



**BUSINESS 9826: ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR
SPECIAL FIELD SEMINAR IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY**

**Winter 2025-2026
Friday 9:00-12:00, Room TBD**

Instructor:

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES:

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. Given that we only have one semester together, the course is necessarily limited, so we will touch lightly on some topics and neglect others completely. I am happy to suggest other readings if you would like.

The course objective is to develop your ability to assess organization theory and 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

Participation

Each class member is expected to participate ACTIVELY 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.

As you do the readings, consider not only what the author did wrong—the usual stock-in-trade of graduate seminars—but what the author 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?

Your enthusiastic involvement is essential to the course. We want to develop an open, inviting, inclusive, but penetrating culture of discourse. That is what makes for a great seminar!

Reaction memos

In addition to the weekly response points, you will also write 2-page 'reaction memos' every other week. Copies of your response papers are due by 5 p.m. the Saturday after class. The purpose of your reaction memo is to develop your insights from our class discussion of the readings. You might choose to elaborate on your response point or, based on the discussion, you might choose to go in another direction. Regardless of what you choose to do, your reaction memo should include some kind of thought, criticism, argument, idea or application in response to the readings *and* our discussion in the class. It should *not* be a summary of the readings and it should clearly build on what we discussed in class.

Regular writing is a fundamental means of intellectual growth! You should treat both your response points and your reaction memos as a grounding for your future research.

Term Paper

You are required to submit a term paper. The content of this will be centered on a topic in organizational theory related to what we have covered in the course. This paper must be original work developed specifically to address the topics from the class. You are not allowed to submit a paper used to satisfy the requirements of another course or a research relationship with another faculty member. These papers should be 15 to 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 first part of your paper should be theoretical or conceptual (e.g., no data), based on a specific topic within the domain of the course. Your paper must build substantially on the topics of at least one session of the course. Your paper could (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 will require identifying a compelling question, problem, or tension in the literature; making a persuasive case for why the question is important and interesting; and then discussing how you would address the question, problem, or tension in a way that will generate some significant insight. You will need to review the appropriate literature and then use that literature to develop original theoretical arguments. Those arguments might lead to the specification of testable hypotheses or to a theoretical framework or model that could guide future research.

Part 2: An essential skill as an academic is developing methods to study, test, explore, or investigate whatever important question, problem, or tension you have identified. This part of the paper should describe how you propose 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. Your methods should not simply be cursory; you should be able to explain why your empirical approach will provide an engaging approach to answering your research question.

You will also be required to participate in a 30-minute oral examination based on your term paper. An essential skill for an academic is to be able to engage with others about the content of your work. The oral exam will address the theoretical foundations of the question, problem, or tension; how your ideas relate to the themes developed in the course; the research design you have proposed; and the contributions and limitations of your work. You should be prepared for a conversation that will extend the choices you made in developing the paper.

The following two online resources might prove helpful:

- Bem, Daryl J. 2003. Writing the empirical journal article. In J.M. Darley, M.P. Zanna, and H.L. Roediger III, eds., *The Complete Academic: A Practical Guide for the Beginning Social Scientist*, 2nd Ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Available at: <https://psychology.yale.edu/sites/default/files/bemempirical.pdf>
- Zuckerman, Ezra. 2008. Tips to article-writers
<http://mitsloan.mit.edu/shared/ods/documents/?DocumentID=2468>

REQUIRED BOOKS & MATERIAL

W. Richard Scott and Gerald F. Davis (2007). **Organizations and organizing: Rational, natural, and open systems perspectives.** Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Becker, Howard S. 2007 [1986]. *Writing for Social Scientists* (2nd Ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. [Read chapters 1-8.]

Both books are available from Amazon.com. I strongly urge you to buy both books. Becker's book is the best book on writing that I know about. I still reread it when I struggle with writing. Scott and Davis is still the best reference to the topics we will study. When I need to think about a topic on organization theory, I will pick it up for guidance. Yes, it is overpriced. (Jerry always complains about this.) Used copies are available.

Required readings you can obtain in electronic format.

EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on the following:

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| • Weekly Seminar Contribution | 25% |
| • Reaction memos (5) | 25% |
| • Referee Report | 10% |
| • 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 (the notification 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.

(https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/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.

I will accommodate medical illness for 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 PhD program office and not to the instructor. The PhD program office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

The goal of the course is for you to learn to think critically about organization theory. The class sessions and the course requirements have all been designed to develop your analytical skill. Students in the past have clearly demonstrated the ability to succeed in the course without using Generative AI.

If you choose to use Generative AI, you must describe how you use it and explain how it contributed either positively or negatively to your assignment. Generative AI tools can produce inaccurate, biased and/or outdated information. You are responsible for verifying the accuracy of

any work you submit and for properly including the appropriate citations in that work.

ENROLLMENT RESTRICTIONS

Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Ivey PhD Program, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES: PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.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>).

GENDER-BASED SEXUAL VIOLENCE SUPPORT

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Health and Wellness Services

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. See <https://www.uwo.ca/health>.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Additionally, 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 or program coordinator.

Accessible Education Western

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with [Accessible Education Western \(AEW\)](#), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

COURSE OUTLINE – REQUIRED READINGS

January 9, 2026: Introduction to Organizational Theory

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapters 1-5.

Lounsbury, Michael, and Christine M. Beckman. “Celebrating Organization Theory” *Journal of Management Studies* 52, no. 2 (March 2015): 288–308. doi:10.1111/joms.12091.

Davis, Gerald F. “Celebrating Organization Theory: The After-Party.” *Journal of Management Studies* 52, no. 2 (March 2015): 309–19. doi:10.1111/joms.12094.

Perrow, Charles. 1991. “A Society of Organizations.” *Theory and Society*, 20:725-62.

January 16, 2026: Approaches to thinking about organizations

Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1982. Should sociologists forget their mothers and fathers? *The American Sociologist*, 17(1), 2-11.

Becker, Howard S. 2007 [1986]. *Writing for Social Scientists* (2nd Ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. [Read chapters 1-8.]

Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory Construction as Disciplined Imagination. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 516. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258556>

January 23, 2026: Carnegie School

March, James G., and Herbert A. Simon. 1958. *Organizations*. New York: John Wiley. [Chapter 2 “Classical” Organization Theory and Chapter 6 Cognitive Limits on Rationality]

Cyert, Richard M., and James G. March. 1963/1992. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. [Chapter 2 Antecedents of the Behavioral Theory of the Firm, Chapter 3 Organizational Goals, and Chapter 7 A Summary of Basic Concepts in the Behavioral Theory of the Firm.

Spencer, B., & Rerup, C. 2024. The Dynamics of Inferential Interpretation in Experiential Learning: Deciphering Hidden Goals from Ambiguous Experience. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 69(4): 962–1005.

Joseph, J., & Sengul, M. 2025. Organization Design: Current Insights and Future Research Directions. *Journal of Management*, 51(1): 249–308.

January 30, 2026: Contingency Theory

Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapter 6.

Lawrence, P.R., and J.W. Lorsch. 1967. “Differentiation and integration in complex organizations”. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 12: 1-47

Schoonhoven, Claudia B. 1981. Problems with Contingency Theory: Testing Assumptions Hidden within the Language of Contingency “Theory.” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(3): 349-377.

Shenkar, O., & Ellis, S. 2022. The Rise and Fall of Structural Contingency Theory: A Theory's 'autopsy.' *Journal of Management Studies*, 59(3): 782–818.

February 6, 2026: Resource dependence

Scott and Davis, Chapter 9

Emerson, R. 1962. "Power dependence relations." *American Sociological Review* 27: 31-40.

Casciaro, T., and M. J. Piskorski. 2005. "Power imbalance, mutual dependence, and constraint absorption: A closer look at resource dependence theory." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 30: 167–199.

Gulati, R. and M. Stych (2007) Dependence asymmetry and joint dependence in interorganizational relationships: Effects of Embeddedness on a manufacturer's performance in procurement relationships. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52(1): 32-69.

February 13, 2026: Reviewing and being reviewed

Johanson, L. (2007). Sitting in your reader's chair. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16:290-294.

Murnighan, J.K. (1996). "Revising and Resubmitting: Author Emotions, Editor Roles, and the Value of Dialogue" Eds. Peter J. Frost & M. Susan Taylor. *Rhythms of Academic Life: Personal Accounts of Careers in Academia*.

Reviewing is not only an important service to our profession, but it helps us to be better writers ourselves. This week you will write your own review of a manuscript that I will distribute before spring break. After reviewing it, you will read the reviews and the author's response, and we will discuss reviewing in class.

For guidelines on how to review a paper, see:

<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/societyimages/asq/ASQ%20reviewer%20guidelines.pdf>

February 20, 2026: Organizational ecology

Scott and Davis, Chapter 10

Hannan, M. T. & Freeman, J. 1977. The population ecology of organizations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 82: 929-964.

Carroll, G. R. & Swaminathan, A. 2000. Why the microbrewery movement? Organizational dynamics of resource partitioning in the US brewing industry. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(3): 715-762.

Hsu, G. 2006. "Jacks of all trades and masters of none: Audiences' reactions to spanning genres in feature film production". *Administrative Science Quarterly* 51: 420-450.

February 27, 2026: Embeddedness, Networks, and Innovation

Padgett, J. and C. K. Ansell. 1993. "Robust action and the rise of the Medici, 1400-1434". *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1259-1319.

- Burt, R. S. 2004. "Structural holes and good ideas." *American Journal of Sociology*, 110: 349-399.
- Lingo, Elizabeth Long and O'Mahony, Siobhan. 2010. Nexus work: Brokerage on creative projects. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 55: 47-81.
- Smith, E. B., Brands, R. A., Brashears, M. E., & Kleinbaum, A. M. 2020. Social Networks and Cognition. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 46(1): 159–174.

March 6, 2026: Institutions and Symbolic management

- Meyer, J. W. and Rowan, B. 1977. "Institutionalized organizations: formal structure as myth and ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83: 340-363.
- DiMaggio, Paul J. and Walter W. Powell. 1983. The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48:147-160.
- Zbaracki, Mark J. "The Rhetoric and Reality of Total Quality Management." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (September 1998): 602. doi:10.2307/2393677.
- Leibel, E., Hallett, T., & Bechky, B. A. 2018. Meaning at the source: The dynamics of field formation in institutional research. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12: 154–177.

March 13, 2026: The Ambiguities of Experience

- Cohen, Michael D., James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. 1972. A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17 (1): 1-25.
- Weick, K. E. (1993). The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(4), 628. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393339>
- Cohen, Michael D., James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. 2012. "A garbage can model' at forty: a solution that still attracts problems." In, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations, vol. 36: The Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice: Looking Forward at Forty*. Alessandro Lomi and J. Richard Harrison, eds. Bingley, UK: Emerald Books, 2012.
- Zbaracki, Mark J. 2013. Book review: "A garbage can model' at forty: a solution that still attracts problems. *Organization Studies*.

March 20, 2026: Occupations, expertise, and AI

- Bechky, B.A. 2020. "Evaluative spillovers from technological change: The effects of 'DNA envy' on occupational practices in forensic science." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65: 606-643.
- Anthony, C. 2021. When knowledge work and analytical technologies collide: The practices and consequences of black boxing algorithmic technologies. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 66(4): 1173-1212.
- Avnoon N, Eyal G (2025) It's not a bug, it's a feature: How AI experts and data scientists account for the opacity of algorithms. *Soc. Stud. Sci.* 03063127251364509.
- Article TBD.

March 27, 2026: Work, markets, and forms of organizing

Marglin, Stephen. 1974. "What do bosses do? The origins and functions of hierarchy in capitalist production." *The Review of Radical Political Economy* 6: 33-60.

Goldberg, Victor P. 1980. "Bridges over contested terrain: exploring the radical account of the employment relation." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 1: 249-274.

Mears, A. (2015). Working for Free in the VIP: Relational Work and the Production of Consent. *American Sociological Review*, 80(6), 1099–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122415609730>

Cameron, L. D. 2024. The Making of the "Good Bad" Job: How Algorithmic Management Manufactures Consent Through Constant and Confined Choices. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 69(2): 458–514.

April 13, 2026: Final Paper Due at 11:59 p.m.