COURSE INFORMATION:

Class Meetings:

Tuesdays, 1:15 to 4:05 pm.
509 CERAS Bldg., SCANCOR Conference Room

Instructor:

Walter W. Powell
School of Education, CERAS 509
Phone: 725-7391
Email: woodyp@stanford.edu
Office hours: Thursday, 11-12

Goals of the Course:

As the title suggests, 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 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 presumes no previous specialized background in organization theory.

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. In addition, all students should arrive at class with questions, topics, and issues to be raised for discussion. 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 noon 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 readings you wish to analyze, but you are expected to complete this assignment before the date that the readings are 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.

Course Materials:


*Education 375A/Sociology 363A Reader*. Field Copy and Printing <fcp1@aol.com>, 650/323-3155. They will bring copies of the reader to the first class.

Starred (*) readings below are suggested and supplementary.

**Week 1: October 3rd:**

**I. ORIENTATION**

Introductions
Discussion of Expectations, Requirements
Assignments
Discussion topics

**Week 2: October 10th:**
II. ORGANIZATIONS AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

A. Academic Structure and the Study of Organizations

**Question:** How does the structure of the academy influence the study of organizations?

Scott, *Organizations*, Ch. 1.


B. Structure and Action

**Question:** How do you recognize the causal power of structure without reifying it?


Week 3: October 17th:

III. THE EMERGENCE OF ORGANIZATIONS

**Question:** What forces gave rise to large-scale formal organizations? Which ideas shaped the early development of organization theory?

Scott, *Organizations*, Ch. 2.

A. Pre-bureaucratic Forms


B. Rise of Bureaucratic Administration


Week 4: October 24th:

IV. REACTION: RISE OF NATURAL SYSTEM MODELS

Question: What accounts for the emergence of theoretical models critical of earlier perspectives? How far do these new perspectives go in introducing social factors in organizations?

Scott, Organizations, Ch. 3

A. Human Relations


B. Functional Theories


C. Conflict Theories

Week 5: October 31st:

V. OPENS SYSTEMS THEORY: CARNEGIE SCHOOL AND CONTINGENCY THEORY

Question: How did the shift in orientation – to a focus on information processing, technology, and external relations -- change the nature of theorizing about organizations?

Scott, *Organizations*, Ch. 4.

Question:

A. Carnegie School


B. Contingency Theory


Week 6: November 7th:
VI. CLASSIFYING ORGANIZATIONAL THEORIES

**Question:** What are the important dimensions along which organization theories differ? What are the uses of theory classifications?

Scott, *Organizations*, Ch. 5.


VII. ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

**Question:** How (and why) has our conception of organizational environments evolved over time?

Scott, *Organizations*, Ch. 6.

A. Institutional Environments


Week 7: November 14th:

VIII. CREATING ORGANIZATIONS AND INDUSTRIES
**Question:** What social conditions foster the development of organizations and industries? What are the key alternative forms for governing economic activities?

**Note:** For purposes of class discussion, students who are discussion leaders this week will focus on either TCE or pop. eco., not both.

Scott, *Organizations*, Ch. 6.

**A. Transaction Cost Explanations**


**B. Organizational Ecology**


**C. Community Ecology**


**Week 8: November 21st:**
IX. TECHNOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

Question: How does technology shape and constrain structure and vice versa?

Scott, *Organizations*, Ch. 9.

A. Information and Organizations


B. Social Shaping of Technology


Week 9: November 28th:

X. ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Question: How do organizations set and manage boundaries? How has the meaning and the mechanisms of boundary setting changed over time?

Scott, *Organizations*, ch. 8.


**Week 10: December 5th:**

**XI. MACRO-STRUCTURE**

**Question:** What are the forces that shape the macro-structure of organizations?

Scott, *Organizations,* ch. 10.

A. **Structural Elaboration**

Chandler, Alfred D. *Visible Hand,* Ch. 14, peruse rest of Part V.


XII. ORGANIZATIONAL POWER AND CONTROL

Question: What are the sources and uses of power in organizations?

Scott, Organizations, Ch. 11, 12.


*Students with documented disabilities: Students who have a disability which may necessitate an academic accommodation or the use of auxiliary aids and services in a class must initiate the request with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The DRC will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend appropriate accommodation, and prepare a verification letter dated in the current academic term in which the request is being made. Please contact the DRC as soon as possible; timely notion is needed to arrange the appropriate accommodations. The DRC is located at 123 Meyer Library (phone 3-1066) (TDD 725-1067).
More Suggestions for Readings on Organizations:

-A recent collection of review essays on various organizational topics, including more “postmodern” approaches.

-an interesting attempt to employ narrative and other textual approaches to the understanding of organizational processes.

-a classic, brief statement of the origins of organizations and their role in contemporary society.

-an elegant quantitative and historical survey of the emergence and evolution of the multi-divisional corporate form in the US.

-a brief, tight exposition of the contingency theory of organizational design.

-the most fully developed statement of the population ecology approach to organizations.

-an inspired argument, albeit empirically thin, concerning the multiple forms assumed by network organizations, and an analysis of the human costs of flexible production.

-an influential early case study of gender relations in organization.

-an insightful case study into the mechanisms of cultural control and individual responses to control attempts.

-a still influential and useful collection of original essays that helped to shape modern scholarship on organizations.
a classic early statement; the second half is still a valuable source of ideas  
about rationality and control systems.

an important book laying out the basic ideas of evolutionary economics.

University Press.  
useful commentary on the state of organization theory and research and  
potential new directions.

still the definitive statement of the resource-dependence perspective in  
organizations.

an influential examination of the historical development of mass vs. craft  
industrial production, and of recent developments encouraging more flexible  
forms of production.

best collection of classic papers and more recent studies of institutional effects  
on organizations.

a classic statement of how administrative systems shape and coordinate  
individual and group behavior in organizations.

outstanding collection of essays on the sociology of economic life.

the best review to date of organizational culture.

Wesley, 2nd ed.  
a very influential treatise applying open system ideas to individual behavior in  
organizations.

Press.  
an elaborated presentation of transaction cost approaches to organizations.