

## Sociology 110 Organizations & Institutions

Fall 2024 UC Berkeley

Instructor: Professor Linus Huang, Continuing Lecturer

Office hours: Mondays 1:15-3:30 PM, 487 Social Sciences Building (drop-in), or by appt

Graduate Student Readers: Maria Francisca Braun, Jasmine Sanders

Final exam: online, Friday, December 20 2024, 11:30 AM-2:30 PM

### Why a sociology of organizations?

The motivation for a sociology of organizations speaks to the heart of the overall sociological enterprise: a perspective that understands that what happens in society is not just the product of individual choices (whether good or bad), but also collective action. And organizations are the most durable and impactful forms of collective action in modern times.

Although we're aware enough of the existence of organizations, they tend to fade into the background when we think about social action and outcomes, while the individual (the consumer choosing a product or service, the principled vs. the unscrupulous/greedy CEO guiding a corporation, the employee laboring for that CEO, the citizen seeking a government service or other representation, etc.) moves to the foreground. A sociology of organizations brings the organizations themselves into the foreground. It will help us see how organizations, as opposed to individuals, are the fundamental "building blocks" of society, as Berkeley sociologist Heather Haveman puts it.

To investigate organizations sociologically, we need tools for understanding their behavior. We need **theories**. Sociologists have theorized about organizational behavior since Max Weber. How they have done so has changed over time. Our emphasis will be on *contemporary* organizational theory, dating to about the late 1970s. The first part of the course will introduce us to the three key perspectives within contemporary organizational theory—the demographic, relational, and cultural perspectives. The remainder of the course will be comprised of case studies illustrating the usefulness of these perspectives for understanding organizational behavior.

### Instructional Mode

This course will be in-person only. There will be no recordings of lectures available.

### Readings

Our 40 class meetings will be divided into about 15 topics. Each of these 15 topics (except for the Introduction) will have associated required readings, which should be completed prior to the first class meeting scheduled to cover them. All are available in PDF format on the course website; there are no texts or paper readers to purchase for this course.

A few notes about the required readings for the course:

- First, I have made a concerted effort to keep the reading workload to a manageable level, page-count-wise. For what would otherwise be long readings, I have heavily excerpted from the original, by skipping over sections that are thematically tangential or which, in the case of academic articles, discuss methodology or discuss data at a technical level—all so as to direct the focus on the theoretical/thematic takeaway. **However**, while this is not a methodology course, the connection between data and how sociologists draw theoretical conclusions from it, will still be a core part of the course. While I will often have you skip more technical parts of articles for the readings, I will present those elements in lecture. **You will be responsible for content both from the assigned readings, AND from lecture.**
- Second, where possible, I have assigned readings that are accessible without sacrificing too much in content. However, contemporary organizational theory is highly **paradigmatic**, in Thomas Kuhn's sense about scientific theory. A number of the readings will be a bit tricky because they are not only written by professional organizational sociologists, but are directed toward an audience of professional organizational sociologists—all of whom share an understanding of the “basics” of understanding organizations sociologically, and which leads them to begin their discussion at a more complex level.

The pieces by and for academic audiences will be the most difficult. Even among these, some—particularly the ones following quantitative methodologies—will be even more difficult than others. In these cases, as I mentioned above, I'll have you skip over the technical parts in the reading, but aim to make these technical parts accessible in lecture.

- Finally, to give you an extra incentive to do the readings, I have attached a graded reading response paper assignment to a few of them (only 3, though in principle the exercise would be useful for all of the readings). These will need to be submitted prior to the first class meeting we spend talking about the corresponding readings, so it will be necessary for you to do the readings and ponder over the arguments beforehand.

## Course grading

Your course grade will consist of three components:

- **2 midterm exams** (20% each, 40% total). These will be take-home, open-book/open-note, “short answer” (think: 4 questions each, 1 or at most 2 pages per question) affairs. They will not be too different in format and scope from what I

might expect you to be able to complete in an in-class setting. However, you'll have 3-4 days to complete them.

- **3 reading response papers** (15% each, 45% total). For three of the readings—Mario Small's *Unanticipated Gains*, Elizabeth Armstrong & Laura Hamilton's *Paying for the Party*, and Lauren Rivera's *Pedigree*—you will be required to submit a reading response paper prior to the first class we spend on each. Each of these reading response papers will need to address a specific question/prompt that will be announced as we near the topic over the course of the semester.
- **a final exam** (15%). The final exam will be **closed-book/notes/everything** and **cumulative**. Although it will be administered during the University's officially scheduled timeslot of **Friday, December 20 2024, 11:30 AM-2:30 PM**, it will be administered **online**, over bCourses.

Near the end of instruction (Friday, December 6), I will distribute a study guide for the final exam. The final exam, again, will be cumulative. But it will disproportionately (but not *exclusively*) emphasize material later in the course vs. material earlier in 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 and a B+, 89.50 rounds up to 90 and an A-, 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 above weightings will be programmed into bCourses so that what you see online will accurately inform you of your course standing. During the semester, with a little arithmetic, you can figure out how well you need to do on subsequent assignments in order to earn a particular desired grade.

**Late work policy:** All graded work submitted late will be marked down **20%** per 24-hour period it is overdue.

The graded assignments this semester will all be submitted over bCourses. If the wrong file is submitted, or the submitted file cannot be read, you will be charged a late penalty whether or not the mistake was accidental.

### Disabled Student Program (DSP)

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

If your accommodations are specifically for in-class assignments, they will not be automatically applied to take-home assignments as well. Note that, of the graded assignments this semester, only the final exam is “in-class” (although it will technically be administered over bCourses).

### 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. (And this goes for any professor you’re contemplating asking for a letter!)

### Academic Integrity & use of generative AI

While I encourage collaborative learning efforts organized amongst yourselves (e.g., study groups), these should be suspended while the take-home midterm exams are on. Similarly, while you are free and even encouraged to discuss the readings, the reading response papers themselves should be your own work.

Plagiarism—passing off the work of someone else, or of AI engines like ChatGPT, as your own—will result in an immediate **zero** on the assignment. Depending on the nature of the infraction, I may also be compelled to report the plagiarism to the appropriate authorities at the Division of Student Affairs. If you are uncertain about what does and does not count as plagiarism, you should consult with me.

**Use of generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is RESTRICTED.\***

\*Guidelines and language adapted from Professor Heather Haveman in the Department of Sociology, UC Berkeley.

Generative AI has earned a lot of attention since ChatGPT was released. You may *not* use any generative AI app or tool to compose any of the assignments for this course, including the exams. If the readers and I suspect that submissions were illegitimately composed, whether detected by Turnitin and/or our own judgment, we may ask you to complete a short oral examination consisting of questions similar to the ones that we suspect were written with the help of AI.

That said, there are a wide range of uses of AI tools by students, such as:

- correcting grammar
  - Though, note that you will not be graded for spelling or grammar *per se* on any of the course assignments, unless they are so incoherent that we cannot understand your argument.
- explaining unfamiliar terms found in readings
- generating practice quiz questions

I encourage you to explore these tools, at least the free versions of LLMs. They are becoming more prominent in the “real world” outside academia, so you will undoubtedly encounter them wherever you work after graduation.

## Reading, Assignment, and Exam Schedule

All readings are available in PDF format on the course website. Each should be completed prior to the first meeting on schedule associated with it.

### Introduction

Aug 28, 30, 4

*No class Monday, Sep 2 (Labor Day).*

*No readings.*

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### Demographic perspective

Sep 6, 9, 11, 13

*Read:*

- Glenn Carroll & Michael T. Hannan, “The Demographic Perspective”, chapter 2 from *The Demography of Corporations and Industries* (2000)
- Heather Haveman, “The Demographic Perspective”, chapter 4 from *The Power of Organizations: A New Approach to Organizational Theory* (2022)

*Note:* The assigned readings here are both chapters from book-length treatments of the demographic perspective. The chapters have the same titles and are both intended as general overviews of organizational demography. The readings are indeed perfectly compatible with one another—but they are not redundant. I’m assigning Carroll & Hannan for their emphasis on what *explaining things demographically* means. The Haveman discussion meanwhile draws out three principles within organizational demographic research that have emerged over time: the principle of **structural inertia**, the theory of **density dependence**, and finally **resource partitioning theory**.

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### **Relational perspective**

Sep 16, 18, 20, 23

*Read:* Heather Haveman, “The Relational Perspective” chapter 5 from *The Power of Organizations: A New Approach to Organizational Theory* (2022)

- Focus on pages 110-117 of the chapter here. Pages 118-125 will be relevant a little later in the course.
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**Midterm Exam #1 distributed on bCourses, Wednesday, September 25, 2024**

### **Cultural perspective**

Sep 25, 27, 30, Oct 2

*Read:* Heather Haveman, “The Cultural Perspective” chapter 6 from *The Power of Organizations: A New Approach to Organizational Theory* (2022)

**Midterm Exam #1 due on bCourses, Sunday, September 29, 2024 @ 11:59 PM**

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### **Social Networks, Part I: Who is likely to have a good idea?**

Oct 4, 7

*Read:* Ronald Burt, “Structural Holes and Good Ideas” (2004)

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### **Social Networks, Part II: Why making friends is about more than just being outgoing**

Oct 9, 11

*Read:* Mario Small, *Unanticipated Gains* (2009), excerpts

**Response Paper #1 due on bCourses, Monday, October 9, 2024 @ 12:00 PM\***

\*12:00 PM noon, not midnight.

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**How do organizations understand their biggest problems?**

Oct 14, 16

*Read:* Neil Fligstein, “The Intraorganizational Power Struggle” (1987)**The rise of the shareholder value corporation**

Oct 18, 21, 23

*Read:* Karen Ho, “Wall Street Historiographies and the Shareholder Value Revolution” chapter 3 from *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (2009)**Organizations and income inequality in the U.S. since 1980**

Oct 25, 28, 30

*Read:*

- “Carrier Workers See Costs, Not Benefits, of Global Trade” *The New York Times* Mar 19 2016
- “The ‘1 Percent’ isn’t America’s biggest source of inequality. College is.” *The Washington Post* May 22 2014
- “Robert Reich: When Bosses Shared Their Profits” *The New York Times* Jun 25 2020

**College and class inequality, Part I: Class inequality within schools**

Nov 1, 4, 6

*Read:* Elizabeth Armstrong & Laura Hamilton, *Paying for the Party* introduction + chapters 2, 5, 6 (2013)**Response Paper #2 due on bCourses, Friday, November 1, 2024 @ 12:00 PM\***\*12:00 PM noon, not midnight.**Midterm Exam #2 distributed on bCourses, Friday, November 1, 2024****Midterm Exam #2 due on bCourses, Tuesday, November 5, 2024 @ 11:59 PM**

### **College and class inequality, Part II: Class inequality between schools**

Nov 8, 13, 15

*No class Monday, Nov 11 (Veterans Day).*

*Read:* Raj Chetty, John N. Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner & Danny Yagan, “Income Segregation and Intergenerational Mobility Across Colleges in the United States” (2020)

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### **Why has the labor movement in the U.S. not acted like a movement?**

Nov 18, 20

*Read:* Kim Voss & Rachel Sherman, “Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy” (2000)

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### **What social movement tactics are effective?**

Nov 22

*Read:* Fabio Rojas, “Social Movement Tactics, Organizational Change and the Spread of African-American Studies” (2006)

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### **Why do employers look for pedigree rather than merit?**

Nov 25, Dec 2

*No class Wed Nov 27, Fri Nov 29 (turkey).*

*Read:* Lauren Rivera, *Pedigree* chapters 2 (“Playing the Field”) and 3 (“The Pitch”) (2015)

**Response Paper #3 due on bCourses, Monday, November 25, 2024 @ 12:00 PM\***

*\*12:00 PM noon, not midnight.*

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### **What do organizations have to do with race and ethnicity?**

Dec 4, 6

*Read:* Cristina Mora, “Cross-Field Effects and Ethnic Classification: The Institutionalization of Hispanic Panethnicity, 1965 to 1990” (2014)

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**Dec 9-13 Reading, Recitation, and Review**

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**Final Exam online Friday, December 20 2024 11:30 AM-2:30 PM**