* was associated with an advanced division of labor.


Analyzes the rise of the nation-state, which are among the largest and most common of modern communities – sites of “deep, horizontal comradeship.” They are “imagined” by the people who conceive of themselves as part of those communities. Highlights the importance of shared language and the media in creating and sustaining such large communities.

**Required readings**


