Sociology 363A/ Education 375A/ MSE 389

SEMINAR ON ORGANIZATION THEORY

COURSE INFORMATION:

Class Meetings:

Location CERAS 123 [SCANCOR Conference Room]
Tuesday afternoon, 4:15p-7:05p

Instructor:

Walter W. Powell
Professor of Education (and) Sociology, Organizational Behavior, Management Science, and Communication.
Phone: 725-7391
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 social science literature on organizations. My goal is to familiarize you with the major theoretical and empirical traditions in organization theory. 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 and organizational fields. In addition to the conceptual readings, the early weeks of the course are supplemented with historical materials that supply a social and political context for understanding the theoretical developments.

The course is not open to master’s students. First year PhD students without any prior 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 advanced students over first-year students.

Course Requirements:

Students will share the responsibility for discussing materials and for raising questions. Each of you is expected to do all of the required reading and be prepared to talk about the materials in class. Final grades are based on three types of information.

1. All students will be asked to lead a portion of class discussion twice during the quarter. These 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 guiding debate about the readings. Typically, I will present for the first 30–45 minutes, then turn to the weekly "experts", who will assume leadership of the discussion, based on materials and questions they have prepared and distributed in advance. The students responsible for the discussion should also familiarize themselves with the optional readings for their week.

All students should arrive at class with questions, topics, and issues to be vetted and debated. Class participation involves both your engagement as a session leader and your active, thoughtful participation throughout the term. Your job is to come to class prepared to answer: What are the central research questions or problems raised by the authors? What core concepts, evidence, and research methods are utilized? 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 with an argument, what would it require to persuade you? Can these differences be adjudicated through further 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 push back. 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. Short memos: All students are asked to prepare brief memos (1-2 pages) relating to the readings for five of the assignments. It is your choice which weeks you do a short memo. The format may vary but it is useful to include:

(a) ideas, concepts, arguments that 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.

**Short memos are due by 6pm Monday, the day before class.** Send them to me via email. Twenty five percent of your course grade will be based on the short memos.

3. Long memos: For four of the topics, students will prepare a more detailed memo (5 pages) assessing the weekly readings. You choose which week’s readings you wish to analyze, but you must complete this assignment before the date the topic is discussed in class. The purpose of the longer 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 the longer memos should be on developing promising ideas suggested by the readings. If you wish to use the memos as a vehicle for pursuing your own research ideas, that would be great. When you choose to write a longer memo about a particular topic, you should consult the additional readings for that week. **Longer memos are due by 9am on the day of class.** Fifty percent of the course grade is based on the long memos.

**Auditors are required to do assignments 1 and 2, but not 3.**

**This course cannot be taken on a Pass/Fail basis.**

**No memos will be accepted after the last day of class on December 4th.**
Course Materials:

Two books are ordered through the Stanford Bookstore:


A *Course Pack (CP)* available from Field Copy, fcp1@aol.com, (650) 323-3155. They will bring copies of the reader to the first class. The reader will subsequently be available from Field Copy at lunchtime in the basement of the History Corner (Bldg. 200) of the Quad.

Starred (*) readings below are suggested and supplementary. These are valuable works that you should be familiar with. 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 that could serve as models or aspirations.

Exemplary memos and presentations from previous classes have been posted on the Coursework page for the class.

**Week 1: September 25th: ORIENTATION**

Introductions  Discussion of expectations and requirements  Assignment of discussion leaders

For fun and enlightenment, you should read these two articles posted on Coursework:


**Week 2: October 2nd: 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: October 9th: INFORMAL ORGANIZATION

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: October 16th: THE CARNEGIE SCHOOL

A. The Decision-Making Tradition


B. Carnegie Goes to California


Week 5: October 23rd: RESOURCE CONTINGENCY AND THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

A. Contingency Theory


B. Resource Dependence and Power and Influence


**Week 6: October 30th: THE ECONOMICS OF ORGANIZATION**


**Week 7: November 6th: THE NEW INSTITUTIONALISM**


Week 8: November 13th: POPULATION AND COMMUNITY ECOLOGY

A. Organizational Ecology


Hannan, Michael T. and John Freeman. 1977. "The population ecology of organizations." AJS 82: 929-64. CP


B. Community Ecology


Week 9: November 27th: NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS


**Week 10: December 4th: NEW DIRECTIONS OR RECOMBINATIONS?**


