

Soc. 601
Fall, 2017
Thurs: 4-6:45
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Office: W/004; 617-287-6253
Hours: T 3-5, Th 3-4,
& 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 use analyses of one public sector organization in the U.S. and global humanitarian relief organizations for case studies, and we will consider the implications of the Internet for organizational practice.

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, the process of global engagement of organizations seeking worldwide impact and the organizational challenges and opportunities of digital technology. You will write a library research paper on one of these organizational issues and present your work in the last weeks of class. (Your paper can also include some primary data by prior arrangement.)

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 global humanitarian work (Krause), and the challenges and opportunities created by digital technology (Chayko). 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 studies relating to organizational change.

Chayko, Mary. 2017. Superconnected: The Internet, Digital Media, & Techno-Social Life. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Krause, Monika. 2014. The Good Project: Humanitarian Relief NGOs and the Fragmentation of Reason. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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. New York: Routledge [Pearson Education].

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 debate.

Your final course paper will present your findings from library research on one of the issues we discuss later in the course (and can be supplemented with interviews, by prior agreement). 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 your paper in one of the last class sessions.

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 answer to the “*leading question*” posed (below) in five weeks. 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, prior to the class to which they pertain.

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

All graded material is to be submitted by the due date by uploading to the class Blackboard site. I will return assignments and papers with comments and grades through Blackboard. Please make an appointment to speak with me if you have any questions about graded work (or just stop by during one of my office hours).

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.

If you require accommodations for a disability, please be sure to visit the Ross Center in McCormack Hall, 2nd floor (617-287-7430) 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>. Other services are available for graduate students at:

https://www.umb.edu/academics/graduate/info_for_graduate_students/graduate_student_services.

COURSE OUTLINE

1 (September 7) INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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

Leading question: Why study organizations?

2 (September 14) 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 21) 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 28) ORGANIZATIONS AS OPEN SYSTEMS

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

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 5) MAKING SENSE OF ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

Open Systems (cont.)
GUEST SPEAKER: Jason Ewas, Mayor's Office of Policy. "ESOPs etc."
DEBATE II: *Competing influences on organizations*

6 (October 12) ORGANIZATIONAL EMERGENCE

Theories of needs.
Environmental dimensions.
Social movements and voluntary organizations
Professionals in bureaucracies.
Semi- and para-professionals.

Schutt, Chapters 1-7.
Scott & Davis, Chapter 8.

Leading question: Why do organizations develop?

7 (October 19) ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE & DEMOCRACY

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

Schutt, Chapters 8-11.

Leading question: Can democracy survive?

8, 9 (October 26, November 2) INSTITUTIONS AND GLOBALIZATION

Institutionalization and deinstitutionalization
Empowerment and human rights

Krause, *The Good Project*

GUEST SPEAKER, Nov. 2: Julia Schutt on Human Rights, NGOs, and the peace process in Colombia. Interview with Lyndsey McMahan.

Leading question: NGO strategy from the bottom-up or the top-down?

10-11 (November 9, 16) ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS AND NETWORKS

Population ecology.
Interorganizational relations.
Social connections in the digital age
Technology, work, and alienation

Chayko, *Superconnected*
Scott & Davis, Chapters 9, 10, 11.

Leading question: How does the Internet change organizations?

12 (November 30) THE ORGANIZATIONAL FUTURE

Job satisfaction and alienation.
Employee engagement and commitment.
Gender, race, and class.
Power at work.

Scott & Davis, Chapter 7, 13 (pp. 361-367), 14.

Leading Question: Can the workplace work for all employees?

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS I

13 (December 7) STUDENT PRESENTATIONS II

FINAL PAPER DUE: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21 (ONLINE UNTIL MIDNIGHT)

SELECTED SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS

- Dobransky, Kerry Michael. 2014. Managing Madness in the Community: The Challenge of Contemporary Mental Health Care. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers.
- 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.
- Marchington, Mick, Damian Grimshaw, Jill Rubery, and Hugh Willmott (eds.). 2005. Fragmenting Work: Blurring Organizational Boundaries and Disordering Hierarchies. New York: Oxford.
- 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.