The University of South Carolina  
Moore School of Business  
Fall 2010

Organization Theory (MGMT 871)

DETAILS

Times & Room: TBD, BA788  
Professor: Thomas P. Moliterno, Ph.D.  
Office: Room 782  
Office Hours: Immediately after class, and by appointment  
Phone: (803) 777-5972  
e-mail: moliterno@moore.sc.edu

First class session: Friday, September 20, 3:00 PM, BA788 (brief meeting to establish permanent meeting time)

COURSE OBJECTIVES & EXPECTATIONS

The primary objective of this doctoral seminar is to provide an overview of the major theoretical perspectives that comprise organizational theory (OT). OT consists of a set of literatures that attempt to explain the existence and behaviors of organizations by translating insights from a variety of areas, including sociology, economics, and social psychology, to an organizational context. We will examine and critique a different theoretical stream each week by analyzing both classic and contemporary approaches. In doing so, participants are expected to gain an understanding of both the contributions and limitations of each body of research, and be able to use that knowledge to suggest extensions and future directions for each literature stream. By the end of the course, participants should possess both the theoretical background and the necessary critical skills to be able to contribute meaningfully to the on-going conversations among organizational theorists.

This course is designed to hone your skills in discussing and critiquing both arguments and evidence. You not only need to understand the arguments, you also need to be able to talk about them and extend them. In order to achieve these goals, the course is in a seminar format. Each week’s readings will typically include some “classics” defining the particular perspective, some more recent theoretical and/or empirical developments of the perspectives, and either implicit or explicit critiques of the basic perspective. Half your final grade in the class will be based on the in-class discussions.

The journal review process is an integral part of academia. This course is designed help socialize you into the journal review process. Your research paper for this class will be submitted for blind peer review by several of your classmates, and you will serve as a reviewer for one of your
classmates’ papers. You will then revise your paper, incorporating the reviewers’ feedback, and prepare a response to the reviewers. The quality of the reviews that you write, your revised research paper, and your written response to the reviewers will determine the 2nd half of your grade in this course.

COURSE GRADING & ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Participation & Leadership

As in any doctoral seminar, class discussion is an integral part of this course. Class participants are thus expected to come prepared to each class session—absences and lack of preparedness are not acceptable. There is a substantial amount of material to digest each week, so give yourself ample time to prepare, as all participants should be fully prepared to participate actively in discussion and debate about each reading. Some things that you might think about when preparing for the class discussions:

• How does this reading relate to the other readings for this session, other sessions in this class, and/or other classes you have taken?
• What theoretical arguments do the authors make? Do the arguments seem reasonable?
  o What are some of the underlying assumptions? Are those assumptions valid? Why or why not?
• What is the underlying research question? Why is the previous literature insufficient for answering this question?
• Is the empirical context appropriate for testing the hypotheses? Is the methodology appropriate?
• What do the authors find? What are the implications arising from the findings? Are there alternative explanations for these findings?
• What limitations does this study/theory have? What logical extensions can you see?

One or two class participants will assume the role of discussant each week, with everyone required to assume this role twice during the semester. The discussant’s responsibility is to come prepared to highlight the main issues in the week’s readings, isolate the main points of debate, and help lead the discussion about these issues. We will choose discussants at the first class session. Discussants are welcome (but not required) to meet with the instructor prior to the classes they will lead.

Class participation and discussion leadership is 35% of your final grade.

Scholar Presentation

At the first class session, each class participant will also sign up to read and present the work of an organizational scholar who has impacted the field. We will match participants to a scholar and a presentation week at the first class session. Presentations should highlight the key contributions of the scholar to the field as well as any conceptual issues unresolved; please
highlight how the book fits in with the other course readings. Presentations should be accompanied by a 1-3 page summary/critique of the book for the class.

We will select scholar presentations from the following list of books. More generally, all of these books are good to have in your professional library if you think you might use OT arguments in some of your future projects.


The scholar presentation is 15% of your final grade.

Research Paper, Review, & Revision

Research Paper. Class participants will write a research paper that applies OT theories to their own research interests. At a minimum, the final product should define a research question, review and critique the extant literature, and develop a few testable hypotheses. The body of the manuscript (excluding title page, references, figures, etc.) should not exceed 25 PAGES, double-spaced, with one inch margins and Times New Roman font. Each paper should be written in the form of a journal article (e.g., AMJ or AMR), and will undergo a blind peer review process (see below). Papers that integrate OT theories with theories from other disciplines are also acceptable, subject to a prior approval of the subject matter by the instructor.
Reviews. Each class participant will provide a quality review of two to three research papers submitted to the blind review process. Keep your review to two, single-spaced pages. In constructing your reviews, try to be as specific as possible and suggest ways in which authors can deal with particular problems that you have identified. It may also be helpful for you to look at AMJ’s guidelines for reviewers (http://aom.pace.edu/amjnew/reviewer_guidelines.html).

Revision & Response to Reviewers. After receiving the peer reviews described above, class participants will revise their original paper, incorporating the reviewers’ comments. Additionally, participants will prepare a written response to the reviewers explaining how they responded to each comment, and/or why you elected not to adopt a particular suggestion.

This entire project is 50% of your final grade, and will be divided among the individually graded components: the reviews you provide (15%); the revised paper (25%); and the response to reviewers (10%).

**OVERVIEW OF TOPICS**

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COURSE READINGS

Overview

Whenever possible, I will post electronic copies of the readings on Blackboard several weeks in advance of the in-class discussion. In cases where electronic copies are not available (i.e., book chapters, old articles), a hard copy will be made available for reading and/or photocopying. In these cases, information will be posted on Blackboard advising where you can locate the hard copy (e.g., on reserve in the library, in the departmental office, etc.).

You may find it useful to purchase the following book, as we will read several chapters from it. The 2006 edition is expensive (~$80), but you may be able to find one of the earlier editions. Dick Scott published four prior editions (same title) without Gerry Davis as a co-author. You should be able to get your hands on one of the earlier editions fairly easily.


All readings are required. But note that these are far from exhaustive lists for the topics we will discuss. If you are interested in a topic and would like additional readings, please let me know. Also, as the semester progresses, we may revisit and/or add to the reading lists to accommodate emergent interests, etc. If this occurs, the required amount of reading per class will remain comparable.

Readings in brackets are individual chapters from books that appear on the scholar presentation list. All class participants should prepare these assigned chapters, whether or not a scholar presentation is assigned for the whole book.

Class 1 (Week of 8/23): Overview, Introduction, and Orientation


Class 2 (Week of 8/30): Rational System Approaches


Class 3 (Week of 9/6): Natural System Approaches I


Class 4 (Week of 9/13): Natural Systems II (“Old” Institutionalism)


Class 5 (Week of 9/20): Open Systems (Contingency Theory)


Class 6 (Week of 9/27): Behavioral Theory I – Foundations


Class 7 (Week of 10/4): Behavioral Theory II – Learning


**Week of 10/11:** Spring Break

**Class 8 (Week of 10/18): Neo Institutional Theory**


**Class 9 (Week of 10/25): The Academic Review Process**

This class will be a bit different. We will track the publication of a paper from submission, through the process of review, revision, and resubmission. I will post a working paper, the reviews received, revisions, response to reviewers, etc.

**Class 10 (Week 11/1): Network Theory I – Individuals and Organizations**


Class 11 (Week of 11/8): Network Theory II – Multilevel Networks


Class 12 (Week of 11/15): Organizational Economics


(Week of 11/22): Thanksgiving
Class 13 (Week of 11/29): Resource Based View


Class 14 (Week of 12/6): Dynamic Capabilities


