

# SOCI 345

## Sociology of Organizations

### Fall 2016

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Office Hours: TBD

Social Sciences 319

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#### **Introduction**

Throughout human history, various observers have attempted to describe the features and outcomes of organized group behavior—many with the aim of proposing a method of organization that might overcome the social problems of their era. In the late 19th century, a social scientific tradition emerged that attempted to find the “one best way” of organizing human labor for the purposes of capitalist production. This intellectual tradition became what we will refer to in this class as the sociology of organizations.

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to this research tradition. To accomplish this, we will investigate the theoretical literature on organizations, the workings of a local non-profit organization, and the dynamics of organizing a small group of students (of which you will be a part). You will not only study organizations on the page, you will gain experience *organizing, being organized, and observing an organization* in its “natural habitat.”

Since we’re studying groups of people working together, it should come as no surprise that much of this class will consist of working together in groups. You and four other students in this class will carry out a sociological evaluation of a local non-profit organization. At the end of the semester, you will (as an individual) write a theoretically-informed analysis of your experience working as an organization, for an organization. In your paper, you will have a chance to venture some sociological explanations for your group’s successes and failures.

#### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, the successful student will:

1. Understand the various sociological perspectives on organizations
2. Be aware of the host of resources the sociology of organizations offers practitioners
3. Have experience evaluating real-world organizational problems
4. Have a written record of their foray into the theoretical and practical dynamics of organizations

## Class Structure

**Grading:** In the interests of transparency, the cumulative point value of this class is 100. Therefore, every point you and your group earns is 1% of your grade. Here's a tabular breakdown of the grading system:

<u>Task</u>	<u>Proportion of overall grade</u>
<b>Two 30-point Tests</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Five 4-point Organizational Memoranda</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Final Paper</b>	<b>20%</b>

See the "Description of Tasks" (below) for more information.

**The Texts:** Many of the readings for this class are in the textbook:

Shafritz, Jay M. and J. Steven Ott. 2015. *Classics of Organization Theory*. 8th Edition. Boston: Cengage Learning.

The text is intended to be a companion for your future organizational endeavors as much as it is a reader for this class. The readings assigned from the text and on Moodle are meant to give you a flavor for the vast body of literature on organizations. I encourage you to explore more as your palate demands it.

**Links to readings outside the textbook will be available on Moodle as necessary.**

**Please make sure you have access to the readings during class.**

## Other Reminders and Caveats

**Disabilities:** Please let me know if you have any sort of disability or language difficulties that might hinder your performance in any of the assigned tasks.

**Office Hours:** Making use of office hours will be critical to your success. Attending office hours indicates your engagement with the material and gives me a chance to get to know you. I will send out an office hours poll the first week before establishing regular hours.

**Moodle:** Where you'll find class updates (i.e. revisions to this document and others), grades, readings, the course schedule, and a place to upload your memos and final paper.

**E-mail:** My e-mail policy is as follows.

- I do not respond to e-mails after 6PM on weekdays. With a few exceptions, I do not check e-mail on Saturdays.
- I will respond to your (relevant) questions or concerns within 48 hours.
- Please keep your e-mailed questions and concerns relevant to this class. Complex issues should be discussed in person during office hours or by appointment.
- Per university policy, I will only respond to e-mails from your student e-mail account.
- I use university e-mail to communicate important information to the class. Therefore, to succeed in this class, you'll need to check your student e-mail account regularly. It's easy to forward e-mails from your student account to another account. Let me know if you need assistance with this.

**Drop deadlines:** September 19th is the last day to drop individual classes via Cyberbear.

**Incompletes:** Please see the University Catalog for the University policy on incompletes:

<http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academics/academic-policy-procedure2.php>

I will not give incompletes unless there are compelling reasons to do so.

**Plagiarism:** Please see the Student Conduct Code. If you use someone else's words or ideas, cite them and use quotes as appropriate. If you have any questions regarding this matter please contact me before you submit your work. You will find this method works better than allowing me to find these issues on my own. Do the right thing.

**Personal device policy:** Personal information devices are an increasingly important part of daily communication and information gathering. They are also a distraction and a nuisance in class. We will produce a meaningful device policy the first day of class.

**Late Assignments:** Please turn in assignments on time. Extensions will be considered if requested at least a week in advance. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day unless prior arrangements are made.

### **Readings and Due Dates**

We will cover the readings in the following sequence. Dates are approximate, since I will not be present for two class periods sometime around the third week of the semester. [M] indicates the reading is available on Moodle. Readings without an [M] are available in your textbook.

#### **Week One: Classical Foundations, "Movement in a Resistant Medium"**

1. Review syllabus, introductions
2. Taylor, "The Principles of Scientific Management" (13 pages)

#### **Week Two: Classical Foundations, cont'd**

1. Weber, "Domination and Legitimacy" [M] (12 pages)
2. Weber, "Bureaucracy" (5 pages)

#### **Buffer Week (approx. Week Three):**

This week, you and your group are required to meet up during class time, compose a group constitution, and propose which organization(s) you would like to analyze. Each of these tasks are to be described in detail in Organizational Memo 1 (due on Moodle by Friday at 5PM).

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMO 1 DUE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16 <sup>th</sup>
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#### **Week Four: Classical Foundations and The Subjective Turn**

1. Gulick, "Notes on the Theory of Organization" (8 pages)
2. Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organization" (10 pages)

#### **Week Five: The Subjective Turn, cont'd**

1. Roethlisberger, "The Hawthorne Experiments" (8 pages)
2. Follett, "The Giving of Orders" (6 pages)

### **Week Six: The Subjective Turn, cont'd**

1. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation" (13 pages)
2. Blau and Scott, "The Concept of Formal Organization" (5 pages)

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMO 2 DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7<sup>th</sup>

### **Week Seven: Critical Perspectives**

1. Braverman, "The Effects of Scientific Management" [M] (9 pages)
2. Burawoy, "The Labor Process as a Game" [M] (17 pages)

### **Week Eight: Critical Perspectives, cont'd**

1. Perrow, "Managerial Ideologies and the Origins of the Human Relations Movement" [M] (13 pages)
2. Perrow, "Power in Organizational Analysis: Illustrations, Summary, and Conclusions" [M] (20 pages)

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMO 3 DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14<sup>th</sup>

### **Week Nine: Critical Perspectives, cont'd**

1. Acker, "Gendering Organizational Theory" (7 pages)

TEST ONE: FOUNDATIONS AND CRITIQUES OF THE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONS  
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3<sup>rd</sup>

### **Week Ten: The Institution**

1. Janis, "Groupthink: The Desperate Drive for Consensus at Any Cost" (8 pages)
2. Dimaggio and Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields" [M] (14 pages)

### **Week Eleven: Organizations and Social Context, The "Strength of Weak Ties"**

1. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties" [M] (18 pages)
2. Fernandez, Castilla and Moore, "Social Capital at Work: Networks and Employment at a Phone Center." [M] (28 pages)

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMO 4 DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4<sup>th</sup>

### **Week Twelve: "Embeddedness" and "Open Systems"**

1. Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure" [M] (26 pages)
2. Thompson, "Organizations in Action" (14 pages)

### **Week Thirteen: Thanksgiving**

1. Documentary: “The Storm” [M]
2. Thanksgiving (no class)

### **Week Fourteen: Organizations as Anarchy, The “Garbage Can Model”**

1. Cohen and March, “Leadership in an Organized Anarchy” (14 pages)
2. Cohen, March and Olsen, “A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice” [M] (18 pages)

ORGANIZATIONAL MEMO 5 DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18<sup>th</sup>

### **Week Fifteen: Explaining Organizational Failure**

1. Clarke and Perrow, “Prosaic Organizational Failure” [M] (15 pages)
2. Vaughan, “Autonomy, Interdependence, and Social Control: NASA and the Space Shuttle Challenger” [M] (31 pages)

FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9<sup>th</sup>

FINAL TEST: INSTITUTIONS, EMBEDDEDNESS, ANARCHY, AND DISASTER  
MONDAY, DECEMBER 19<sup>th</sup>, 3:20-5:20PM

## Description of Tasks

Each of the following tasks will be discussed in class. These descriptions are mainly for future reference and to document my expectations of/obligations to you.

**File naming conventions:** Please upload your group and individual files to Moodle in Microsoft Word or plain text format (.docx, .doc, .rtf, or .txt). Additionally, please use the following naming convention to ease management of class files:

**name\_TaskNumber.docx (or another applicable file extension)**

For example, Jane Doe's group, "The Weevils," would name their second memo as follows:  
Weevils\_Memo2.docx

And her final paper would be named:  
Doe\_Final.docx

**Tests:** There are two tests of the theoretical knowledge contained in readings and lecture. The tests are meant to (1) enforce careful reading, (2) encourage study and synthesization of the concepts presented in class, and (3) give you experience with a test format similar to the GREs. The tests are designed to take no longer than an hour each and are not cumulative. The tests will combine short answer, multiple choice, and essay questions. Review sessions will be held prior to each test.

**Memoranda:** There are five 4-point memoranda assigned throughout the semester (20% of your grade). These memoranda should be composed in a manner agreed upon by the group. Some groups will choose to have planning sessions, then assign a different person for each write-up. Other groups will decide on a more rigid division of labor. Any arrangement your group comes up with should have some theoretical basis outlined in the memos themselves.

Each memo will have a different emphasis (more details later—see outline below for basic progression). In general, you will be asked to apply some concept(s) from the readings to your non-profit or to yourselves. Most memoranda will have a minimum word count requirement (usually around 250 words), but they are not meant to be formal compositions (as your final essay is). The specific format of memos will vary based on the group and the assignment. In general, they should be a logically coherent, clear and concise presentation of information. Superior memos will address the prompt, refer explicitly to the readings, document the special contributions of each group member, and contain some original analysis.

Here's a rough breakdown of the tasks your group will carry out in each memo:

**Memo 1: Group Constitution** Identify group member roles/responsibilities and basic functions. Come up with a group name and mission statement. Pick a non-profit.

**Memo 2: Research Plan** Describe and justify methods for data collection (mainly participant observation during volunteer hours). Elaborate group member roles. Make amendments to constitution as needed.

**Memo 3: Initial Findings** Observations on data quality. Discussion of applicability of theories/concepts to empirical situation. Propose adjustments to research agenda, methodology, emphasis, constitution.

**Memo 4: Findings Memo 1** Discuss data quality, justify termination of data collection phase. Make preliminary (theoretically-informed) analyses of observed organizational patterns (in the non-profit). Identify group member roles in data analysis phase. Create an analysis agenda. Identify any additional areas in the social scientific literature on organizations that need to be explored to complete the study.

**Memo 5: Findings Memo 2** Evaluate organization in theoretical and practical terms using data gathered over the semester and the required readings.

Since many of you will be understandably concerned about the prospect of your grade being dependent on other students, I have structured the class so that only 20% of possible points will be derived directly through group-authored memoranda. Fully 60% of your grade will be evaluated by means of two (non-cumulative) tests of your theoretical knowledge, and another 20% are based on your final paper. Thus, a poorly functioning group could receive a failing (or poor) grade on its memoranda but a top-performing student in that group could still potentially receive a 90% (or higher) in the class.

That said, just as in the rest of life, the most successful students will find ways to ensure the success of their group.

**Final Paper:** This five to seven-page formal essay will synthesize your research and idea-making in memos, the readings assigned for class, and reflections on the functioning of your student group. The goal of the paper is to apply some of the concepts discussed in class and readings to the learning environment you are currently engaged in. This essay is a rare opportunity to explain (in a sociologically rigorous way) the tribulations and triumphs of group work in an undergraduate class at the University of Montana.