

Complex Organizations

[Soc 275]

Fall 2013

Location: Classroom 102
Time: 8:55 – 10:05
Instructor: Barbara Jensen
Email: jensenb@moravian.edu
Office: 310
Office Hours: Wed. 10:30 - 11:30 by appointment
Required Course Materials: *Complex Organizations - A Critical Essay* - Third Edition
Author: Charles Perrow - McGraw-Hill Publishing Company

1. COURSE OVERVIEW

Organizations are everywhere. They provide us with food, clothing, medicine, information, and other resources. They structure social activity across the life course: from birth (in hospitals) to schools and employment to death (in mortuaries and cemeteries).

We take for granted how many moments of our lives are spent in the service of organizations.

Everyday activities occur in the context of paid employment, school, politics, church, volunteer activities, travel, and leisure.

Organizations are the engines that enable human activity and they are the tools that carry out “society’s work” (Nadler and Tushman 1980:35).

Thus, it is critical to understand the how organizations influence, and are influenced by, society.

This course provides a broad overview of the theoretical and empirical developments in the study of Organizational Sociology.

Organizational scholars study diverse organization forms such as strategic alliances that cooperate to produce research, goods, and services; multinational corporations that span geopolitical boundaries; NGOs and social movement organizations that influence political and economic outcomes; virtual (i.e., online) organizations and communities; and heterarchical (compared to hierarchical) organization structures.

We begin the course by covering scientific management and other early approaches, and we continue by discussing central perspectives in the field.

Organizational sociology has traditionally emphasized the structural arrangements and politics of organizations – rules, roles, and power relationships – in which individuals are embedded.

In Contemporary Sociology the most influential approaches examine the way these structural arrangements are enabled or constrained by the external environment.

The second half of the course, then, focuses on the way organizations respond to and enact the environment; that is, the way organizational forms, policies, products, and procedures are influenced by competitors, markets, politics, industry and professional standards, and non-profit organizations.

Finally, this course will conclude with a brief discussion of the **antagonism** between Organizational Economics and the Sociology of Organizations, and how this antagonism perhaps can be overcome.

2. COURSE SCHEDULE

In a typical week (i.e., a week with no holidays or tests), on Monday and part of class on Wednesday I will lecture and facilitate class discussion. In lecture I will not summarize readings, but I will provide background to help you better understand course material. For the second half of class on Wednesday, the class period will be devoted to class presentations. For class presentations, students take turns presenting and leading the discussion of course readings.

3. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

3.1 Expectations and Classroom Etiquette

I expect you to read all the material on the day it is assigned and to critically and independently evaluate course readings.

Please respect others' opinions and minimize distractions to learning by turning off cell phones, avoiding Facebook and email during class, avoiding conversations with other students during lecture, coming to class on time, and staying until class is over.

Lastly, you are responsible for all the information in the syllabus.

3.2 Class Policies

I expect all class members to work consistently throughout the semester without requesting exceptions or special treatment. Asking for exceptions is unfair to others who have consistently worked hard and done well throughout the entire semester. If you want the best grade possible, work hard and perform at a high level over the course of the semester.

- There is no extra credit.
- If you think you received an unfair grade on an assignment, please submit your reasoning to me in writing.
But, be clear about the reasons why you believe your grade is unfair (not just that you want more points). This request should consist of the following:
1-identify the question in dispute, 2-provide an explanation as to why the question was incorrectly evaluated (in the student's opinion), 3 -propose a suggested remedy.
This must be submitted within one week of receiving the grade.
I will then review this request carefully and return a written decision to you within a week.

- **Quizzes/Periodic Assignments:** Readings/assignments other than the assigned textbook pages may be distributed in class, posted on Blackboard or placed on reserve (library). I will post the assignment due date along with the assignment (Blackboard) or I will tell you in class if the assignment is distributed in class/reserved in the library. Therefore, please check Blackboard regularly for announcements and assignments. If you miss a class, be sure to check with me or a classmate for any missed assignments. You will **not** be given extra time to complete an assignment, simply because you have missed a class.
- Incompletes or extensions for assignments are not given without medical documentation.
- I expect you to follow the Honor Code written in the "Academic honesty policy" (stated in the Student Handbook).
- If you are caught cheating, you will fail the course and be reported to the University.
- Assignments are not accepted electronically.
- You are responsible for all material covered in class. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting lecture notes and any other information from another student.
- I will not post lecture slides used in class (to reward those who attend).

3.3 Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes	Course Objectives Assessment	Assessment
Students will be conversant with the substantive areas of Sociology and the variety of theories and research methods associated with these substantive areas.	Learn the most influential theoretical approaches in Organization Sociology	Quizzes, reading summaries, and exams
Students will be able to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of current Sociological and Economic Theories and research relating to substantive areas.	Learn to evaluate theory and current academic research in Organization Sociology and Economics of Organizations	Reading summaries and course papers
Students are able to demonstrate their knowledge of substantive areas, theory, and research methodologies by developing an original sociological argument in writing.	Learn to construct and communicate an effective academic argument	Course papers and class presentation
Students are able to apply what they have learned in the Sociology program to a real world, professional experience of the semester	Use organization theory to inform real-world organization problems/issues	Course papers and class presentation

4. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

I expect an "active "participation" which will be considered in the evaluation of the grade.

Most students might assume that attendance equals participation, and that by simply being in class, they deserve the highest possible participation grade.

The “active participation” means taking notes, looking attentive, volunteering thoughtful answers, offering comments and point of view on a regular basis.

The “passive participation” is just being there without showing interest, curiosity, and his/her own attentive contribution.

4.1 Quizzes

There will 8 quizzes (almost every week) based on course readings. Quizzes occur at the beginning of class and the questions are based on the reading assigned for the day. If you do the reading, I cannot guarantee you will get all of the items correct on the quiz.

But, I guarantee the quizzes will test your knowledge of broad (not obscure) concepts from the readings.

The purpose of quizzes is to encourage students to read, facilitate class discussion, and students' understanding. If you are late or miss class, you forfeit your chance to take the quiz.

You have the opportunity to make-up one quiz. To make-up a quiz, you may write an article review about the reading assigned. The article review is an informal presentation that takes place at the beginning of class. The review includes a brief summary of the article and an explanation of how one course reading informs the topic of the article. Bring the article (or a photocopy) and turn it in to me after the presentation.

4.2 Reading Summaries and Class Presentations

You are required to write at least one reading summary. In the reading summary, you will analyze one course reading. Summary consists of 6 parts:

- (1) a brief statement regarding the background of the reading (i.e., what motivates or prompts the study? To which existing theory or problem is the author responding?);
 - (2) the author's thesis;
 - (3) the evidence provided by the author to support the thesis (i.e., empirical findings, examples, or reasons);
 - (4) the limitations of the reading (note that limitations can be identified by leveraging other theoretical lenses that emphasize different understandings of social phenomena); and
 - (5) lessons for managers (i.e., suggest one way the article may help managers be more effective).
- (6) Also, include 1 or 2 discussion questions to help the class explore key concepts from the article in more depth.

Reading summaries should be single-spaced, no more than one page in length, and written in paragraph form (i.e., it is ok to number items in the paragraph, but do not use outline form or bullet points).

You will distribute the summaries to the class, so bring enough paper copies of the reading summary for each student in class and for me. I will distribute a sign-up sheet for reading summaries next class period.

You are also required to present the 6 parts included in the reading summary to the class in a PowerPoint presentation on the day for which you sign up. Presentations should not be elaborate. Six slides (or fewer) are sufficient. Slides should consist of the main points (cut and paste) from the reading summary.

The purpose is NOT to provide a detailed summary of the reading (presenters should assume everyone has read the material carefully), but to examine the argument, evaluate the main issues, discuss limitations, and compare/contrast it with other readings.

Class presentations provide a forum for students to ask questions about the reading, learn from one another, explore the readings in greater depth, and prepare for exams.

To get full points, you must give a presentation and distribute the reading summary on the day for which you sign up.

4.3 Exams

There are two exams. The first exam is scheduled for 10/23/2013, the second exam is scheduled for 11/20/2013, in our classroom.

The university will schedule day and time for the final exam. University policy does not allow finals to be taken early, so please don't ask.

The first two exams are comprised of a small article, and multiple choice and matching questions.

There are 20 questions per exam. The exam includes likely multiple choice questions that cover material from each lecture and matching questions come from each reading ([20 questions @ 4 points each] + 20 points = 100 total points).

Questions from course readings ask you to match the author(s) from one reading with one of the following: the background, thesis, evidence, or limitations (these are parts of the reading summaries mentioned above).

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Academic and Disability Support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510.

Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

4.4 Proposal (Due 11/13/2013)

The first part of this assignment requires you to select an organization with which you are familiar. The organization could be an NGO, a youth sports league, a government agency, a for-profit firm, etc.

Next, select a real-world problem or issue facing the organization after you (1) read at least 5 newspaper articles about the company you are studying (or companies in the same industry as the one you are studying if there are no articles available on your company) and (2) contact a member of the company you are studying and conduct a face-to-face interview with him/her (select an organization and set up the interview early since it can be difficult to schedule an interview at the last minute). In the interview, ask about problems or issues facing the organization. (Keep in mind that the company will likely identify problems that are different from entry-level employees.)

The written part of this assignment consists of five parts and should be no more than two double-spaced pages in length (not including references).

First, provide (brief) background information for the organization you are studying.

Second, identify the organization's problem you are studying, explain what was said about the problem in the articles you looked up, and explain what was said about the problem by the person you contacted in your organization.

In the text of your paper cite the newspaper articles you found and cite the person you interviewed by listing the person's name and date of interview in parentheses.

For example: (Personal communication with John Grant, September 16, 2013).

Third, develop and state a research question related to the organizational problem.

Fourth, provide a tentative answer to the research question drawing from theories we have discussed so far in class. (Important: If the theories we have discussed to this point do not adequately address your research question, state why the theories are insufficient.)

Fifth, list and properly format the course readings and newspaper articles you cited in the references section.

Late papers are docked one letter grade per day (e.g., from an A- to a B-). If you know you will not be in class the day the paper is due, you can turn in the paper early. Papers should be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. If papers are turned in at the middle or end of class, points will be deducted.

4.5 Case Study

For the case study you will analyze the organization you chose for the Proposal and use course material to inform your topic. The case study should be about 10 pages in length (not including references or tables).

Instructions and grading criteria will be distributed later in the term. The case study is due _____,____ at am/p.m. The university will schedule day and time for the final exam.

List of Assignments	Points	Due Date
Active participation	10	
1 Reading Summary and Presentation (30 points ea.)	30	____,____
Quizzes (5 points ea.)	40	Various days
Exams		
Exam 1	100	09/25
Exam 2	100	11/20
Final Exam:		
- Proposal	20	11/13
- Case Study	100 /
Total Points Possible	400	

A	94 - 100%	B+	87 - 89%	C+	77 - 79%	D+	67 - 69%
A-	90 - 93%	B	84 - 86%	C	74 - 76%	D	64 - 66%
		B-	80 - 83%	C-	70 - 73%	D- F	60 - 63 % 59% and below

Grading Criteria

A = Outstanding performance. Always demonstrate independent thinking by critiquing and providing insight into and new applications of course material. Writing meets requirements and contains no more than one or two grammar and citation errors.

B = Exceeds expectations. Occasionally demonstrate independent thinking by critiquing and extending course material. Writing meets requirements, extends course material in new ways, and contains few grammar and citation errors.

C = Average performance. Demonstrate competence in understanding course material (in lecture, readings, group discussions). Writing meets all of the requirements and contains some grammatical and citation errors.

D and F = below average and performance.

5. Exam Policy

Examinations will be given at the times shown in the schedule. Examinations are not given early. The examination period is preceded by exam preparation days, which give time for conscientious review, study, and synthesis of the semester's work. Your instructor may give the grade Incomplete, depending on the circumstances.

(Certain sections of this Syllabus paraphrased from Professor John R. Sutton - University of California Santa Barbara, CA- Professor Eric Dahlin , Brigham Young University, UT College)