

**ORGANIZATIONS AND BUREAURACY**  
**Sociology 920:315:01**  
**Davison Hall, room 122; MTh 10:55-12:15**

**Department of Sociology**  
**Rutgers University**  
**Fall 2010**

Professor: Paul McLean

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Office hours: Thursdays 1:00-2:30, Davison Hall, room 049, and by appointment

Formal organizations are ubiquitous and utterly essential elements in the landscape of the modern world. The conduct of everyday life—going to school; being at work; shopping for food, clothes, and services; voting; paying our taxes; going to religious services—brings us into recurrent contact with them. Organizations often set the parameters for our behavior and our choices. For a simple example, at work we often follow scripts for interacting with other human beings, scripts that have been essentially created by the company for whom we work and that we merely execute. In some ways we can think of organizations as extremely powerful tools for problem-solving. But organizations are not just passive. They are, like us individual humans and like the social groups (families, friendship networks, and so on) to which we belong, *actors* on the social stage. In fact, they are the stars on the stage. They are human creations, but like Frankenstein's monster, they take on a life of their own. They are as legally real as we are, but they typically command resources far in excess of ours. The successful ones frequently outlive us. They are recognizable to others to a degree most of us can only dream about.

This course surveys sociological work on the topic of formal organizations, focusing especially on different theories of how organizations work, why they are constituted as they are, and how we relate to them and they relate to each other. We will have recurrent recourse to examples as we proceed, and we will read some case studies throughout the semester, but by and large, the course sticks to theory. We will compare and, especially, contrast different theories. Take note that I intend to lecture on some material that is not explicitly presented in the readings. We will identify abstract properties of organizations, and use those lists of properties to understand social dynamics better, and to facilitate comparison across disparate cases. Much of what we will read is old; but it is classic stuff and you should know it to graduate with a major in sociology. Finally, although we will be reading theory, and although the topic may seem at the outset a little dry, in fact I think what we will read is eye-opening and, in a way, exciting.

The following book should be purchased at the Douglass Campus Bookstore. It contains most of what we need, but a good deal of additional stuff will be on sakai.

- 1) Michael J. Handel, ed., *The Sociology of Organizations: Classic, Contemporary and Critical Readings* (Sage, 2003) [ISBN: 9780761987666]

## Requirements and Evaluation

Your grade in this course will be based on the following factors:

- 1) attendance, participation, and submission of reading responses in class (15%);
- 2) one midterm test in class (25%);
- 3) one short paper, about 5 pages in length (30%);
- 4) a final exam (30%).

Attendance will be taken regularly, although not necessarily at every session. As part of your attendance/participation grade, you will be required to provide a **RESPONSE** to one reading **TEN** times throughout the semester: **once a week (you may pick whether it is the Monday reading or the Thursday reading) from week 3 to week 12**. The response is due at the **beginning** of the class period; therefore you **MUST** do the reading in advance of coming to class. The response need not provide a thorough reflection on the reading. You should state the main point you gleaned from the reading, describe your reaction to it, and pose a question or two about it. The response should be no longer than half a page, even shorter if possible—perhaps a cue card's length. The responses are simply my way of monitoring your attention to the class material on an ongoing basis.

The midterm and final will consist of multiple choice questions, short answers (either concept- or quotation-identification), and one or two bluebook essays. The final exam in particular will cover mostly material from the post-midterm portion of the semester, including only limited attention to materials from the first third of the course. I will hand out paper topics midway through the semester, although you may write on a topic of your own choosing if you wish and you clear it with me.

Your grade will also depend on your compliance with some basic guidelines of classroom conduct, as follows:

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Behavior that distracts students and faculty and obstructs classroom goals is **NOT** acceptable. **Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, leaving and returning, leaving early without permission, and discourteous remarks.** Courteous and lawful expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is of course permitted. If a student engages in disruptive behavior, then your instructor, in compliance with the University Code of Student Conduct, is entitled to direct that student to leave class for the remainder of the class period. Serious verbal assaults, harassment, or defamation of the instructor or other students can lead to university disciplinary proceedings. The University Code of Student Conduct may be consulted at <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~polcomp/judaff/ucsc.shtml>.

## **Class Schedule**

### **Week 1                                      Introduction to the Course**

September 2                                      No reading assigned

### **Week 2**

September 8 (Wednesday!)      Design and the Notion of Problem-Solving

Read:      Herbert Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, selections [sakai]

September 9                                      Max Weber's Classic Statement of Bureaucracy

Read:      Weber excerpt in Handel, pp. 5-23

### **Week 3**

September 13                                      Taylorism: Utopia or Dystopia?

Read:              Taylor and Braverman excerpts in Handel, pp. 24-38

September 16                                      Contingency Theory I: Spontaneous Design from the Environment

Read:              James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action*, selections [sakai]

### **Week 4**

September 20                                      Contingency Theory II: Strategy, and the Managerial Revolution in American Business

Read:              Alfred Chandler excerpt in Handel, pp. 303-14

September 23                                      Contingency Theory III:  
Craft Organization and Innovative Management

Read:              1) Arthur Stinchcombe, "Bureaucratic and Craft Administration of Production,"  
*Administrative Science Quarterly* 4: 168-87 [sakai]  
2) Burns and Stalker excerpt in Handel, pp. 45-51

### **Week 5**

September 27                                      The Firm as a Rational Actor

Read:              Jensen and Meckling and Williamson excerpts in Handel, pp. 269-287

September 30

Organizations as Natural Systems I:  
The Organization as a Limited Problem Solver

Read: 1) Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," *Science* 211:453-8. [sakai]  
2) Richard Cyert and James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, selections [sakai]  
3) Perrow excerpt in Handel, pp. 288-294

**Week 6**

October 4

Case Study of Limited Problem Solving: Juvenile Court

Read: Aaron Cicourel, *The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice*, selections [sakai]

October 7

Competing Explanations of Organizational Decision-Making: The Cuban Missile Crisis

Read: Allison excerpt in Handel, pp. 185-204

**Week 7**

October 11

MIDTERM TEST

October 14

Power in Organizations I: Oligarchy

Read: Michels excerpt in Handel, pp. 211-24

**Week 8**

October 18

Power in Organizations II: Coalitions

Read: 1) James G. March, "The Business Firm as a Political Coalition," *Journal of Politics* 24: 662-78 [sakai]  
2) David Mechanic, "Sources of Power of Lower Participants in Complex Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 7: 349-64 [sakai]

October 21

Power in Organizations III: Internal Conflict and Control Through Process

Read: Dalton, Jackall, and Burawoy excerpts in Handel, pp. 149-80

**Week 9**

October 25

Effacing Power I: The Human Relations Movement

Read: Homans and Bramel and Friend excerpts in Handel, pp. 85-107

## Effacing Power II: Eliciting Commitment

Read: Walton, and Rubinstein excerpts in Handel, pp.114-30

## PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED

## Week 10

November 1

## The ‘Chaos’ View of Organizations

Read: Michael D. Cohen, James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen, "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17: 1-25 **[sakai]**

November 4

## Inter-organizational Relations I: Power *Between* Organizations

Read: Pfeffer and Salancik excerpt in Handel, pp. 233-42

## Week 11

November 8

## Inter-organizational Relations II: The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis, and Organizations as Symbols

Read: DiMaggio and Powell excerpt in Handel, pp. 243-53

November 11

## Populations of Organizations

Read: Carroll and Hannan excerpt in Handel, pp. 254-62

## Week 12

November 15

## Networks of Organizations

Read: Powell excerpt in Handel, pp. 315-30

## PAPERS DUE!!!

November 18

**No class today—Instructor out of Town!**

## Week 13

November 22

**No class today—RU follows Wednesday schedule**

November 25

## NO CLASS; THANKSGIVING RECESS

## **Week 14**

November 29                      Organizational Culture

Read:                      1) Kunda excerpt in Handel, pp. 351-70  
                                 2) Cal Morrill, "Conflict, Management, Honor, and Organizational Change," *American Journal of Sociology* 97, 3:585-621 [sakai]

December 2                      Organizations and Broader Cultural Influences I:  
                                         Gender and Race

Read:                      Kanter and Collins excerpts in Handel, pp. 381-407

## **Week 15**

December 6                      Organizations and Broader Cultural Influences II:  
                                         Class and Politics

Read:                      Edwards and Clawson et al. excerpts in Handel, pp.408-32

December 9                      Organizational Breakdown I:  
                                         Complexity and Normal Accidents

Read:                      Perrow excerpt in Handel, pp. 437-42

## **Week 16(!)**

December 13                      Organizational Breakdown II:  
                                         Societal Pressures and Flawed Decision-Making

Read:                      Vaughan excerpt in Handel, pp.443-56

                                         FINAL EXAM:  
                                 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 8:00-11:00 A.M., DAVISON HALL 122