BUSINESS 9826: ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR
SPECIAL FIELD SEMINAR IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

Winter 2023-2024
Thursday 9:00-12:00, Room 3102

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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

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 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 Tuesday evening (5:00 pm) the week **before** our Thursday seminar. I will review the questions and suggest changes or additional questions as appropriate. The questions will be distributed to seminar members Thursday (a week before the actual meeting). These questions should provide guidance to your classmates in preparing for each session.

**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
   a. What the material tells us;
   b. What questions remain to be answered; and
   c. Where the particular area or theory might go from here.
3. 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 may intervene to consolidate arguments, point out missing links, and guide the conversation.

**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!*

**Response points**
We will do a considerable amount of writing in this class. Starting with week 2, each student will write a weekly half-page “response point” based on one of the assigned readings. The response point is to be shared with the class by 5:00 p.m. on the Wednesday **before the session.** The response point is
simply a nagging thought, idea, argument, or question that you might want to pose during class
discussion. (This means that you should plan to bring a copy to class as well!) You are allowed to
miss two response points over the course of the semester. However, you should still plan to read the
material and contribute to class discussion!

_The response points help ensure that we will all come with something interesting to contribute to the class
discussion._

**Reaction memos**
In addition to the weekly response points, you will also write 2-page ‘reaction memos’ every other
week. Hardcopies of your response papers are due by 5 p.m. the Saturday after class. This will allow you
to further develop your response paper based on 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. It
should not be a summary of the readings and it should go beyond 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. You should not submit a paper used to satisfy the requirements of another course or a
research relationship with another faculty. 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 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 question,
problem, or tension in the literature, arguing why the question is important and interesting, and then
discussing how you intend to address the question, problem, or tension. You should 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 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 you 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.

The following two online resources might prove helpful:


EVALUATION

Your grade will be based on the following:

- Discussion Questions / Moderator 10%
- Weekly Seminar Contribution/10 Response Points 20%
- Reaction memos (5) 20%
- 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.

ACADEMIC OFFENSES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at https://grad.uwo.ca/administration/regulations/13.html.

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).
Support Services: Health and Wellness
Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness at Western University 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 (graduate chair), program coordinator or other relevant administrators in their unit.
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.

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.

REQUIRED BOOKS & MATERIAL

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 a resource that you will use throughout your career. 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.
COURSE OUTLINE – REQUIRED READINGS

January 11, 2024: Introduction to Organizational Theory and Theorizing
Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapter 1.

January 18, 2024: Approaches to thinking about organizations
Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapters 2-5.

January 25, 2024: Carnegie School

February 1, 2024: Contingency Theory
Scott and Davis. 2007. Chapter 6.


February 8, 2024: Resource dependence
Scott and Davis, Chapter 9


February 15, 2024: Reviewing and being reviewed


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 22, 2024: Organizational ecology
Scott and Davis, Chapter 10


February 29, 2024: Embeddedness, Networks, and Innovation


March 7, 2024: Institutions and Symbolic management


March 14, 2024: The New Neo-Institutional Theory


March 21, 2024: No class

March 28, 2024: The ambiguities of experience


April 4, 2022: Occupations, negotiated order and power


April 21, 2024: Final Paper Due at 11:59 p.m.