NEW TOPICS IN SOCIOLOGY: Sociology of Organizations
SOC215H1S
Winter 2024

Professor: Alicia Eads

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Office hours: by appointment

Class time: Thursdays 9:10– 11:00

Classroom:

TA:

email:

Course description

Organizations are ubiquitous in modern society. Many of us spend the first days of our life in hospitals and our last days in nursing homes. During our lifecourse, we go to school, we work, we dream of becoming a part of some organizations (perhaps an elite university or firm), while we try to avoid becoming a part of other organizations (e.g., jail). Despite their ubiquity and importance in our lives, we seem not to notice organizations or think about how they may be shaping our lives for better or worse. This course will help you begin to see organizations sociologically. We will examine organizations from several theoretical perspectives and learn about empirical developments in organizational sociology.[1]

Prerequisite: SOC100H1. Students without this requirement will be removed by the department without notice.

Learning Objectives

1. Become more aware of and critically consider the powerful social force of organizations in modern life.
2. Learn organizational theoretical and empirical developments.
3. Improve communication skills through in-class discussions.
4. Improve critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through course assignments.

Grading

Your overall course grade is meant to assess your academic performance in this course. This grade does not measure your overall potential as a person, nor do they assess your overall intelligence or

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[1] Part of this course description was borrowed from Craig Rawlings's Sociology of Organizations course at Northwestern University.

worth. A variety of assessment tools, assignments, and exams were designed to assess your knowledge, skills, and achievement of the course objectives.

Component	Weight	Due Date
Participation	**6%**	
Personal profile	1%	Jan. 18
Discussions/Group work	5%	each week
Module Assignments	**44%**	
Module 1	20%	Feb. 1
Module 2	24%	Feb. 29
Midterm	**25%**	Feb. 29
Final Test	**25%**	Apr. 4

Participation. Learning only happens when you practice using the material we cover. The best place to practice using what you know and getting clarification on what you don't understand yet will be the class discussions and activities. You are expected to participate in these each week. Your goal should be adding value to the discussion with respectful and thoughtful contributions and insightful questions.

Personal profile. Submit via Quercus a profile of yourself. Include: 1) a recent photo, 2) your major(s)/minor(s), 3) one thing you expect to get from this class, 4) what you hope to do after college, 5) one non-academic activity you enjoy, 6) anything else you wish to include about yourself. This profile assignment helps me get to know you. These will be graded; I am looking for an honest and thoughtful response to question 3 in particular.

Module assignments. The module assignments are another opportunity for you to practice using the material we cover in the course. It is also a chance to practice your critical reading and your writing skills. I will release the assignment at the beginning of the module. The assignment will be due the week after the last class in that module. Each module will have a different prompt, but you will respond in essay format to each one. You should submit your responses via Quercus by 9:09AM on the day they are due.

You should submit your written responses via Quercus. Your assignments will automatically be submitted to the University's plagiarism detection tool, unless you inform me in advance that you do not wish to have your assignments submitted to the University's plagiarism detection tool. Assignments not submitted through the University's plagiarism detection tool will receive a grade of zero (0 %) unless a student instead provides, along with their position paper, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own. This alternative is in place because using the University's plagiarism detection tool is voluntary for students at the University of Toronto.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (https://uoft.me/pdt-faq).

Midterm Test & Final Assessment. The midterm and final assessment (test) will be composed of short-answer, essay-style questions. The tests will cover all material from readings, lectures, and discussions.

Midterm. The midterm will be an in-person test, taken during class time on Feb. 29th. The test will cover material through Feb. 22nd.

Final. The final will be an in-person test, taken during class time on Apr. 4th. The final will cover material from Mar. 7th through the end of the course.

Course Policies

Assistance and accessibility. Let me know of any difficulties that you may be experiencing as soon as possible so that I can provide appropriate assistance and/or direct you to someone who can. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom, or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: www.accessibility.utoronto.ca.

Make-up test. If you will require a make-up due to illness, email me prior to missing the test. You must also declare your absence on ACORN. You will need to provide appropriate supporting documentation for make-ups necessary due to other approved reasons: 1) personal or family crisis, or 2) accessibility-related issues. For documentation for a personal or family crisis, have your college registrar email me directly (it is a good idea anyway to advise your college registrar if a crisis is interfering with your studies). For documentation for accessibility-related issues, please visit http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility. If you require a make-up for an approved reason, you must inform me as soon as possible and this timeframe should correspond to the timeframe indicated on your supporting documentation, otherwise the make-up may not be granted.

Late assignments. All students may submit assignments up to one week (7 days, including weekends) late without penalty. You do **not** need to email me to tell me that you will be submitting your assignment within the one-week grace period or why you need to do this. E.g. if you are sick, that's OK, just submit the assignment when you are able. If it's within the grace week, there will be no penalties. If you submit an assignment later than the one-week grace period, that's ok too. In that case, I hope you will take responsibility for yourself by gracefully accepting the late penalty and trying again next time. The late penalty is 5% of the grade for each 24-hour period that the assignment is late, beyond the one-week grace period. If the assignment is submitted 1 week (7 days, including weekends) late, the grade will be reduced by 35%. Assignments submitted more than 1 week (7 days, including weekends) late will not be graded and given a 0. Do not consider the one-week grace period as a new due date. The due dates are as listed and the grace period is a grace period, meant to offer universal flexibility.

Remarking. If you feel that your grade is wrong, submit a detailed memo in writing, specifying the questions or portions of the assignment or test that you believe were marked incorrectly, and why

you think the marking was incorrect. Also submit the assignment or test along with the memo. The deadline for requesting a remarking is no sooner than 24 hours after receiving your grade and no later than 2 weeks after the graded work was made available to students. During the re-grading process, grades can increase, decrease, or remain the same. The teaching assistant (TA) will review the assessment that has been submitted for a re-grade. The grade after the re-grade will be the grade recorded for your assignment. If you are not satisfied after the TA has reviewed your assessment, you should immediately (within 3 days of receiving it back from the TA) request that I re-grade your assignment. Please note that any work re-graded by me will involve the entire assessment, not simply the questions or portion you believe was scored improperly. As mentioned previously, your revised grade may increase, decrease, or stay the same.

Academic integrity. The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct seriously as do I. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your U of T degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The [University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document. Please be advised that instructors are required to report any instance of suspected academic dishonesty.

Offences includes but are not limited to:

In papers and assignments:
- Using someone else's ideas or words without acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment. This includes working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work.

On tests and exams:
- Using or possessing any unauthorized aid, including a cell phone.
- Working with someone else when the test is supposed to be individual work.
- Misrepresenting your identity.
- Submitting an altered test for re-grading.

Copyright. Lectures and course materials prepared by the instructor are considered by the University to be an instructor's intellectual property covered by the Canadian Copyright Act. It is absolutely forbidden for a student to publish lectures and course material to a website or sell them in any form without written permission.

Generative AI. Large Language Models (LLM), Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), and related machine learning systems have been proliferating. Some of these systems automatically generate essays, computer code, or images using minimal human prompting. This includes various versions of

ChatGPT as well as many other writing and research assistants. Students are ultimately accountable for the work they submit.

In this class, students *may* use AI tools for conducting background research, asking questions about course themes, assimilating information for general understanding, refining language or grammar (i.e., ESL purposes), or identifying secondary literature.

In this class, students *may not* use artificial intelligence tools to automatically generate any part of the research paper assignment or the reading responses. The line between appropriate and inappropriate use can get fuzzy if you use an AI tool to generate an early draft and then re-work it into your own language. In general, I do not think this is a very effective way to develop your writing and thinking skills. If you use any sentences or passages generated by an AI, the following conditions must be met:

1. Students must submit, as an appendix with their assignments, any content produced by an AI tool, and the prompts used to generate the content. This documentation should include what tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how the results from the AI were incorporated into the submitted work.

2. Any content produced by an AI tool must be cited appropriately. Many organizations that publish standard citation formats are now providing information on citing generative AI (e.g., MLA: https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/).

READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS SCHEDULE

Module 1: Foundations

Week 1: January 11 – **Welcome and introduction to the course**

    QUESTIONS:
1. What role do organizations (especially large corporations) play in social life?

    READINGS:
1. Haveman, Heather. 2022. *The Power of Organizations: A New Approach to Organizational Theory*. Princeton University Press. **Preface and Chp. 1**.

2. Perrow, Charles. 1991. "A Society of Organizations." *Theory and Society* 20(6). Only **pp. 725-738 and skip sections with black strikethroughs.**

Week 2: January 18 – **Survey of the field**

    QUESTIONS:
1. What are the three major perspectives for understanding organizations and organizational behavior?

    READINGS:
1. Scott, W. Richard, and Gerald F. Davis. 2015. Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural and Open Systems Perspectives. Routledge. **Chp. 2 pp. 36-40, Chp. 3 pp. 59-64, Chp. 4 pp. 87-98**.

    ASSIGNMENT
1. **Personal profile due** by 10:09AM on Jan. 19th. See profile assignment instructions in the assignment tab on Quercus. Submit via Quercus.

Week 3: January 25 – **Bureaucratic organization**

    QUESTIONS:
1. What are the major characteristics of the bureaucratic organization, as described by Weber?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this model of organization?

    READINGS:
1. Weber, Max. "Bureaucracy." 1978 [1968]. *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press. **Pp. 956-963.**

2. Ritzer, G. 2008. The McDonaldization of Society. Pine Forge Press. **Chps. 1 & 2— skip sections with black strikethroughs**.

Module 2: Transformations in corporate form and strategy

Week 4: February 1 – **The conglomerate**

QUESTIONS:
1. How has the form, and strategy, of the modern corporation evolved over time?

READING:
1. Fligstein, Neil. 1990. *The Transformation of Corporate Control*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. **Chps 1 and 9**.

2. Chandler, Alfred D. Jr. 2001. "The Enduring Logic of Industrial Success" *Harvard Business Review*. March-April.

ASSIGNMENT
1. **Module 1 assignment** due. See assignment instructions in the assignment tab on Quercus. Submit via Quercus by 9:09AM.

Week 5: February 8 – **Shareholder value revolution**

QUESTIONS:
1. What is the shareholder value model of corporate governance?
2. When, how, and why did it emerge, and what have been its effects?
3. What happened to the conglomerate?

READINGS:
1. Shin, Taekjin. 2013. "The Shareholder Value Principle: The Governance and Control of Corporations in The United States." *Sociology Compass* 7(10): 829-840.

Week 6: February 15 – **Financialization of the firm**

QUESTIONS:
1. What is financialization?
2. What does it mean to say that firms have been financialized?

READINGS:
1. Krippner, Greta R. 2003. "The Financialization of the American Economy." *Socio-Economic Review* 3 (2): 173-208.

IN-CLASS EXAM REVIEW

February 22rd – **READING WEEK**

Week 7: February 29th

MIDTERM

ASSIGNMENT
1. **Module 2 assignment due**. See assignment instructions in the assignment tab on Quercus. Submit via Quercus.

Module 3: Organizational decision-making

Week 8: March 7 – Rationality

QUESTIONS:
1. What does rational mean with respect to decision-making?
2. What is the rational decision-making model?

READINGS:
1. March, James G. 1994. *Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen*. Simon and Schuster. **Chp. 1 through section 1.1.3 Enthusiasts and Skeptics**.

2. Robbins, Stephen, Timothy Judge, and Katherine Breward. 2018. Essentials of Organizational Behavior, Second Canadian Edition. Pearson, New York. **Chp. 6 Pp. 113**.

Week 9: March 14 – Bounded rationality

QUESTIONS:
1. What are the differences between the rational and boundedly rational decision-making models?

READINGS:
1. Simon, Herbert A. 1955. "A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 69(1): 99-118.

Optional: Simon, Herbert A. 1979. "Rational decision making in business organizations." *The American Economic Review* 69(4): 493-513.

Week 10: March 21 – Garbage can model & sensemaking

QUESTIONS:
1. How are the garbage can and sensemaking models related to the rational decision-making models?

READINGS:
1. Cohen, Michael D., James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen. 1975. "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice." *Administrative Science Quarterly*: 1-25.

2. Weick, Karl E. 1993. "The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster." *Administrative Science Quarterly*: 628-652.

Week 11: March 28 – Employer decision-making and the reproduction of inequality

QUESTIONS:
1. How do organizations reproduce inequality?
2. How does individuals' status work in organizations to reproduce inequality?
3. How do employers make decisions about workers?

READINGS:
1. Stainback, Kevin, Donald Tomaskovic-Devey, and Sheryl Skaggs. 2010. "Organizational Approaches to Inequality: Inertia, Relative Power, and Environments." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 225-247.

2. Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2014. "Why Status Matters for Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 79(1): 1-16.

3. Rivera, Lauren A. 2020. "Employer Decision Making." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 215-232.

IN-CLASS EXAM REVIEW

Week 12: April 4

FINAL TEST