Education 375A/Sociology 363A

SEMINAR ON ORGANIZATION THEORY

COURSE INFORMATION:

Class Meetings:

Thursdays, 2:15 to 5:05 pm.
527 CERAS Bldg., SCANCOR Conference Room

Instructor:

Walter W. Powell
Professor of Education, and Organizational Behavior, Sociology, and Communication.
Phone: 725-7391 Office Hours: Thursdays 11-12, and by appointment
Email: woodyp@stanford.edu

Goals of the Course:

This Ph.D. seminar is designed to introduce students to fundamental questions and approaches to the study of organizations. The purpose of the course is to provide students with a thorough grounding in the “classic” social science literature on organizations. The readings are organized historically. This will enable students to understand the intellectual development of organization theory and the various shifts in emphasis: from workers to managers, from organizational processes to outputs, from studies of a single organization and its environment to studies of populations of organizations. In addition to the theoretical readings, the early weeks of the course are supplemented with historical materials that supply a context for a better understanding of theoretical developments. The course is not intended for master’s students. First year PhD students without a background in the social sciences may want to wait until their second year before taking this course. If there are more than 16 students who wish to enroll, priority will be given to SUSE, Sociology, GSB and Communication students, and to advanced students over first-year students. I will teach the course again in fall 2004.

Course Requirements:

Students will share the responsibility for discussing materials and for raising questions. Students will be expected to do all of the required reading and be prepared to discuss the materials in class on the schedule indicated in the syllabus. Final grades are based on three types of information.

1. All students will be asked to lead discussions twice during the quarter. Discussion assignments will be made on the first day of class. Leading a week’s discussion entails providing the class with a short overview (20 minutes) of the main issues (strengths, weaknesses, and controversies) and leading a discussion of the readings. Typically, I will present for the first 30–45 minutes, then turn to student
discussants, who will make a brief presentation. We will then have a general discussion based on questions posed by the assigned discussants. Discussants should familiarize themselves with the optional readings for the week. All students should arrive at class with questions, topics, and issues to be raised for discussion. Class participation involves both your performance as a session leader and your active, thoughtful participation throughout the term. As you do the readings, think about what the author did right as well as wrong. What are the interesting ideas in the paper? If you disagree, what would it require to persuade you? Can these differences be adjudicated through empirical study? A good seminar should have active dialog and debate. If someone proposes an idea that is contrary to your view, speak up. I will often be intentionally provocative, so be prepared to challenge me. Your task is to engage one another in an assessment of the readings. Twenty five percent of the course grade is based on class participation.

2. All students are asked to prepare brief memos (1-2 pages) relating to the reading for each week. Formats may vary but it is useful to include:

(a) ideas, concepts, arguments which you found stimulating, worth remembering and building on,
(b) questions, concerns, disagreements with ideas encountered,
(c) connections, linkages, contradictions between one idea or approach and another.

**Memos are due by 9 am on the day of class.** Send them to me via email. Twenty five percent of course grade will be based on weekly memos.

3. For four of the topics, students will prepare a more detailed memo (5-6 pages) assessing the weekly readings. You can choose which week’s readings you wish to analyze, but you are expected to complete this assignment before the date that the topic is discussed in class. All memos, therefore, must be completed before the end of classes. **No memos will be accepted after the last day of class.** The purpose of the memos is to help you grapple with the readings and respond with questions, criticisms, and new ideas. Although the memos and class discussion will identify the major points made by the readings and criticize them where appropriate, the main thrust of both the memos and the class discussion will be on developing promising ideas suggested by the readings. If you wish to use the memos as a vehicle for developing your own research ideas, that would be super. I recommend that when you choose to write a memo about a particular topic, you consult the additional readings for that week. Fifty percent of the course grade is based on these longer memos.

**Auditors are required to do assignments 1 and 2, but not 3. This course cannot be taken on a Pass/Fail basis.**

Course Materials:


A **Course Pack (CP)** is available from Field Copy, fcp1@aol.com, (650) 323-3155. They will bring copies of the reader to the first class.
Starred (*) readings below are suggested and supplementary. The case studies represented by two stars (**) are intended as additional readings for students who want to learn more about this line of research. Some of the books are revised doctoral dissertations, and may be particularly useful as illustrations of exemplary work.

Week 1: January 8th: ORIENTATION

Introductions
Discussion of Expectations, Requirements
Assignment of discussion sections

*I apologize but I have to be in NYC on January 15th for a Social Science Research Council Board of Directors meeting. I propose we push the course back one week and meet through March 18th. Please let me know if this presents a problem for you.

Week 2: January 22nd: THE ORIGINS OF MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

A. Pre-bureaucratic Forms


B. Rise of Bureaucratic Administration


Lipset, Seymour Martin. Introduction to Robert Michaels’ Political Parties (1911), pp. 15-39. CP.


C. Scientific Management


Callahan, Raymond. Education and the Cult of Efficiency. University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1, 6, and 10. (Especially recommended for SUSE students). CP.


**Week 3: January 29th: INFORMAL ORGANIZATION

Read Chapters 12 and 13 (pp. 377-454) in Chandler, The Visible Hand.

Barnard, Chester. 1938. Functions of the Executive, Harvard University Press, pp. 82-95, 165-171. CP.

Blau, Peter M. 1955. “Consultation Among Colleagues,” Ch. 9 from Dynamics of Bureaucracy, University of Chicago Press. CP.

Dalton, Melville. 1959. “Relations between staff and line,” Ch. 4 from Men Who Manage, John Wiley. CP.


Week 4: February 5th: THE CARNEGIE SCHOOL

A. The Decision-Making Tradition


A. Carnegie Goes to California

March, James and Johan Olsen. Chapters 1-4 of *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations*, Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976, pp. 10-68. CP.


Week 5: February 12th: CONTINGENCY THEORY, THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, AND POLITICS

A. Contingency Theory


B. Resource Dependence and Issues of Power and Conflict


**Week 6: February 19th: THE ECONOMICS OF ORGANIZATION**


**Week 7: February 26th: THE NEW INSTITUTIONALISM**


Week 8: March 4th: POPULATION ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

A. Organizational Ecology


B. Community Ecology


Minkoff, Debra. 1999. “Bending with the wind: Strategic change and adaptation by women’s and racial minority organizations.” AJS 104: 1666-1703. CP.


Week 9: March 11th: NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS


Podolny, Joel. 2001. “Networks as the Pipes and Prisms of the Market.” *AJS* 107(1): 33-60. CP.


**Week 10: March 18th: New Directions: Analyzing Network and Organizational Dynamics**


Note to SUSE Students: I routinely get questions from Education students as to why there aren’t more readings about schools. The simple fact is that organizational researchers have not often dealt with schools in a significant way. Universities are another matter, and there is more work there. If you would like to familiarize yourself with some of the available literature, the following articles are a useful start.


