

## MGMT 607: Seminar in Organization Theory

**Class Meetings:**

Thursdays, 2-4:50pm  
McKenzie 471

**Professor:**

Andrew Nelson  
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**Office Hours:**

By appointment

### Course Overview

This Ph.D. seminar is designed to introduce students to the study of organizations. Most organizational research in the social sciences is grounded in theory, and a primary reason that editors of top journals reject research articles is “lack of theoretical contribution.” In this seminar, we will explore theories stemming from various disciplines and approaches within the social sciences, alongside the development of organization theory over time. My goals are to familiarize you with some major theoretical and empirical traditions in organization theory; to enable you to understand the role of theory in organization studies; and, ultimately, to empower you to identify new directions in organization theory and potential contributions that you might make through your own research.

### Course Requirements

Students will share the responsibility for discussing materials and for raising questions. Students are 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 approaches. As such, we’ll make use of debates, 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 and having primed a number of questions, topics, and issues to be raised for discussion. Twenty-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 grapple with the readings and to 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 via email (ajnelson@uoregon.edu) by 9am on the day of class. Weekly memos constitute twenty-five percent of the course grade.

- 3) *Article review.* All students will write a “review” of an article that I will hand out. 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 an actual research publication.) You should be prepared to present and discuss your paper during our final class session (December 5), though the final paper is not due until December 11 (the scheduled day for our final exam – though there is no final exam for this class). This paper constitutes thirty-five percent of the course grade.

## Readings

Given the breadth of organization theory, I’m unable to cover every topic. I have deliberately left out topics covered in other UO PhD seminars. Even within specific topics, there are many more readings than we have time to consider. As a general approach, I strive to expose you to some key “classic” readings for a given topic, alongside a more contemporary article or articles that demonstrate empirical applications. I also take the opportunity to highlight some of my own work, partially out of interest and partially since one of our goals is to learn how to craft theory and I can best speak to the process underlying my own studies.

I am also requiring several books, only a couple of which we’ll read in their entirety. For the others, I’ve personally found it most useful for future research and reference to own the original book as opposed to a photocopied excerpt. To save you money, however, I’ve suggested older editions, and all of these books are available used through Amazon at reasonable prices.

### Required Books:

Becker, H. S. 2008. *Tricks of the Trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it.* University of Chicago Press.

Burawoy, Michael. 1979. *Manufacturing Consent.* U. of Chicago Press.

Powell, Walter W., and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds. 1991. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis.* University of Chicago Press.

Scott, W. Richard. 2007. *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*

Taylor, Frederick Winslow. 1916. *The Principles of Scientific Management.*

## Course Calendar

Date	Topic
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**1. Oct 3 Introduction and Course Overview**

Sutton, R. I., & Staw, B. M. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(3): 371-384.

Weick, K. E. (1995). What theory is not, theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(3): 385-390.

DiMaggio, P. J. (1995). Comments on "What theory is not". *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(3): 391-397.

Davis, Murray S. (1971). "That's Interesting! Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology." *Philosophy and Social Science* 1: 309-44.

Elster, J. (1998). A plea for mechanisms in *Social mechanisms: An analytical approach to social theory* (Hedstrom and Swedberg, eds.). Cambridge University Press.

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**2. Oct 10 Historic Origins**

Taylor, Frederick Winslow. (1916). *The Principles of Scientific Management*.

Bendix, R. (1947). Bureaucracy: The problem and its setting. *American Sociological Review*, 12(5), 493-507.

Thompson, E. P. (1967). Time, work discipline, and industrial capitalism. *Past and Present*, pp. 56-97.

Chandler, A. D. (1984). The emergence of managerial capitalism. *Business History Review*, 58(4), 473-503.

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**3. Oct 17 Informal Organization**

Roy, Donald. (1952). Quota restriction and goldbricking in a machine shop. *American Journal of Sociology* 57: 427-442.

Roy, D. F. (1960). 'Banana time': Job satisfaction and informal interaction. *Human Organization* 18(4): 158-168.

Blau, Peter (1954). Cooperation and Competition in a Bureaucracy. *American Journal of Sociology* 59(6): 530-535.

Burawoy, Michael. (1979). *Manufacturing Consent*. U. of Chicago Press. Read Chs. 4 and 5, pp. 46-94.

Kellogg, Katherine. (2009). "Operating Room: Relational Spaces and Microinstitutional Change in Surgery." *American Journal of Sociology* 115(3):657-711.

Grodal, S., Nelson, A. J., & Siino, R. M. (2015). Help-seeking and help-giving as an organizational routine: Continual engagement in innovative work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(1), 136-168

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#### **4. Oct 24      The "New" Institutional Theory**

Scott, W. Richard. (2007). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Read Chs. 1-4 and 6.

Powell, Walter W., and Paul J. DiMaggio, eds. (1991). "Introduction" in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-38. Read this introductory chapter only.

Thornton, P. H., & Ocasio, W. (2008). Institutional logics. *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*, 840, 99-128.

Tilleman, Suzanne, Michael Russo, and Andrew Nelson. (2019). Institutional Logics and Technology Development: Evidence from the Wind and Solar Energy Industries. *Organization Science*, forthcoming.

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#### **5. Oct 31      Networks and Organizations**

Powell, Walter W. (1990). Neither market nor hierarchy: Network forms of organization. *Research in Organization Behavior*, 12: 295-336, Barry M. Staw and L. L. Cummings, eds. JAI.

Padgett, John F. and Christopher K. Ansell. (1993). Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434. *American Journal of Sociology* 98(6): 1259-1319.

Powell, Walter W., K. Koput, and L. Smith-Doerr. (1996). Interorganizational Collaboration and the Locus of Innovation. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41(1): 116-45.

Uzzi, Brian. (1997). Social Structure and Competition in Interfirm Networks: The Paradox of Embeddedness. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 35-69.

Burt, R. S. (2004). Structural holes and good ideas. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(2): 349-399.

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#### **6. Nov 7      Organizational Learning**

Levitt, B., & March, J. G. (1988). Organizational learning. *Annual review of sociology*, 14(1), 319-338.

Cohen, Wesley and Daniel Levinthal. 1990. "Absorptive Capacity: A new perspective on learning and innovation." *ASQ* 35: 128-52.

March, James G. 1991. "Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning." *Organization Science* 2(1): 71-87.

Brown, J. S., & Duguid, P. (1991). Organizational learning and communities-of-practice: Toward a unified view of working, learning, and innovation. *Organization science*, 2(1), 40-57.

Waisberg, I., & Nelson, A. (2018). When the General Meets the Particular: The Practices and Challenges of Interorganizational Knowledge Reuse. *Organization Science*, 29(3), 432-448.

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### **7. Nov 14      Special Topic I: Categories**

Zuckerman, Ezra. (1999). The categorical imperative: Securities analysts and the legitimacy discount. *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 1398-1438.

Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2010). How new market categories emerge: Temporal dynamics of legitimacy, identity, and entrepreneurship in satellite radio, 1990–2005. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(3), 439-471.

Grodal, S., Gotsopoulos, A., & Suarez, F. F. (2015). The coevolution of technologies and categories during industry emergence. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(3), 423-445.

Anthony, C., Nelson, A. J., & Tripsas, M. (2016). "Who Are You?... I Really Wanna Know": Product Meaning and Competitive Positioning in the Nascent Synthesizer Industry. *Strategy Science*, 1(3), 163-183.

Zhao, E. Y., Fisher, G., Lounsbury, M., & Miller, D. (2017). Optimal distinctiveness: Broadening the interface between institutional theory and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 38(1), 93-113.

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### **8. Nov 21      Special Topic II: Occupations and Professions**

Van Maanen, J., & Barley, S. R. (1982). Occupational communities: Culture and control in organizations (No. TR-ONR-10). *Research in Organizational Behavior / Office of Naval Research*.

Barley, Stephen. (1986). Technology as an Occasion for Structuring: Evidence from Observations of CT Scanners and the Social Order of Radiology Departments. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 31: 78-108.

Bechky, B. A. (2003). Sharing meaning across occupational communities: The transformation of understanding on a production floor. *Organization Science*, 14(3), 312-330.

Evans, J. A., Kunda, G., & Barley, S. R. (2004). Beach time, bridge time, and billable hours: The temporal structure of technical contracting. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 49(1), 1-38.

Nelson, A. J., & Irwin, J. (2014). "Defining what we do—all over again": Occupational identity, technological change, and the librarian/Internet-search relationship. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(3), 892-928.

Howard-Grenville, J., Nelson, A. J., Earle, A. G., Haack, J. A., & Young, D. M. (2017). "If Chemists Don't Do It, Who Is Going To?" Peer-driven Occupational Change and the Emergence of Green Chemistry. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 62(3), 524-560.

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### **9. Nov 28      Thanksgiving Holiday (No class)**

Becker, H. S. (2008). *Tricks of the trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. University of Chicago press.

*We have no class meeting today, but please read this book and prepare a memo prior to our Dec. 5 class.*

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### **10. Dec 5      Discussion of student papers and Becker**

*Each student will present her/his paper to the class today and will engage in Q&A. Thus, please come prepared to present and discuss your paper. We'll reserve time at the end of class to discuss Becker's Tricks of the Trade. (The associated memo is due at 9am today.)*

*Your final paper is due at 12:30pm on Wednesday, December 11.*

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## **Lundquist College of Business Academic Policies & Resources**

### **Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct**

The University Student Conduct Code (see <http://dos.uoregon.edu/conduct>) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at [researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism](http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism).

### **Lundquist College of Business Code of Conduct**

The Lundquist College of Business learning community is committed to a set of core values that guide our

interactions with one another. Our values are as important within our Lundquist College community as within the business community. Our values help define both how we aspire to act and what it means to be a business professional. (See <https://business.uoregon.edu/code-of-conduct>.)

#### *Integrity*

Members of our community act with integrity and honesty. These qualities are essential in providing a basis for trust and go to the core of what is expected from business professionals.

#### *Respect*

Our community conveys respect for the dignity of all people. Our relationships are based on mutual respect. Differences of opinion are discussed openly and civilly. These discussions focus on issues and are presented in a courteous manner. We are sensitive to the impacts of both our words and actions on others.

#### *Openness*

We encourage all members of our community to exchange ideas freely within the bounds of reasonable behavior. We recognize that learning requires an open environment.

#### *Responsibility*

We act publicly and accept responsibility for our actions. We understand that the community will keep us accountable for our dealings. We deliver on the commitments and promises we make to others.

#### *Teamwork*

Our community is stronger when we work as a team. We foster attitudes encouraging members of the community to give and receive constructive criticism, and develop creative solutions to challenges.

### **Accessible Education**

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments (see <https://aec.uoregon.edu/>) Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoac@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoac@uoregon.edu).

### **Help for Victims and Survivors**

If you are a victim or survivor of sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating or domestic violence, gender-based harassment or bullying, and/or stalking and need help, start here: <https://safe.uoregon.edu/>. There is staff available 24-hours a day for confidential advice and assistance. Even if you are unsure what to do, call 541-346-7233 (SAFE) and you'll be connected with somebody who will listen to you and help guide you as you figure out what you want to do next. We are here to support you and help provide the assistance and services you need.

### **Bias Education and Response Team**

The University of Oregon Bias Education and Response Team (BERT), <http://dos.uoregon.edu/bias>, based in the Office of the Dean of Students, works to provide those who have witnessed, or themselves become a target of an act of bias, an opportunity to be heard and supported. The fundamental role of BERT is to respond to situations that affect the larger University of Oregon community through education about current and historical issues surrounding bias. Utilizing best practices in our field, the BERT provides services to witness(es), bystander(s), targeted individual(s), offender(s), or a member(s) of the community in order to create change in a timely, effective, and comprehensive way. It is through our education services and initiatives that we hope to eliminate acts of bias within our community.

If you have witnessed or experienced bias and would like more information or would like to report it,

please visit <http://dos.uoregon.edu/bias>.

### **Title IX**

If you or someone you know (student, faculty, or staff) has experienced gender discrimination, sexual harassment, or sexual violence, the university can offer assistance, support, and resources: <http://titleix.uoregon.edu/how-report>

### **Prohibited Discrimination and Harassment Reporting**

Any student who has experienced sexual assault, relationship violence, sex or gender-based bullying, stalking, and/or sexual harassment may seek resources and help at [safe.uoregon.edu](http://safe.uoregon.edu). To get help by phone, a student can also call either the UO's 24-hour hotline at 541-346-7244 (SAFE), or the non-confidential Title IX Coordinator at 541-346-8136. From the SAFE website, students may also connect to Callisto, <https://uoregon.callistocampus.org/>, a confidential, third-party reporting site that is not a part of the university.

Students experiencing any other form of prohibited discrimination or harassment can find information at [respect.uoregon.edu](http://respect.uoregon.edu) or [aaeo.uoregon.edu](http://aaeo.uoregon.edu) or contact the non-confidential of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity (AAEO) office at 541-346-3123 or the Dean of Students Office at 541-346-3216 for help. As UO policy has different reporting requirements based on the nature of the reported harassment or discrimination, additional information about reporting requirements for discrimination or harassment unrelated to sexual assault, relationship violence, sex or gender-based bullying, stalking, and/or sexual harassment is available at Discrimination & Harassment.

Specific details about confidentiality of information and reporting obligations of employees can be found at [titleix.uoregon.edu](http://titleix.uoregon.edu).

### **Emergency Response**

#### *Active shooter*

In the unlikely event of an active shooter on campus, all students should "run – hide – fight." Our first line of defense will be to run from the classroom and away from campus. (You are to get yourself to safety. There will be no class meeting spot in this emergency.) If running is not an option, we will attempt to hide in the classroom by turning off the lights and getting on the ground. If hiding is not an option, we will fight the active shooter by throwing objects at his/her eyes (books, laptops, water bottles, etc.) and then tackling him/her until help arrives.

#### *Earthquake or fire*

Students should leave the building by the nearest, safe exit and gather on the north side of Lillis by the wind sculpture.