COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is an advanced Ph.D. level survey course on organization theory with a focus on the history and development of research on organizations. The course, however, is more than a survey course in the following respects:

1. The theoretical perspectives and topics covered rely upon original sources (mainly journal articles and books) as well as upon secondary sources (review articles and books). You will be challenged to develop your own criteria to evaluate, critique, and synthesize existing research, rather than relying exclusively upon the criteria and biases of other scholars.

2. The materials covered represent a blend of classic pieces that enable you to understand the core assumptions and historical roots of current theories, along with very recent research.

3. The course is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing upon related and organizationally relevant literatures in industrial organization economics, public administration, economic history, political science, and sociology.

SEMINAR FORMAT

The goal of this course is to get you engaged with these works and to start a discussion that helps us think through them. To do this, each week the first half of the seminar will be based on a discussion and critique of the readings for that week. Two members of the class will have been designated as primary discussants for that class. You will find more information on the criteria for good discussion leadership below. During the second half, we move to a more general discussion and I will also be presenting additional materials.

The success of this class depends strongly on your active engagement with these readings. I will be looking for quality rather than quantity of contributions, and will be seeking out participation throughout the semester. It goes without saying that you will have to be well prepared for each class. A cursory reading will not suffice—you will need to actively engage the readings. I encourage (though I don’t require) you to form reading groups to discuss the readings before class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Student Discussants. Each week, we will have 2 student discussants. Your job is to open the seminar with a 20-25 minute session opener talk and then use that to drive our discussion of the themes that emerge from considering each paper’s motivations, argumentation, and implications. The best papers we read will be strong in all three dimensions
and, in so doing, teach us about their topics while also teaching about the craft of doing great research. **You should know, however, that not all assigned papers meet this standard equally well, by design.** Make and share your own judgments about differences in importance and quality of the assigned papers, and be prepared to debate your conclusions with others!

Here are the guidelines for these session “opener” talks:

1. 20-25 minutes
2. Bring a handout for everyone – 1-3 pages
3. No PowerPoint slides
4. No summaries of the readings
5. **Let me repeat this: NO SUMMARIES OF THE READINGS!**
6. Diagrams or tables are helpful
7. Analytical narrative is permitted, but keep it short
8. Conclude with a set of questions that we will debate and discuss

The best “openers” will lead to discussions that cover the papers thoroughly because we are asking hard questions about what the value of what they mean to say, whether they succeed, and what we might do next. All this goes well beyond just figuring out what is in the papers.

In sum, good discussants will deliver an opener that does the following:

- Integrates the readings using an analytical framework
- Identifies and makes explicit the commonalities and differences in implicit assumptions that underlie the various readings
- Where possible, exposes theoretical gaps with suggest avenues for development beyond the readings
- Engages the other seminar participants in a discussion of the readings by taking a clear and perhaps provocative position!
- **AVOID questions such as “What do you think of the authors’ arguments?” or “Do you agree with that point?”** Your job is to have a position on these issues, i.e. you should have asked yourself these questions and the answer should be part of your presentation

**Research Paper.** The goal for this assignment is that you develop a paper that you will submit to the Academy of Management Conference (or the appropriate professional conference for your field). You have three options for this:

1) **Empirical Project Proposal:** abstract, theory, hypotheses, research design, and discussion of anticipated contributions. Note that this does not include any requirement for data collection or analysis—that will come later after the completion of the course. In previous years, students developed an idea of what they’ll do during the semester and then work on it over the summer.

2) **Complete Empirical Paper:** same as (1) but with data collection, analysis, and discussion of results. This is much tougher (!), so you probably only want to take this route if you already have data or know a faculty member who has data you can use (many of us do), or a strong lead on data that you can get quickly. Because of the additional burdens of data collection and analysis, I do not require you to perform all of the analyses a full paper would require. Again, that will come later.

3) **Theory Paper:** following the format of the theory papers you will see in our readings (especially the Academy of Management Review), this will require a clear statement of the problem; review of the prior literature; development of a new perspective, approach, theory, framework, etc. (perhaps but not necessarily including clear propositions); and conclusion with discussion of potential strategies for empirical research.
**Paper Review.** As part of this course, we will engage in a review process where you review (blindly) each other’s papers. Accordingly, there will be several interim deliverables with the final product being due during the exam period. The deliverables are as follows:

1) Tues., Mar. 6       Submit Proposal of Research (hardcopy)
2) Tues., Apr. 3       Submit Draft of Paper
3) Tues., Apr. 10      Submit Reviews
4) Tues., Apr. 17      Submit letter of response to reviews
5) Tues., Apr. 24      Presentations delivered
6) Fri., May 4         Final papers due

Instructions for the review process will be given as we approach that time.

**MATERIALS**

I will post readings to the course web site on Blackboard; you will not need to buy books or a course pack for this course. In addition, I will use the course website to provide you with additional materials as appropriate. Please be sure you check the website regularly for announcements.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

Grades will be determined by relative performance on the following course components:

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<thead>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Participation</td>
<td>Includes 2 session openers</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First submission</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reviews and letter of response</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Presentation</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**DETAILED SESSION OVERVIEW**

-- Please be sure to read deeply all those texts marked with a star (*), skim the others --

**Session 1 (Jan. 10) – Introduction to the Course**

During this first class, the goal is to get an overview of the topic of our study: organizations. What are they and what are some of the major theories that have been proposed to understand them? How do these theories reflect on current research?

To get us started, I have selected several readings and posted them for you here. Please read these over the break and come prepared to discuss them. Specifically, do read the first two closely (Scott 1992 and Perrow 1973) and skim the other three (Scott ARS 2004, Baum & Rowley 2002; Hinings & Greenwood, 2002). By the way, I do recommend reading them in the order listed here (though of course that is in the end up to you).
As you read these, please also begin to think about what streams of organization theory might interest you in particular. At the end of the first session, we will select discussants for the following weeks, so it might be good to begin thinking about which topics you would like to tackle.


**Session 2 (Jan. 17) – What is Theory (and Why Do We Care)?**

What is theory, and why do we care about it? What does a good theory look like, and why is it necessary or useful to study "classics"? The readings for this week should get you started on these debates. There are several positions here, as you will see, and the point-counterpoint format will hopefully make for a lively discussion.

Please read all six papers (i.e. read, don't skim them). The first three (Alexander, Turner, Stinchcombe) will get us into the question of theory more generally, while the second three (Sutton & Staw, Weick, DiMaggio) will focus on theory in organization studies. Finally, the last three (skim) ask what constitutes a theoretical *contribution,* which, as you will see, is something a bit different.


**Session 3 (Jan. 24) – Classical Management Theory**


**Session 4 (Jan. 31) – Bureaucracy**


**Session 5 (Feb. 7) – Behavioral Decision Theory: The Carnegie School**


Session 6 (Feb. 14) – Contingency and Configurational Theory


Session 7 (Feb. 21) – Resource Dependence Theory


Session 8 (Feb. 28) – Population Ecology


**Session 9 (Mar. 6) – Organizational Economics**


**No Class Mar. 13 – Spring Break**

**Session 10 (Mar. 20) – Institutional Theory I**


Session 11 (Mar. 27) – Institutional Theory II


Session 12 (Apr. 3) – Sensemaking and Enactment


**Session 13 (Apr. 10) – Networks**


**Session 14 (Apr. 17) – Where to? The Future of Organization Theory**


*Heugens, P.M.A.R. *Organization theory: Bright prospects for a permanently failing field*. Inaugural Addresses Research in Management Series, RSM, Rotterdam.


**Session 15 (Apr. 24) – Paper Presentations**

During this session, you will give short presentations on your research papers. No readings are assigned.