I have two main goals in this course. The first is to cover basic issues in organizational sociology. The course does not cover all the cutting-edge issues in the field. My aim is to foster in you an organizational perspective. The second is to analyze some of the key current topics and arguments in social scientific thinking on organizations and organizationally relevant issues. “Organizationally relevant” means this: there are a lot of important debates and currents of thought in social science that depend in one way or another on organizations. For example, micro-level analyses about how people make choices among jobs must take account of how organizations set the menu of choices from which they choose. Or, to take a macro example: it’s not possible to understand how western culture shapes prevailing conceptions of rationality without understanding how organizational politics gave rise to those conceptions, and defeated others. Or take the recent problem of the financial crisis: understanding what happened there as an issue of organizational failure is very different from understanding it as a problem of individual greed (an issue of agency).

It is almost always a waste of time to lecture in graduate courses. Because this course is a seminar, it is important that everyone participate in the discussions. It will be impossible to participate intelligently without having done the reading, so please do it before the class in which we’ll be discussing it. As a device to facilitate discussion, a discussion leader (or leaders) will assume primary responsibility for leading the discussion. Leaders should prepare a set of crucial questions about the readings for the day. Regardless of whose week it is to lead discussion, everyone is responsible for reading the material. We will arrange the schedule on the first day of class. I’ll also give some tips on how to digest what might appear to be a large amount of material.

Course requirements:

1. Participation.

2. Weekly memos on readings.

   If it is your week to lead the discussion, you don’t have to do this. Otherwise, this is ½ to 1 page of reflections on the readings. “Reflections” can be issues the readings raised for you, criticisms of the readings (and we’ll talk, over the semester, about what constitutes good criticism), ideas you had because of the readings. This is not just something you dash off the morning of the class. It should show careful reflection. These are due no later than 9 am Monday morning. By “due” I mean posted to the “class discussions” section on Sakai; this is so that everyone can be reflective about others’ reflections.
Proposal, paper, or chapter. I am flexible about this, so that students have a choice that will work best with their intellectual agenda. Of course, the specific topic can be of your own choosing, but you should clear it with me first. If your proposal is built upon or might feed into a dissertation proposal, please see me before developing it. Toward the end of the course, you will present your work to the class, for friendly, constructive feedback.

I don’t give incompletes.

The following books are required, and are available at the Rutgers Bookstore &NJ Books. All are in paper, and will be cheap:

- Gerald F. Davis, Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America, Oxford University Press, 2009

The articles and chapters are on Sakai.

Generally, the naming convention I used is lastname_significant word.pdf. So, for example, the first reading is entitled “weber_bureaucracy.pdf.”

We’ll talk about how to get the other readings on the 1st day of class.

A few of the readings are Word documents. Let me know if that’s a problem for you and I’ll send it to you in another format. Most are PDF files.

List of readings, by week.

1. September 8. Introductions. The relevance of organizational analysis; importance of the perspective; place of organizational sociology in the field. Why I chose the books, and so on.


Here the point is to flesh out what it means to say “organizational analysis,” while giving some intellectual history along the way. As you read through this material look for assumptions about human nature and assumptions about the purposes of formal organizations. Also think, as you read, in whose interest organizations work, according to the authors?

• Donald Palmer, Taking Stock of the Criteria We Use to Evaluate One Another’s Work: ASQ 50 Years Out, Administrative Science Quarterly, 2006, 51, 535-559.

NB: You are not required to read the following, but they’re good to know:

• Worker interdependence and output: the Hawthorne studies reevaluated, ASR, 1990, 176-190.
• Neil Fligstein, Organizations: Theoretical debates and the scope of organizational theory, Handbook of Sociology.

3. September 19. What makes organizations do what they do? The institutionalist answer. Usual answers to that question involve efficiency or some other functional reason that makes sense. These authors come up with other answers altogether, and it matters for what organizations look like and how they act. Of course, all theories leave out things so be on the lookout for what is missed here.


Other relevant readings, not required for class but key to further understanding the institutional perspective:
• Frank Dobbin and Erin L. Kelly, How to stop harassment: professional construction of legal compliance in organizations, AJS, 1007, 112(4):1203-1243.

4. September 26. Gender is everywhere. So is organization. Here’s a place that they meet in particularly interesting ways.


5. October 3. Organizational contexts & social networks
More arguments about the social structures that shape people’s life chances in various ways. Look at the trust writings in that light.
• Neil Fligstein and Peter Brantley Bank control, owner control, or organizational dynamics: who controls the large modern corporation?, AJS, 1992, 98(2), 280-307
• Val Burris, Interlocking Directorates and Political Cohesion among Corporate Elites, AJS, 2005, July.

The question of trust


6. October 10. Accidents, Mistakes, and Chance
• Steven F. Freeman, Larry Hirschhorn, and Marc Maltz, Moral purpose and organizational resilience: Sandler, O’Neill & Partners in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Also excellent, but not required:
• Columbia Accident Investigation Board, Chapter 7, “The accident’s organizational causes,” and Chapter 8, “History as Cause”: 

7. October 17. Organizations and capitalism
Is there anything organizations can say about the recent economic meltdown? Gerald Davis thinks so:

Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America, Gerald F. Davis, Oxford University Press, 2009

8. October 24. New Organizational Forms
Treat: Eric Kushins is a graduate student in our department (and also Rutgers’ business school). He’s doing very interesting work on family-owned businesses. He’ll join us to talk about that work, during the first part of class.


Recommended but not required:
- Arthur Stinchcombe, Social structure and organizations, Handbook of Organizations.

9. October 31. Sense making in organizations
Today, another treat. Ken Chung is a PhD student in Rutgers’ business school. He has an MBA from Syracuse and a BS in nuclear engineering from Berkeley. Now he’s writing a fascinating dissertation on environmental hazards and institutional change. Ken employs a sense-making perspective in is work. He’ll join us for the first hour or so of class.

- Herbert Simon, The psychology of administrative decisions, Chapter 4 of Administrative Behavior
- Karl Weick, The Nature of Sense Making, chapter 1 of Sense Making in Organizations
- Karl Weick, Enactment and organizing, chapter 6 of The social psychology of organizing

10. November 7. Moral Games in Organizations


Organizations and inequality.
A huge amount of the important stratification in modern society happens inside and because of organizations. Yet they are often neglected. Here we wonder what purchase is gained by bringing organizational analysis to bear in inequalities, and vice versa.

Special treat: Our colleague Pat Roos will join us for half the class to talk about some of her important work with Barbara Reskin.

- Reskin and Roos chapters 1 & 2 from Job Queues, Gender Queues
- Joan Acker, Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: www.susans.org/reference/gendorga.html

Extra relevant readings
- Mark Granovetter, Small is Bountiful: Labor markets and establishment size, ASR, 1984, 49(3)
- The social organization of the American business elite, Michael Useem, ASR, 1979, 44(4)
- Pathways to top corporate management, Michael Useem and Jerome Karabel, ASR, 1986, 51(2)

Note that November 21 is Wednesday, according to Rutgers.
12. November 28. Organizational production of culture
The fundamental point here is that organizations make and use symbols. But what are the mechanisms? Why do they make the symbols as they do? What are the alternative arguments? Extra credit for anyone who can identify the connections with classical organization theory.


13. December 5. Special topics: what does organizational analysis have to say about 9.11 and the response to 9.11?
- Richard Clarke, Evacuate the White House, Ch. 1 of Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror, Free Press, 2004.
- Graham Allison, Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis, American Political Science Review, 1969, 63(3):689-718