

# Sociology 250 Organizations and Society

## Fall 2010

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Lectures: TR 11:00a.m.-12:15p.m.  
6104 Social Science  
Office Hours: TR. 4:00p.m.-5:00p.m.  
or by appointment

### Overview

Organizations are the dominant social structure through which most of the economic, political, and social activity in our contemporary society is accomplished. This course introduces sociological work on organizations. We begin by examining various sociological perspectives on formal and complex organizations. What are organizations? Why do they exist? We then proceed to consider questions about how organizations are structured, how decisions are made, and how organizations interact with surrounding environments. We follow this by examining the intersection of individuals, organizations, and society. How are our lives shaped by organizations? How do organizations shape social inequality and political democracy? We will use sociological theories of formal organization and various examples of organizations to answer these questions.

### Format

Classes consist of my lectures and discussions led by students about the issues raised in the reading assignments. In Tuesday's class (and probably a part of Thursday's class), I will summarize the content of core readings assigned that week and try to provide some context for them in other work. The remainder of Thursday's class will be led by student discussion initiators who are responsible for critiquing the week's material and posing questions for further discussion by participants. The goal is for participants to leave room with a good sense of the content of the body of literature covered during that week, as well as some appreciation for open issues that surround it.

There will be no student discussion initiators in the first two weeks, while everyone is getting settled. Students will prepare as discussion initiators for classes beginning with the week of Sep. 14&16. Each student will be assigned to initiate at least one session; this assignment will be made in the week of Sep. 7. The number of initiators will lie between two and five, depending on the final enrollment. In preparing to lead their sessions, initiators may find it helpful to coordinate with one another; they are also welcome to bring works that have not been assigned as part of that week's reading to the attention of participants.

## Readings

Students are required to read about 100 pages (or more) per week. Please read each week's assignment before Tuesday's class. All reading materials are available online at the *learn@uw* course website for downloading. There is no required textbook for this class.

## Requirements

*Attendance and quality of contribution to class discussion (10%)*

- I expect you will do the assigned readings, including case studies, attend class, and participate actively.

*Contribution as a discussion initiator (5%)*

*Reading responses (25%)*

- Each week (beginning the second week) you must turn in a short essay (no longer than 2 pages, **double-spaced**) outlining your reactions to the reading you have done for that week. You do not have to summarize (although a brief summary would be ok if it is necessary to make your points): I will have read the material. I am interested in what you think about what you have read.
- Your reading response should NOT focus on a single reading. Instead you should try to find common themes that run through all readings of the week.
- These are due in class on Tuesday, and no extensions are permitted. Your responses will be graded on a "+," "✓", "-" system. "+" will be given for exceptionally thoughtful responses. "-" will be given for poor or incomplete assignments. If you miss a week or turn in an exceptionally poor assignment, you will receive a "0." However, your three lowest grades will be dropped in calculation of your final grade.
- No reading response for week 1, 8, 15, 16.

*Midterm in-class exam (15%) and final take-home exam (20%)*

- There will be one in-class exam on October 21<sup>st</sup>.
- There will be one final take-home exam. The exam will be distributed in class on December 14<sup>th</sup> and will be due at 5pm on December 16<sup>th</sup>.

*Final paper project (final paper: 20%; Presentation: 5%)*

- There will be a term paper that will require you to conduct an in-depth study of an organization of your choosing. You will pick an organization in the local area or one that you know from your hometown, visit the organization, observe the organization in action, and develop a diagnosis of the organization. In considering which organization to select, give careful thought to the kind of access you have to a person in that organization. You may work together in teams on this assignment. Teams may not be larger than four people. Each person on the team will be assigned the same grade for the project. You are required to submit a one paragraph description of the organization you have selected for your term paper by October 7<sup>th</sup>. The paragraph should include (1) the name of the team member(s), (2) the name of the organization, and (3) a brief description of the organization. You will present your first draft in class at the end of the semester. The final draft is due Friday, December 17, 2010 in 2446 Social Science.

**Comments**

*Submission of work.* Please submit paper copies of your reading responses and final paper. I do not accept written assignments in electronic format.

*Extensions.* I have assigned the reading responses in order to facilitate your preparation for class, and so no extensions are permitted for these. Extensions on the term paper must be requested in advance, and will be granted with reluctance and possible penalty.

**Special Needs Arrangement:**

To make special arrangements for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course you must qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions on how to qualify: <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>. Please notify me within the first 2 weeks of class if you have or anticipate having authorization from the Center and we will be happy to make the necessary arrangement.

**Academic Honesty:**

As with all courses at the University of Wisconsin, you are expected to follow the University's rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. Students are expected to know and follow the standards outlined by the Offices of the Dean of Students. See their website (<http://www.wisc.edu/students/conduct/uws14.htm>) for a complete description of behaviors that violate the University's standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures.

**Department Notice:**

The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistant near the end of the semester. Students have more immediate comments, complaints, or concerns about the course should report them to me or to the Chair, or else to Associate Chair of the Department of Sociology.

**Feedback:**

I am interested in hearing your reactions to the course, and your suggestions for improvement. Please feel free to e-mail me about comments or suggestions or make an appointment to see me.

**Course Schedule and Reading Assignments  
(\* Recommended)**

**Part I. Managing Complex Organizations**

**Week 1. Introduction (9/2)**

Perrow. 1991. "A Society of Organizations." *Theory and Society* 20: 725-762

**Week 2 Efficiency and Control in Organization (9/7 & 9/9)**

Taylor. "Scientific Management."

Braverman. "Scientific Management"

Lepore, "Not so fast"

**Week 3 Systems of Informal Organization (9/14 & 9/16)**

Roethlisberger and Dickson. "Human Relations."

Krackhardt and Hanson. "Informal Networks: The Company behind the Chart."

Kessler, "Moscow station"

\*Gladwell. "Designs for Working"

**Week 4 Decision-Making in Organized Anarchy (9/21 & 9/23)**

Simon. "The psychology of administrative decisions"

Langer. "Mindfulness on the Job"

Jackall. "Looking UP and Looking Ahead"

Vaughan. "The Trickle-Down Effect"

**Week 5 Leadership, Team, and Performance (9/28 & 9/30)**

Hackman. "Rethinking team leadership or team leaders are not music directors"

Ganz. "Resource and Resourcefulness"

Gawande. "The Bell Curve: What Happens When Patients Find Out How Good Their Doctors Really Are?"

**Week 6 Managing organization's environment (10/5 & 10/7)**

Williamson. "The Economics of Organization: The Transaction Cost Approach"

Alexander. "Pictures at an Exhibition: Conflicting Pressures in Museums and the Display of Art."

Saxenian, "Inside-Out: Regional Networks and Industrial Adaptation in Silicon Valley and Route 128"

**Week 7 How environments shape organizations? (10/12 & 10/14)**

DiMaggio and Powell. "The Iron cages Revisited"

Carroll and Swaminathan. "Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the U.S. Brewing Industry."(p715-735; 749-754)

Chaves. "All Creatures Great and Small: Megachurches in Context"

\*A Better Brew: The Rise of Extreme Beer

## **Week 8 Review (10/19) and Midterm exam (10/21)**

### **Part II. Diversity, Inequality, and Organizations**

#### **Week 9 Getting a job, Getting ahead (10/26 & 10/28)**

Granovetter. "Strength of Weak Ties"

Burt. "Structural Holes and Good Ideas"

Coleman. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital"

\*Gladwell. Six Degrees of Lois Weisberg

#### **Week 10 Women in Organization (11/2& 11/4)**

Baron and Bielby. 1985. "Organizational Barriers to Gender Inequality: Sex Segregation of Job and Opportunities."

Kanter. 1977. "Number: Minorities and Majorities"

Blair-Loy. 2003. "Competing Devotions: Career and Family among Women Executives."

\*Belkin. 2008. "When Mom and Dad Share it All"

#### **Week 11 Changing Social Contracts (11/9 & 11/11)**

Kalleberg. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition."

Barley and Kundra, Gurus, *Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies*. Ch. 1&10

#### **Week 12 Making Organization Diverse, Making Diverse Organization Work (11/16&11/18)**

Putnam. "E Pluribus Unum"

Gurin et al. "The Benefits of Diversity in Education for Democratic Citizenship."

Florida and Gates. "Technology and Tolerance: Diversity and High-Tech Growth."

Dobin et al. "Diversity Management in Corporate America."

### **Part III. Organizations and Democracy**

#### **Week 13 Networks, Bright and Dark (11/23)**

Raab and Milward. 2003. "Dark Networks as Problems."

Newsome. 2006. "Expatriate Games: Interorganizational Coordination and International Counterterrorism"

\*Lawrence Wright, "The Agent: Did the C.I.A. Stop an F.B.I. detective from preventing 9/11?"

#### **Week 14 Organizations and Democracy (11/30 & 12/2)**

Putnam. "Turning in and Turning out: The strange Disappearance of Social Capital"

Skocpol. "Voice and Inequality"

Wolfe. "Developing Civil Society: Can the Workplace Replace Bowling?"

#### **Week 15 Student presentation (12/7 & 12/9)**

#### **Week 16 Student presentation & Final Take-home exam (12/14)**