SOCIOLOGY 2103
SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

Fall 2017
Mondays 9:30am-11:20am
Wednesdays 10:30am-11:20am
TSH/B106

Instructor: Dr. P. G. Watson
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Office Hours: Mon 12:00-1:30, Thurs 5:00-6:00
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social organization, and organizations, are fundamental defining features of human society. While many species exhibit characteristics of hierarchy, roles, and forms of interaction, only humans have occupations, laws, currency, defined status, etc. As a result, as the textbook for this course states, it would be impossible to understand contemporary (what it calls ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’) society without reference to organizations.

This course opens some discussion of the sociological treatment of organizations and organization. The fundamental driving concern of sociology as a discipline is to understand how individuals in society remain in an apparently ordered and structured social circumstance – i.e. how they stay organized as opposed to chaotic.

We will spend the term examining both classical and contemporary sociological approaches to organization, as well as discussing some contemporary studies of organizational life. The idea here is not to tell you what is and what is not an organization – as you will come to learn, this is a difficult task, and likely a fool’s errand. Instead, the objective is to provide a frame for understanding what sociologists are interested in when they discuss organizational life.

OUTLINE

The course outline found below gives you approximate dates for when topics will be covered. In the event of major changes to the schedule, you will be given notice both in class and on Avenue to Learn.

WEEK 1: Introduction (September 5th)

An introduction to the discussion of organization from a sociological analysis. You will be asked to perform an ‘organizational audit’ of your personal lives, and consider the different types of organizations you have interacted with over the previous month. We will employ small, informal groups to facilitate this discussion, and groups will feed back to the class. The lecture component will focus on some introductory remarks on the sociology of organizations, as well as an overview of course policies and procedures.

Reading: Lune, Chapter 1 – Introducing Organizations

WEEK 2: Weber, Bureaucracy, and Organization (September 10th, 12th)

Max Weber’s work has been foundational for sociology, but has been heavily influential in the broader fields of Organization Studies and Business Administration. His book Economy and Society was among the first to seriously consider the bureaucratic form of organization, and the ideal-typical functions of a ‘perfect’ bureaucracy. In this week, we will discuss this phenomenally important text.
WEEK 3: Durkheim's Division of Labour (September 17th, 19th)

As mentioned in the introductory paragraph for this syllabus, humans are unique in as much as we tend to rigidly define the roles and expectancies we have of-and-for each other. We will focus on how Durkheim demonstrates these defined roles (at least in contemporary society) create the very social structure we rely on to navigate our social lives, through his concepts of Mechanical and Organic solidarity.

Reading: Lune Chpt. 2, pp. 28-32.

WEEK 4: Marx, Kapital and Dialectical Materialism (September 24th, 26th)

Thanks to some exceedingly disingenuous statements by ‘academics’ and politicians, Marx has become a figure of considerable interest and controversy in academia once again. For provocateurs, Marx’s theories are treated as synonymous with the murderous political regimes of Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, or Nikolai Ceausescu, Marx himself never accumulated political power and, so far as I know, never actually killed anyone. In this week we will consider the significance of Marx in the sociology of organizations, and redress some of the pantomime about Marxian theory present in contemporary discourse.

Readings: Lune, Chpt. 2, pp. 32-38.

WEEK 5: More Contemporary Theories of Organization (October 1st, 3rd)

Obviously, a great deal has changed since Marx, Durkheim and Weber were writing. We use those writings to situate sociological thinking, to create a frame through which other sociologists then operate. In this week, we will introduce further developments to theory in organizations: Talcott Parsons and Egon Bittner.


WEEK 6: Midterm (October 15th, 17th)

On Monday October 15th I will give a review session preceding the midterm test. This will be a shortened class, so we will omit the first hour and convene from 10:15am to 11:20am. On Wednesday October 17th,
we will have a test in the class time that covers all material in weeks 1-5, or the theory portion of the course.

Readings: None

WEEK 7: Muddling Through (October 22nd, 24th)

This week marks a transition in the courses focus away from theory, one that reflects a change in focus in research practice. In the early to mid twentieth century (around the 1930s or so) the practice of ‘arm chair theorizing’ had reached its peak in sociology, and theorists were growing increasingly discontent with a gulf between theory and practice. For organizations theorists, this was evident in the fact that organization actors did not seem to exhibit the purely rational and principled practices theorized by Weber and Parsons. We will consider two revolutionary theorists in this week, Charles Lindblom and Herbert Simon, whose main contributions were decidedly anti-theoretical.


WEEK 8: Organizations and Culture (October 29th, 31st)

In some sense, culture is what sociologists attend to in their studies. In another sense, sociologists frequently demarcate a distinction between social life and culture. This week we will look at culture as an organizational phenomenon, the ways organizations create boundaries for themselves that make them distinguishable from other organizations, the way that members of an organization enculturate those they operate around in the ‘ways things get done here’, the ways wider socio-cultural factors affect the operations of organizations.

Readings: Lune Chapter 4, pp. 61-84.

WEEK 9: Dysfunctions, Deviance, Disaster in Organizations (November 5th, 7th)

Disasters and deviance attract a great deal of attention, for very good reason. Many contemporary disasters – wars, chemical spills, the financial crash of 2008, or the separation of asylum seeking families at the US-Mexico border, are either the results or consequence of organizations. In this week, we will examine the sociological assessment of deviance and disaster in organizations, both as a form of function and dysfunction.

Readings: Lune Chapter 5, pp. 85-104.

WEEK 10: Organizations interactions and their spaces (November 12th, 14th)

The textbook, somewhat misleadingly, calls this “organizations and environment”. While we are not dismissing an interest in the physical, natural environment, the interest in this week of the course is how organizations interact with each other, rather than how individual actors interact inside organizations. This will draw some of Parsons and Bittner’s assertions about the sociological analyses of organizations into question, but we will see that there are occasions where organizations operate as a whole, rather than through individuals.
WEEK 11: Organizing for Change (November 19th, 21st)

One of the pitfalls of studying sociology is becoming aware of the problems and hardships that social life bears. Organizations can both cause and/or alleviate these strains. In this week of the course, we will review the role organizations can play in bringing about social change, or how organizations respond to social change.

Readings: Lune Chapter 8, pp. 154-172.

Week 12: Future Directions and Summary (November 26th, 28th)

We will complete the course by summarizing where we have been, and considering how the future of the sociology of organizations may proceed. We will also discuss the pressing issues facing contemporary social life, and the ways organizations will need to adapt, reform, or be abolished in order to ensure a productive continuance of human society as we know it.

Readings: Lune Chapter 9, pp. 173-191.

Week 13: Conclusions (December 3rd)

This week will be used to wrap up any loose ends, and to prepare for the final exam.

Readings: None

TEXT BOOK AND TEXTS


Articles on A2L as assigned.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

- In class group work assignments – 25%
- Midterm Test – 30%
- Final Exam – 45%

In Class Assignments (5 x 5% each, 25% of overall grade)

There will be five small groupwork assignments spread through the term. As the class is large, it is impractical to monitor participation. Instead, participation will be evaluated through these assignments. During class time, on an ad hoc basis, small assignments will be distributed and the class will be recessed for groups to discuss them. Class will be brought back together following the recess, and any questions
can be dealt with then. A small report, not more than a page, will be due by the start of the following class.

**Midterm Test (30% of overall grade)**

The midterm will cover all materials in weeks 1-5, or the classical and contemporary theory portions of the class. The test will consist of a series of short answer and essay questions, and will be completed in class time.

**Final Exam (45% of overall grade)**

The final will cover all topics in the course, but will be biased toward weeks 7-12. It may be comprised of multiple choice/true false, short answer, and essay questions. The exam will be scheduled through the central administration and will be conducted in the final exam period.

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration or group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

In this course we reserve the right to use a software package designed to reveal plagiarism. Students will be required to submit their work electronically via Avenue-2-Learn and it may be checked for academic dishonesty either manually by the instructor/TA, or via software.

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This course addresses three University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (see http://cll.mcmaster.ca/COU/degree/undergraduate.html). First, sociological approaches to the study of organizations are complex and varied. This course will present **Depth and Breadth of Knowledge** for these sociological approaches to organization studies. We will focus on **Communication Skills**, in accurately and reliably writing about sociological analyses of organizations. Finally, Sociology presents a number of **lenses** or **viewpoints** from which we might understand organizations. This course will forward an **Awareness of the Limits of Knowledge** including how limits of knowing about how individuals come together inside organizations, or how they are affected outside organizations.

**DEPARTMENTAL/UNIVERSITY POLICIES:**

Do NOT fax assignments. Written assignments will be submitted via Avenue to Learn (A2L). Specific instructions on how to format and submit the written assignment will be circulated with assignment instructions in approximately week three of the course.
The Sociology staff do NOT date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of papers.

The McMaster Student Absence Form (http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/) is a self reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Please note, this tool cannot be used during any final examination period.

You may submit a maximum of 1 Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation.

If you are absent more than 3 days, exceed 1 request per term, or are absent for a reason other than medical, you MUST visit your Associate Dean’s Office (Faculty Office). You may be required to provide supporting documentation.

This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence.

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”. Please note these regulation have changed beginning Fall 2015.

If you have any questions about MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean’s office.

Students should check the web, the white board and the Undergraduate Bulletin board outside the Sociology office (KTH-627) for notices pertaining to Sociology classes or departmental business (eg. class scheduling information, location of mailboxes and offices, tutorial information, class cancellations, TA job postings, etc.).

Computer use in the classroom is intended to facilitate learning in that particular lecture or tutorial. At the discretion of the instructor, students using a computer for any other purpose may be required to turn the computer off for the remainder of the lecture or tutorial.

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

It is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances (RISO)
The University recognizes that, on occasion, the timing of a student’s religious, Indigenous, or spiritual observances and that of their academic obligations may conflict. In such cases, the University will provide reasonable academic accommodation for students that is consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code. Please review the RISO information for students in the Faculty of Social Sciences about how to request accommodation.