BUSINESS 9826: ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR
SPECIAL FIELD SEMINAR IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

Fall 2015
Thursday 2:00-5:00, Room 3102
DRAFT Version, August 17, 2015

Instructor:              Faculty Assistant:
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COURSE SCHEDULE

COURSE OVERVIEW:

This course is an introduction to the major theoretical approaches and ongoing debates within organization theory. Organization theory draws on disciplinary roots in (alphabetically) economics, political science, psychology, and sociology to explain the origins, persistence, and disappearance of the structures (organizations, firms, networks, markets, and others) that we use to order our lives. We will read some of the classic statements of the major approaches and trace the history of ideas as the field has developed up to the present. Disparate roots imply disparate approaches to explanation, and thus there are many lively debates within the field that provide some of the frisson of current research.

The aim of the course will be to examine a number of perspectives, consider the strengths and weaknesses of each, and to look at the comparative ability of these models to explain a variety of organizational phenomena. An important objective is to develop your ability to assess organization theory / research both critically and comprehensively.

By the conclusion of the course, you should (a) be familiar with important sources and references on fundamental issues in organization theory, (b) have a grasp of advanced theory and research on a breadth of topics, (c) have a better understanding of the process of developing theoretical articles, and (d) develop your ability to evaluate the contributions of various research streams to the field of organization theory. With this roadmap in hand, you should be well prepared to generate original research ideas that advance the discourse in your chosen area.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Discussion Questions / Overview / Moderator

Because this course is a seminar, most of the action takes place during class discussion. Each class member is responsible for leading the discussion on several topics (the actual number of topics is a
function of the number of people enrolled). This involves preparation of discussion questions in advance, providing the class with a written integration of the assigned readings, and leading the class discussion.

**Discussion questions:** Each discussion leader (or discussion team) must prepare a set of discussion questions for my review before distribution to the class. These must be submitted via email by Monday evening (7:00 pm) the week before our Wednesday seminar. I will review the questions and suggest changes or additional questions as appropriate. The questions will be distributed to seminar members Wednesday (a week before the actual meeting). These questions should provide guidance to your classmates in preparing for each session.

**Overview:** Each discussion leader (or discussion team) is responsible for providing the class with an overview / integration (5-8 pages) of that week’s readings in the form of a written handout to be distributed to class members. This overview should provide a framework or logic to organize the readings. Within this framework, the key theoretical arguments and empirical findings from these articles will be integrated and critically reviewed. The discussion leader should bring enough copies of the overview for the entire class. You will be expected to begin the session with a brief presentation of your overview (5 minutes) before leading our discussion. I do not want you to distribute the overview to your colleagues before the seminar as experience demonstrates that this will constrain the reading and interpretation of the weekly material by the rest of the class. You must bring the overview to class on the day of class and send an electronic copy to me. I will not accept late overviews. If you do not provide an overview on the assigned day, you will not be eligible to write the final exam, and you will fail the course.

*Note:* There is a distinction between developing an integrative framework / interpretation of the readings versus simply summarizing each of the individual readings. You are expected to do more than simply summarize the ideas.

**Presentation/Moderating the Discussion:** Each discussion leader (or discussion team) is also responsible for moderating the discussion. While there will be differences in how everyone approaches the role of moderator, providing the following information would be a good starting point:

1. Review the assigned material collectively, identifying (as appropriate) key theoretical arguments, research questions, and methodologies.
2. Constructively critique the material that you read (on both sides of the issue, as appropriate) by considering what the material tells us, what questions remain to be answered, and where the particular area / theory might go from here. To the extent possible, it would be helpful to let us know how you view the relationships between your topic and previous topics discussed in the seminar.

I will jump in as appropriate to consolidate arguments, point out missing links, and guide the conversation.

**Paper moderator / discussant**

Doctoral courses help us establish an overview of different arguments in a field. In service of that
goal, I have assigned 4-6 articles per session. One student will be assigned to each paper in each session as a paper moderator. The role of the paper moderator is to read the article and be prepared to describe major issues in the manuscript for the class. In addition, the moderator should prepare a one (1) page synopsis of the paper. You will find these synopses useful later on in your education and academic life.

The paper moderator should have invested a little bit more time in reading a particular paper and will serve as our ‘go to person.’ When asked to sum up the main insight and strengths and weaknesses of the paper, the moderator’s presentation should last no more than 2-3 minutes.

Participation / Session Reflection Memos

As you do the readings, consider not only what the author did wrong--the usual stock in trade of graduate seminars--but what he/she did right. What are the interesting ideas in the paper? If you disagree with an argument, what would it take to convince you? What are the scope conditions--under what circumstances is the argument meant to apply (e.g., only to U.S. non-profits; only to family businesses in Canada; etc.)? What modifications would be necessary to extend the argument? Are there critical differences between this author's arguments and those of others we have read? Can these differences be resolved through empirical test? What would a study look like that did this?

Each class member is expected to ACTIVELY participate in every class. You are expected to be prepared to discuss and comment on all of the required readings for each session. Pre-class preparation involves reading the material as well as reflecting upon the discussion questions assigned for that session.

To make sure that you are well-prepared for discussion, I ask that you hand in a one to two page memo on each week's reading on the day of class, starting with the second class meeting on September 13. The memo should either be a critical discussion of the major themes of the readings or a specific reflection on a particular paper. You are allowed to miss two memos over the course of the semester (by your own choice). However, not writing a memo does not excuse you from reading the material and contributing to our class discussion. Discussion leaders / moderators do not need to submit a weekly reflection memo for the sessions they will be leading on the assumption that they will already be preparing the information described above. Paper moderators are expected to hand in the one to two page reflection memo. If a memo is not handed in on the assigned day, you will not be eligible to write the final exam, and you will fail the course.

Term Paper

You are required to submit a term paper. The content of this paper must, of course, be centered on a topic in organizational theory related to what we have covered in the course. This paper must be original, and therefore not a paper that is used to satisfy the requirements of another course or a research relationship with another faculty. These papers should not exceed 20 pages, double-spaced, excluding references and any appendices, tables, and / or figures.

The term paper must contain: Part 1, theory (15 pages); and, Part 2, a research study design (5 pages).
**Part 1:** The paper should be theoretical or conceptual (e.g., no data), based on a specialized topic within the domain of the course. Most likely this part of the paper would, (1) develop a particular topic linked to one of the schools of thought we consider in the seminar; (2) integrate the perspectives from two or more schools of thought that might offer a unique conceptualization of an OT issue; or (3) use the various schools of thought discussed in the seminar to explain a current phenomenon in organizations. You should identify the problem or issue of interest and convince the reader of the importance of examining the issue further. That involves identifying a gap in the literature, arguing why the gap is important and interesting as well as discussing how you intend to close the gap. You should review the appropriate literature, thus using that literature to develop original theoretical arguments. Those arguments would likely lead to the specification of testable hypotheses or to a theoretical framework or model that could guide future research.

**Part 2:** An important part of your comprehensive exam is the ability to explain how you are going to design a study to test, explore, or investigate the ‘gap’ identified in the literature. This part of the paper should focus on how you would actually design a study to investigate the line of argument developed in part 1. These reflections should as a minimum focus on choices around: (1) the empirical context (if it is a field study), (2) data collection, including data sources (survey, interview etc.), (3) data analysis and method, (4) theory testing vs. theory development – basically, what type of study are your designing? Overall, you need to argue why this design is appropriate for answering your research question, and investigating the line of thinking developed in part 1.

**EVALUATION**

Your grade will be based on the following:

- Discussion Questions / Overview / Moderator 20%
- Weekly Seminar Contribution 20%
- Reflection Memos 20%
- Term Paper 40%

**ATTENDANCE**

Attendance in all sessions of this course is mandatory. If you miss a class, you will not receive any contribution credit for that class; there is no way to “make up” for a missed day. A grade of zero will be assigned to those classes (notifications requirements must be met – see below). If absenteeism has reached 25 percent (3 or more classes), you will not be eligible to write the final exam, and you will fail the course. [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/attendance.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/exam/attendance.pdf)

Missed classes with the exception of religious holidays with advance notice or extended absences approved by the program office, will be included in the overall calculation for contribution.

**NOTICE OF ABSENCE**

I recognize that circumstances may arise that make it impossible for you to attend. For example, if you are unable to attend class for health reasons or religious holidays, I expect you to send me an email in advance with the reason for your absence. As a rule, there will be no way to make up your contributions for a missed class, even though you may be asked to complete an additional
assignment to ensure you are keeping up with the assigned work.  
(https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm).

I will accommodate medical illness of work worth less than 10% of the total course grade by assigning additional course work. Medical documentation for such accommodation will be required. Such documentation must be submitted by the student directly to the appropriate Faculty Dean’s office and not to the instructor. It will be the Dean’s office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com).

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western’s Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page http://www.music.uwo.ca/, and our own McIntosh Gallery http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module, found here: http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/module.html. This module is 30 minutes in length and provides participants with a basic understanding of mental health issues and of available campus and community resources. Topics include stress, anxiety, depression, suicide and eating disorders. After successful completion of the module, participants receive a certificate confirming their participation.
REQUIRED BOOKS & MATERIAL


RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND MATERIAL


All books are available from Amazon.com. I strongly encourage you to buy these books. You will be using them throughout your career.

Required readings will be available in electronic format. I am not expecting you to read the supplementary readings listed under some of the topics. Read them if you are really interested in a topic.
COURSE OUTLINE – REQUIRED READINGS

September 17, 2015: Introduction to Organization Theory

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapters 1-5.


September 24, 2015: Contingency Theory


October 1, 2015: Carnegie School


October 8, 2015: Structure, agency and control

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapters 6-7.


October 15, 2015: Network approaches

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapter 11.


October 22, 2015: Resource dependence

Scott and Davis, Chapter 9


October 29, 2015: Organizational ecology

Scott and Davis, Chapter 10


November 5, 2015: Institutional Theory


November 12, 2015: Categories


November 19, 2015: Sensemaking


November 26, 2015: Garbage cans, rationality and its discontents


December 3, 2015: Work, markets, and order


December 11, 2015: Final Paper Due at 5 p.m.