Goals of the Course

As the title suggests, this PhD seminar is designed to introduce students to the study of organizations through the lens of networks and institutions. Network analysis is a form of structural analysis in the social sciences. It is based, therefore, on the assertion that the pattern of relations amongst individuals and organizations is responsible, at least in part, for the actions of these individuals and organizations. Institutional theory has enjoyed a powerful resurgence and is currently the dominant theoretical perspective (according to bibliometric analyses) for the study of organizations. Institutional theory is also a core component of economic sociology, which emphasizes the importance of social relations in shaping economic behaviors. Much of the most exciting work in organizational theory is taking place at the intersection of networks and institutions.

The purpose of the course is to provide students with a thorough grounding in the “classic” social science literature on these topics. The readings are organized to provide an introduction to fundamental concepts, followed by an elaboration and extension on these concepts. Over the course of the quarter, we’ll cover a number of topics, including embeddedness, institutional diffusion, institutional change, historical contingency, and network dynamics. Please note, however, that this is not a course on methods; in particular, while the final class provides an overview of select research methods, this course will not cover the logistics of collecting and manipulating network data. Also note that the course presumes no previous specialized background in organization theory.
Course Requirements

Students will share the responsibility for discussing materials and for raising questions. Students will be expected to do all of the required reading and to be prepared to discuss the materials in class on the schedule indicated in the syllabus. Final grades are based on four requirements:

1) *Class participation.* We have the advantage of a small class, which facilitates some unique pedagogical opportunities. As such, we’ll make use of debates, “field trips,” panels, and role plays as we engage with various articles, authors, and schools of thought. The success of this approach depends on each student’s preparation and full participation. As such, I expect all students to arrive at class having thoroughly engaged with the readings, prepared the day’s “activity,” and primed a number of questions, topics, and issues to be raised for discussion. Twenty-five percent of the course grade is based on class participation.

2) *Weekly memos.* All students are asked to prepare brief memos (1-2 pages) relating to the reading for each week. The purpose of the memos is to help you grapple with the readings and respond with questions, criticisms, and new ideas. Formats may vary, but it is useful to include:
   a. Ideas, concepts, and arguments that you found stimulating, worth remembering and building on. In other words, what prompted an “a-ha”?
   b. Questions, concerns, and disagreements with ideas encountered.
   c. Connections, linkages, and contradictions between one idea or approach and another. Specify how you would take this work and build on it.

   Memos are due by 9am on the day of class. Send them to me via email. Twenty-five percent of the course grade will be based on weekly memos.

3) *Article review.* All students will write a “review” of an article that I will hand out during the quarter. I will provide specific guidelines on the review process and areas on which to focus. The review constitutes twenty percent of the course grade.

4) *Research proposal.* All students will write a ten- to fifteen-page paper applying one of the lines of research to a specific empirical case. This research proposal should read like the detailed “front end” of an empirical paper, reviewing the appropriate literature, identifying a promising and important research gap, and proposing an empirical setting and dataset through which this gap might be addressed. (There is no need to actually collect and analyze data, though I strongly encourage you to write on a topic of interest such that you could leverage this paper into a full research publication.) The paper is due in class during the last session (March 9) and constitutes thirty percent of the course grade.
Readings

Required readings for each session are listed immediately below the date and title for the session. Readings marked with an (R) are recommended further reading – and I urge you to consult them if you are leading discussing and/or writing a research paper on the topic. Readings marked with a (BG) are background reading; though we will not discuss these readings in class, they are useful references – particularly if you’re unfamiliar with the methodology or topic.

While I have not required the following texts, I strongly recommend them for all students – and especially those students who intend to include institutional and/or network analyses in their own research:


Course Calendar

Jan 5: Economic and Rational Choice Perspectives on Institutions


Jan 12: Networks and Embeddedness


Jan 19: The New Institutionalism in Sociology


(R) Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. The Social Construction of Reality Anchor Books


Jan 26: Institutional Diffusion


Feb 2: Institutional Change


Feb 9: The Historical Contingency of Institutional Change


Feb 16: Agency and Institutional Entrepreneurship


Feb 23: Multiple Logics


Mar 2: Networks and Institutions Revisited


Mar 9: Research Methods in Institutional Theory and Network Analysis


