

Soc. 601  
Fall, 2014  
Weds: 4-6:45  
E-mail: russell.schutt@umb.edu

Prof. Russell Schutt  
Office: W/4/013, 287-6253  
Hours: T 3:30-5; W 10:30-12:00  
& by appointment

## **SOCIOLOGY OF COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS**

Most of our connections to the larger social world are through organizations and so it is often in organizations that we shape and are shaped by society. It is because organizations reveal so much about us and our society that the classical sociological theorists focused attention on them. And it is because organizations—particularly complex organizations—determine much of what we need to study as sociologists as well as how we can study it that understanding organizations is so important for career progress.

This course is a comprehensive introduction to the sociological study of organizations; our focus will range from the profound insights of and controversies about major classical and contemporary theories of organizations to current organizational developments and recent research findings. Private for-profit organizations have served as the focal point for much organizational theorizing, so we will often study them as we learn about fundamental organizational processes. We will also read about public agencies and non-profit organizations, both because they influence our lives in many ways—including creating research projects and jobs for many applied sociologists—and because they can give us a different perspective on organizational processes.

We will first review the major alternative sociological (and management) theories of organizations; we will then use these theories as a framework for understanding organizations throughout the course. You will participate in a formal debate in the first half of the course as a way to review and apply these theories. In the second half of the course, we will focus on exciting extensions of and recent developments in the sociological study of organizations: the processes of organizational emergence and change, influences on the survival of democratic governance, the challenges of institutional and community-based care, and the fragmentation of organizations. You will write a library research paper on one of these organizational issues and present your work in class.

Course goals are to learn:

- 1) Major social theories of organizations;
- 2) Key organizational research questions and findings;
- 3) Current controversies and conflicting perspectives about organizations.

## **REQUIRED READINGS**

The course readings provide a comprehensive overview of organizational theories and research by leading experts in the sociology of organizations (Scott and Davis), an in-depth case study of organizational emergence, conflict, and change (Schutt), a study of organizational challenges in institutional and community-based care (Dobransky), and a comparative study of contemporary practices involving organizational fragmentation (Marchington et al.). We will use the Scott and Davis text to develop the conceptual foundations for studying organizations in the first third of the course. We will then read the three other books in succession as we apply organizational concepts to these very different case studies of organizational change.

Dobransky, Kerry Michael. 2014. Managing Madness in the Community: The Challenge of Contemporary Mental Health Care. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers.

Marchington, Mick, Damian Grimshaw, Jill Rubery, and Hugh Willmott (eds.). 2005 Fragmenting Work: Blurring Organizational Boundaries and Disordering Hierarchies. New York: Oxford.

Schutt, Russell K. 1986. Organization in a Changing Environment: Unionization of Public Welfare Employees. Albany: SUNY Press.

Scott, W. Richard and Gerald F. Davis. 2007. Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural, and Open System Perspectives. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

## GRADING

Our class sessions and other course activities will provide many opportunities for active learning. We will have discussions at each class meeting, student commentary and presentations in many classes, and some group meetings and of course much independent study outside of class. In the first half of the course you will participate in an in-class debate and then turn in structured notes that reflect your preparation for the debate and your analysis of the perspectives presented. In the second half of the course, you will conduct library research on a topic in the sociology of organizations, present that research in class, and write up your analysis in a paper. Throughout the course you will write summaries of the readings and pose questions for class discussion. You will present some of this material in class and you will post all of it in Blackboard in the discussion section for the corresponding week.

We will have two in-class debates after our initial review of major alternative theories of organization in the first part of the course. You will participate in one of these debates and you will prepare for it by reading all the assigned readings, developing your own perspective on the theories we have studied, and working with your teammates to organize a persuasive approach. You will turn in your detailed notes and reflections after the debate and your grade will be based on both your notes and presentation and comments during the panel.

Your final course paper will present your findings from library research on one of the issues we discuss later in the course. You must first submit a short proposal to me with a statement of the research problem, a partial proposed bibliography, and some indication of how you will develop your analysis of the problem. In order to complete the required work, you will have to know how to search the literature and locate sources effectively. Let me know if you need help with the related skills. The paper will have to draw on course readings as well as related research found in the journal literature. You will present at least a portion of your paper in the last classes.

I expect you to read and think about the assigned readings before each class. One product of this thinking is that you will come to class prepared for discussion. Another product will be a short 2-3 paragraph answer to each week's "*leading question*" (only 8 are needed; if you submit more, I will drop the lowest grades). The class schedule and other materials will be posted online in the Blackboard Learn system. This course delivery system allows you to check on assignments and readings on the Web and it also

allows you to post questions for me or for other students. You are to post all of your reading responses on the Blackboard Learn site.

Throughout the course, you should feel free to speak with me about the course material in general and about specific issues pertaining to grades. I will be available during my regularly scheduled office hours (see above) and at other times by appointment or when it is mutually convenient. You also can communicate with me by email, including by posting messages in the Blackboard Learn system.

Course grades will be computed as follows:

Reading responses	15%
Class participation	5%
Debate	30%
Final research paper	
Presentation	10%
Paper	<u>40%</u>
	100%

Each 2.5 hour class session corresponds to one week of class time, so it's very important to attend each session---and to keep up in the coursework. I will not give a grade of "incomplete" in other than the most extreme circumstances (and only if you have completed all the work up to the final paper); receiving an incomplete will hinder your progress toward your degree and rarely leads to a better final grade.

Needless to say, plagiarism is never acceptable and the penalties for submitting work that is not your own are very severe. UMass Boston's policies on academic honesty are detailed in the Code of Student Conduct, at:  
[http://cdn.umb.edu/images/life\\_on\\_campus/Code\\_of\\_Conduct\\_5-14-14.pdf](http://cdn.umb.edu/images/life_on_campus/Code_of_Conduct_5-14-14.pdf).

If you require accommodations for a disability, please be sure to visit the Ross Center in McCormack Hall and obtain an official accommodations statement, which you must submit to me in the first two weeks of the course.  
<http://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/disability>.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### **1 (September 3) INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The nature of formal organization and their role in the social world.  
Connections to classical theory.

ADD/DROP ENDS, 9/9

*Leading question: Why study organizations?*

### **2 (September 10) ORGANIZATIONS AS MACHINES: RATIONAL SYSTEMS**

Scientific management.  
Legal-rational authority and bureaucratic principles.  
The rational choice perspective.  
Structure, size, and specialization.

Scott & Davis, Chapters 1, 2.

*Leading question: Why can't we just be more efficient?*

### **3 (September 17) ORGANIZATIONS AS ORGANISMS: NATURAL SYSTEMS**

The Hawthorne studies.  
Human relations theory.  
Cooperative management.  
"Theory Z" and Japanese management.

Scott & Davis, Chapters 7.

*Leading question: What difference do people make?*

### **4 (September 24) ORGANIZATIONS AS OPEN SYSTEMS**

Open systems.  
Contingency theory.  
Resource dependence.  
Technology and organizational structure.

Scott & Davis, Chapters 4, 5, 6.

*Leading question: How does the environment influence organizations?*

### **5 (October 1) MAKING SENSE OF ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY**

DEBATE I: *Henry Ford or George T.?*

DEBATE II: *Competing influences on organizations*

**6 (October 8) ORGANIZATIONAL EMERGENCE**

Theories of needs.  
Environmental dimensions.  
Social movements and voluntary organizations

Schutt, Chapters 1-6.  
Scott & Davis, Chapter 8.

*Leading question: Why do organizations develop?*

**7 (October 15) PROFESSIONALS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Professionals in bureaucracies.  
Semi- and para-professionals.  
Fragmented forms and employee skills.

Schutt, Chapters 3, 7.  
Marchington et al., Chapter 9.

*Leading question: Is professionalization outdated?*

**8 (October 22) ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE & DEMOCRACY**

Participatory or representative democracy.  
The Iron Law of Oligarchy.  
Do exceptions prove the rule?

Schutt, Chapters 8-11.  
Marchington et al., Chapter 11.

*Leading question: Can democracy survive?*

**9 (October 29) INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES**

Hospital- and community-based health care  
Medical and social models of illness  
Institutionalization and deinstitutionalization  
Patient empowerment

Dobransky, *Managing Madness in the Community*

*Leading question: Can deinstitutionalization work?*

**10-11 (November 5, 12) ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS AND NETWORKS**

Population ecology.  
Institutionalism.  
Interorganizational relations.  
Organizational fragmentation and boundary maintenance.

Marchington et al., Chapters 1-3, 6, 7, 9.  
Scott & Davis, Chapters 9, 10, 11.

*Leading question: How important are pressures for organizational conformity?*

**12 (November 19) SUBJECTIVE REACTIONS, CONFLICT, AND DIVERSITY**

Job satisfaction and alienation.  
Employee engagement and commitment.  
Gender, race, and class.  
Power and empowerment.  
Organizational conflict.

Marchington et al., Chapter 8, Chapter 10.  
Scott & Davis, Chapter 7, 13 (pp. 361-367).

*Leading Question: Can the workplace work for all employees?*

**13 (November 26) THE ORGANIZATIONAL FUTURE**

Organizational boundaries.  
Employee diversity.  
Information technology.

Marchington et al., Chapter 12.  
Scott & Davis, Chapter 14.

*Leading question: Will organizations fragment and disappear?*

**14 (December 3) STUDENT PRESENTATIONS I**

**15 (December 10) STUDENT PRESENTATIONS II**

**FINAL PAPER DUE: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18 (ONLINE UNTIL MIDNIGHT)**

**SELECTED SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS**

- Gordon, Suzanne, Patrick Mendenhall, and Bonnie Blair O'Connor. 2014. Beyond the Checklist: What Else Health Care Can Learn from Aviation Teamwork and Safety. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.
- Grandin, Greg. 2009. Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City. New York: Metropolitan.
- Handel, Michael J. (ed.) 2003. The Sociology of Organizations: Classic, Contemporary, and Critical Readings. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Meyer, Stephen. 1981. The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Ritzer, George. 2004. The McDonaldization of Society, revised new century ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage/Pine Forge Press.
- Rother, Mike. 2010. Toyota Kata: Managing People for Improvement, Adaptiveness, and Superior Results. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Scheid, Teresa L. 2004. Tie a Knot and Hang On. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.