

Sociology 110 Organizations & Institutions

Spring 2021 | UC Berkeley

Instructor: Dr. Linus Huang, Continuing Lecturer

Office hours: on Zoom, Tuesdays, 1-3 PM; sign up via bCal

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Final exam: online, Wednesday, May 12 2020, 3-6 PM

Graduate student reader: Isabel García Valdivia

What will this course be about?

Organizations are an inescapable part of our everyday lives. We're employees, students, or customers of them; we buy their goods and services; we drive or ride on roads built and maintained by them; we're bound by their rules, but also, as in the case of governments, receive rights and protections from them. And yet, in practical terms, what organizations do and don't do, and why, are undertheorized. Our "cultural repertoire" for thinking about organizations, to adopt a concept offered by Berkeley Sociology's Ann Swidler, is limited. We tend to think of organizations either in terms of "red tape", or as simple instruments of their leaders—so that if we need an organization to change, all we need to do is replace the leader.

Both of these ways of thinking about organizations have more than an element of truth to them, but they represent only a limited way for understanding problems in organizations today. The object of this course is to add new tools to our "conceptual toolkit" for thinking about organizational behavior. To do so we will look at three major perspectives in contemporary organizational theory—population ecology, the relational perspective (aka resource dependence theory), and the institutionalist perspective—that will offer a deeper, more sociologically-informed, understanding of organizations.

Logistics for an online semester

This course will be entirely online this Spring 2021 semester. Despite this, I intend the course to be given synchronously, as if we were meeting in-person. I will lecture live, over Zoom, on the regular MWF 12:00-1:00 PM schedule. We will observe the "Berkeley time" convention of starting 10 minutes after the hour, so we will actually begin at 12:10 PM on MWF.

Although I don't recommend it, it will be technically possible to take the course **asynchronously**. All lectures will be recorded and posted to bCourses shortly after class ends, where they will remain until the end of the semester. Attendance/participation will not be part of the grade. Of the graded assignments, only the final exam will require online attendance at a specific time, but even there, accommodations can be made for those in different time zones, etc.

But, while asynchronous participation will technically be possible, I recommend synchronous participation in the course. This course will indeed follow a lecture format, as it would have if we had been holding the course in-person, but the Zoom sessions will not be me just playing a pre-recorded lecture. I intend to take full advantage of Zoom's interactive features, including both normal audio/visual interaction, as well as chat.

I will hold weekly office hours on Tuesdays from 1:00-3:00 PM. These will be held over Zoom, but at a separate URL from the lecture (the lectures are of course specific to the course, but my office hours are shared between students in all three of my courses this term). Students can sign up for 15-minute appointments over bCal.

Readings

All readings for this course will be made available in PDF format on the bCourses site. There are no textbooks or course readers to purchase.

In many cases reading assignments have been chosen that offer a basic story, but with in-depth details omitted. Lecture time will be used to introduce material that explores the stories in the readings in greater depth. You will be responsible for both the material in the readings and the material presented in lecture.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by four different components:

- **Four assessment quizzes** (2.5% each, 10% total). The course will be built upon three theoretical paradigms that will be presented in the first part of the semester. These four quizzes, all given through bCourses, will assess your understanding of the basics of each paradigm. All are multiple-choice, short, and low-pressure. The scores on the quizzes will count toward your grade, but bCourses will tell you which if any of your responses are incorrect after you submit them, and you can re-take each multiple times up to their respective deadlines.
- **Two focus papers** (10% each, 20% total), both associated with material after Spring Break. Each will be one-single-spaced page in length. They are not research papers, but neither are they open-ended response papers: each will have a specific question or issue that the paper should address. The papers will be scored by how well they demonstrate serious engagement with the material and how well they address the question asked.
- **Two midterm exams** (25% each, 50% total). Both will be “take-home” (whatever that means during an online semester) in that you will be given 4 days to complete each, rather than a single class session.
- **A final exam** (20%), which will be administered as a bCourses quiz during the University’s official exam timeslot for this course: Wednesday, May 12, 2020, 3-6 PM. The exam will be 100% multiple choice. It will cover material from the entire course (i.e., it will be cumulative), but it will emphasize material from the later parts of the course.

The course grading scale is as follows:

A+	97+	A	93-96	A-	90-92
B+	87-89	B	83-86	B-	80-82
C+	77-79	C	73-76	C-	70-72
D+	67-69	D	63-66	D-	60-62
		F	0-59		

When it comes time to compute overall course grades, I will round to the nearest whole number using standard rounding conventions—89.49 rounds down to 89, 89.50 rounds up to 90, etc. It doesn't really matter what the letter grade on the individual assignments are.

There are no other discretionary considerations, nor opportunities to earn extra credit on an individual basis, that will factor into your grade.

There are no surprises in how I calculate course grades. The GRADES section on bCourses will incorporate the weightings above and will accurately keep you apprised of your course progress. During the semester, with a little arithmetic, you can figure out how you need to do on subsequent assignments in order to earn a particular grade.

Late grade policy: Work submitted late will be marked down 20% for each 24-hour period the assignment is overdue.

Disabled Students Program (DSP)

DSP students should have their arrangements made by the third week of instruction. The DSP office will automatically send me a digital copy of your letter, with explanation of your accommodations. It will not be necessary to also provide me with a physical copy of the letter.

Recommendation Letters

Writing recommendation letters is part of an instructor's job and one which I embrace readily. However, it is difficult for me, and unhelpful to all parties involved, to write letters for students I do not know very well. I can and have exercised the discretion to decline to write letters when I don't know students beyond what grades they've earned in the course. If you anticipate asking me to write a letter, it is in your interest to participate in class discussion, visit me during my office hours, etc., and let me know what your plans and interests are above and beyond course material.

Academic Honesty & Classroom Conduct

The UC Berkeley Honor Code states that "As a member of the UC Berkeley community, I act with honesty, integrity, and respect for others" (<https://teaching.berkeley.edu/berkeley-honor-code>). I expect you will follow these principles. You may not copy specific text or ideas from others, whether from fellow students, from authors of our readings or other material you find, without specific attribution. To do otherwise is to plagiarize. You may not cheat on any of the

exams by bringing in illicit outside material, copying from fellow students, or engaging in other dishonest practices. Violation of these rules will result in an immediate **-0-** on the assignment in question, plus a report to the Office of Academic Affairs at my discretion.

You may of course discuss the lectures and readings with your fellow students. Forming studying groups on your own is encouraged, especially as there are no discussion sections to accompany this course. If these groups are used to struggle through ideas or debate topics (both are also good uses of class time, by the way!), then the effort expended can be very rewarding. However, if groups are used simply to memorize a classmate's notes by rote, to subsequently recite on exams, **this is effectively another form of plagiarism** as far as I am concerned. I use this specific example because it has popped up in my courses before.

Study group meetings should be suspended during periods where a take-home exam is active. They can begin again after the exam due date has been reached.

Additional Resources

The University has set up a central online location with links to a variety of resources, both academic and non-academic, that students might need. Go here: One-Click Resources for Undergraduate Resources <https://recalibrate.berkeley.edu/one-click-mode/one-click-resources-undergraduate-students>.

Reading, Assignment, and Exam Schedule

All readings listed below are required and must be completed prior to the first meeting of the indicated topic.

Introduction: What is a sociology of organizations?

January 20, 22, 25

No readings.

Topic: Population ecology: the environmental selection hypothesis

January 27, 29

Read: Michael T. Hannan & John Freeman, "The Population Ecology of Organizations"

Assessment Quiz #1 due Friday, January 29, 11:59 PM

Topic: Population ecology: the resource partitioning hypothesis

February 1, 3

Read: Glenn Carroll & Anand Swaminathan, "Why the Microbrewery Movement?"

Assessment Quiz #2 due Wednesday, February 3, 11:59 PM

Topic: The relational perspective

February 5, 8, 10, 12

No class on Monday, February 15, Washington's Birthday.

Read: Jeffrey Pfeffer & Gerald Salancik, "The Social Control of Organizations"

Assessment Quiz #3 due Friday, February 12, 11:59 PM

Topic: The institutionalist perspective

February 17, 19, 22, 24, 26

February 26 is a planned "buffer day" in the very likely event that I fall behind on the schedule.

Read: Paul DiMaggio & Walter Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited"

Assessment Quiz #4 due Wednesday, February 24, 11:59 PM

Midterm Exam #1 distributed on bCourses Friday, February 26

Topic: How do organizations understand what their biggest problems are?

March 1, 3

Read: Neil Fligstein, "The Intraorganizational Power Struggle"

Midterm Exam #1 due on bCourses, Tuesday, March 2, 11:59 PM

Topic: The rise of the shareholder value corporation

March 5, 8, 10, 12, 15

Read: Karen Ho, *Liquidated* chapter 3 "Wall Street Historiographies and the Shareholder Value Revolution"

Topic: Financialization and income inequality in the U.S.

March 17, 19

Read: Ken-Hou Lin & Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, "Financialization and U.S. Income Inequality, 1970-2008"

March 22-26 Spring Break!

Topic: Financialization at the University of California
March 29

No required readings.

Topic: Does college reproduce class inequality?
March 31, April 2, 5

Focus Paper #1 due on bCourses Wednesday, March 31, 11:59 PM. Further details on the assignment will be explained online.

Read: Elizabeth Armstrong & Laura Hamilton, *Paying for the Party* introduction, chapters 2, 5, 6

Midterm Exam #2 distributed on bCourses Friday, April 2

Midterm Exam #2 due on bCourses, Tuesday, April 6, 11:59 PM

Topic: How well has college facilitated upward mobility?
April 7, 9, 12

April 12 is a planned “buffer day” in the very likely event that I fall behind on the schedule.

No required readings.

Topic: Social movements
April 14, 16

Read: Kim Voss & Rachel Sherman, “Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy”

Topic: What social movement tactics are effective?
April 19, 21

Read: Fabio Rojas, “Social Movement Tactics, Organizational Change, and the Spread of African American Studies”

Topic: Social Networks, Part I: Organizations are embedded within networks ...
April 23, 26

Read: Ronald Burt, “Structural Holes and Good Ideas”

Topic: Social Networks, Part II: ... But networks are also embedded within organizations
April 28, 30

Focus Paper #2 due on bCourses Wednesday, April 28, 11:59 PM. Further details on the assignment will be explained online.

*Read: Mario Small, *Unanticipated Gains**

May 3-7 Reading, Recitation and Review

Final Exam online Wednesday, May 12th, 2020 3-6 PM