

METHODS OF RESEARCH IN ORGANIZATIONS (SOC 1050)

Meetings: Jan 21 - May 13, 2009 MWF 1:00pm – 1:50pm Smith-Buonanno Hall 106

Instructor: Professor Ebony N. Bridwell- Mitchell

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:30-5:30; by appointment

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Course Description

Methods of Research in Organizations is designed to introduce students to the frameworks and methodologies used to conduct research on organization. The primary aim of the course is that by its conclusion students will have developed the skills to ask interesting and important questions about organizations and also be able to design research projects that can answer those questions in a meaningful and conscientious way.

Conducting meaningful and conscientious research depends on a variety of skills from rigorous training in statistics and methods of inference to the social savvy required to gain entry into organizational contexts, collect data, and appropriately present findings. No one class can expose students to all this required knowledge. However, the crux of effective research, whether it be academic research for scholarly pursuit, action research to examine organization-specific interventions, or evaluation research for reformulating programs and policies, depends on being able to develop an appropriate research design. Research design is the focuses of this class.

Research design begins with a question or hypothesis about organizational processes or outcomes at any one or multiple levels of analysis. These questions are often generated by observed organizational phenomena but are necessarily contextualized by existing knowledge about organizations and how to study them. Thus, this course takes a three-pronged approach to teaching the skill of research design:

- First, students will examine existing frameworks for studying organizations and will evaluate research studies conducted from each perspective.
- Second, students will focus on the process of conducting research and developing research projects, including an emphasis on different methodological approaches.
- Finally, students will design and propose their own research projects, which could be conducted in the real world of organizations.

Course Format

During the first few weeks of the semester we will focus on understanding four major frameworks for organizational research, which are grounded in (1) economics, (2) sociology, (3) social psychology, and (4) philosophy and political science. During the first few week we will

read an overview of each framework and also an exemplar of a research study conducted from that perspective. The goal is to understand the central questions generated by the framework and how one might go about answering them. The readings are high-level academic articles, typically read by doctoral students and professors. Thus, I expect students will face considerable challenges in attempting to digest them. This is why our class meetings are organized around analyzing and synthesizing lessons from the readings (it may also be helpful to self-organize independent study sessions outside of class).

Typically, Monday sessions will be devoted to gaining a broad understanding of the framework through lecture and discussion. There will also be a brief introduction to the focal article in order to provide an orienting context for your independent reading. On Wednesdays students will meet in class with an assigned 4-5 member research team to discuss each article and what they learned about conducting research, particularly from the perspective of the focal framework. Following each group discussion students will have an opportunity to pose questions of clarification to the professor and class. Each Friday will be devoted to an in-class discussion used to generate shared criteria for assessing research quality based on the strengths and weaknesses of the work conducted in the focal article.

In the remaining weeks of the class we will focus on designing your own research projects and proposals. Each week will focus on a particular issue related to designing research (see the schedule of instruction below). There will also be a weekly opportunity for your research team to meet in class to formulate your research project. This formulation includes: (1) generating possible research topics, which are grounded in a unique organizational phenomena of interest and also in the broad questions posed by the major research frameworks reviewed during the first part of the course; (2) developing ideas for designing a research project to address the focal topic using the variety of research strategies to which you will be introduced throughout the course; (3) preparing a research proposal that documents your approach to the research study, including how it would be executed so that it addresses the key elements of effective research design and successfully meets the shared criteria the class established for conducting quality research.

Course Requirements and Assessment

The course has two required texts: *Studying Organizations: Theory and Method* edited by Stewart Clegg and Cynthia Hardy and *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* by John Creswell. There are two recommended text for the course. The first provides an overview of a variety of methods and issue related to conducting research in organizations: *Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology* edited by Harry Reis and Charles Judd. The second text provides a basic overview on managing research projects: *Designing and managing a research project: A Business Student's Guide* by Jay Polonsky and David S. Waller. All the texts are available at the Brown University Bookstore. Also required for the course are a number of scholarly articles and book chapters. These are accessible on-line through the electronic databases provided by the Brown University library or on our MyCourses site.

Students are expected to attend ALL class sessions ON TIME. Frequent absence, lateness, or leaving class early (e.g. occurring more than 4 times – nearly 10% of the sessions) will be reflected in your final grade. Extenuating circumstances should be discussed in advance with the professor via e-mail. All students are expected to participate fully in cooperative class activities, as judged by peer and instructor evaluations. All written assignments must be typed on neat 8.5” x 11” paper, free of grammar and spelling errors and composed in 12-pt Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins and double-spacing. I do not accept late assignments; I do not provide ‘make up’ assignments (again, extenuating circumstances should be discussed in advance). Your overall performance will be based on 100 possible points, assigned as follows:

- I. **Class Participation** [30pts]: Your participation will be judged based on your steady attendance and punctuality in class. Additionally, I will be evaluating the extent to which you are prepared for class based on your ability to thoughtfully participate in class discussions by asking and answer questions or posing insightful comments. However, the greatest proportion of your participation will be based on peer assessment. Following each in-class research team meeting your contribution to the research team will be assessed by your teammates using a rubric provided by the instructor.
- II. **Two Short Quizzes** [20 pts - 10pts each]: Each of the two main course sequences culminates with a short multiple choice quiz. The first quiz is designed to assess your basic knowledge of the core concepts related to the major research framework on organizations. The second quiz is designed to assess your basic knowledge about core concepts related to research design. Both quizzes are in class, ‘closed book’ exams to be completed in 25 minutes. I take the academic code very seriously. **Any violations of the academic code or suspicion of unethical behavior will result in failing the quiz and being reported to the undergraduate dean.** You can view the academic code at: http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/documents/principles.pdf
- III. **Individual Research Idea Brief** [20 pts]: As your team research project unfolds your team will identify a topic of interest and generate ideas for how to study that topic. You will submit a 2-page paper that identifies your group’s research topic and explains how that topic relates to the research frameworks we have studied. The paper should also explain your own personal idea for how to study the topic as well as justify why the idea makes sense based on what you have learned so far about how to conduct research in organizations. This paper will also be a basis of you “pitching” your idea to your research team and will thus have implications for how they assess your participation and contribution to the group.
- IV. **Group Research Proposal** [30 pts.]: The culminating product for the course is a research proposal developed by you and your team. The research proposal is 10-page paper that includes an introduction, purpose statement and literature review, presentation of questions or hypotheses, proposed methodology, and expected contribution/impact. In addition to the 10-page proposal each team should provide a 1-2 page memo explaining the division of labor for the proposal; each team member will also provide a peer

assessment of their teammate's contribution to the final project, using a rubric provided by the instructor.

SCHEDULE OF INSTRUCTION*

INTRODUCTION

- Week 1** Wednesday, January 21 **C/H 1:** Organizational Theorizing (Reed)
Friday, January 23 **MY:** Kuhn, T. (1966). The Structure of Scientific
Revolutions. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
[Recommended]
MY: Bowditch et. al (2007) The Research Process in
Organizational Behavior; Statistical Analysis, How to
Read a Research-Oriented Journal Article
[Recommended]

FRAMEWORK 1: ORGANIZATIONAL ECONOMICS

- Week 2** Monday, January 26 **C/H 4:** Organizational Economics (Barney & Hesterly)
Wednesday, January 28 **OL:** Walker. G. and D. Weber (1984). "A Transaction
Friday, January 30 Cost Approach to Make-or-Buy Decisions"
Administrative Science Quarterly, 29(3): 373-391

FRAMEWORK 2: INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS

- Week 3** Monday, February 02 **C/H 5:** The Individual in Organizational Studies (Nord
Wednesday, February 04 & Fox)
Friday, February 06 **OL:** Tyler, T. R. and S. L. Blader (2005). "Can
Businesses Effectively Regulate Employee Conduct?
The Antecedents of Rule Following in Work Settings."
Academy of Management Journal 48(6): 1143-1158.

FRAMEWORK 3: INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

- Week 4** Monday, February 09 **C/H 6:** The Institutionalization of Institutional Theory
Wednesday, February 11 (Tolbert & Zucker)
Friday, February 13 **OL:** Deephouse, D.L. "Does Isomorphism
Legitimate?" The Academy of Management Journal,
39(4): 1024-1039

FRAMEWORK 4: POST-MODERN & CRITICAL THEORIES

- Week 5** Monday, February 16 NO CLASS
Wednesday, February 18 **C/H 7 & 8:** Critical Theory & Postmodernism
Friday, February 20 (Alvesson & Deetz); The Woman's Point of View
(Calás & Smirich)
OL: Barley, S. R. (1983) "Semiotics and the Study of
Occupational and Organizational Cultures"
Administrative Science Quarterly 28(3): 393-413

FRAMEWORK 4 (cont'd)/ DISCOVERING A RESEARCHABLE TOPIC - I

- Week 6**
Monday, February 23 C/H 7 & 8 - review
L: Barley, S. R. (1983) - review
Wednesday, February 25 **QUIZ 1**
Friday, February 27 **OL:** Davis, M. (1971). "That's interesting! Towards a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology." Philosophy of the Social Sciences 1(4): 309-344 [*Recommended*]

DISCOVERING A RESEARCHABLE TOPIC - II

- Week 7**
Monday, March 02 **OL:** Sutton, R. and B. Staw (1995) "What Theory is Not" *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40(3): 371-384
Wednesday, March 04
Friday, March 06 **OL:** Weick, K.E. (1995) "What Theory is Not, Theorizing Is" *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(3): 385-390

DISCOVERING A RESEARCHABLE TOPIC - III

- Week 8**
Monday, March 09 **JC 1:** Selection of a Research Design
Wednesday, March 11 **JC 7:** Research Questions and Hypotheses
Friday, March 13 **MY:** Polnosky, M. & D. Waller (2005) "Chapter 2: Choosing a Topic"

OVERVIEW: DESIGNING RESEARCH

- Week 9**
Monday, March 16 **JC 1 (review):** Selection of a Research Design
Wednesday, March 18 **C/H 17:** The Owl of Minerva (Marsden & Townley)
Friday, March 20 **R/J 1 & 2:** Research Design and Validity (Brewer); Research Design (Smith) [Also on MyCourses]
**** RESEARCH IDEA BRIEF DUE** (3/20/09)**

**** SPRING BREAK ****

- Week 10**
Monday, March 23 NO CLASS
Wednesday, March 25 NO CLASS
Friday, March 27 NO CLASS

REVIEWING THE LITERATURE & LEVERAGING THEORY

- Week 11**
Monday, March 30 **JC 2 & 3:** Review of the Literature & The Use of Theory
Wednesday, April 01
Friday, April 03 **JC 7 (review):** Research Questions and Hypotheses

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGIES

- Week 12**
Monday, April 06 **JC 9:** Qualitative Procedures
Wednesday, April 08 **C/H 9:** Data in Organization Studies (Stabliens)
Friday, April 10 **R/J 11 & 12:** Coding Semistructured Interviews (Bartholomew et. al); Content Analysis (Smith) [Also on MyCourses]

QUANTITATIVE & MIXED METHODOLOGIES

Week 13	Monday, April 13	JC 8 & 10: Quantitative Methods; Mixed Methods
	Wednesday, April 15	Procedures
	Friday, April 17	R/J 9: Survey Research (Visser et. al)

ISSUES OF MEASUREMENT & INFERENCE I

Week 14	Monday, April 20	MY: Hoyle, Harris & Judd (2001) “Chapter 4: Fundamentals of Measurement”
	Wednesday, April 22	R/J 1 & 2 (review): Research Design and Validity (Brewer); Research Design (Smith)
	Friday, April 24	R/J 3: Causal Inference (West et. al)
		R/J 13: Measurement (John & Benet-Martínez)
		**all the above readings are required for this week and are available on MyCourses

ISSUES OF MEASUREMENT & INFERENCE II & MAKING AN IMPACT

	Monday, April 27	R/J 1,2,3,13 (review)
Week 15		MY: Hoyle, Harris & Judd (2001) “Chapter 8: Fundamentals of Sampling”
	Wednesday, April 29	QUIZ 2
	Friday, May 01	JC 4: Writing Strategies and Ethical Considerations
		C/H 10: Action Research (Eden and Huxham)
		MY: Polnosky, M. & D. Waller (2005) “Chapter 11: Establishing Recommendations”

MAKING AN IMPACT & COURSE SUMMARY

Week 16	Monday, May 04	Review Past Readings
	Wednesday, May 06- Monday, May 11	NO CLASS – Reading Period
	Wednesday, May 13	FINAL PROPOSALS DUE

* **Note:** “C/H” refers to readings available in the text by Clegg and Hardy, numerals refer to chapter numbers; “JC” refers to readings available in the text by John Creswell; “MY” refers to readings available on My Courses site; “OL” refers to readings available through on-line database provided by brown university library; R/J refers readings in the text by Reiss and Judd, all the readings in this text are recommended. Other recommended readings are listed as such and available on My Courses. All other readings on the syllabus not from Reiss and Judd or not indicated as recommended are required readings to be read before the class sessions for a particular week.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

Friday, February 27, 2009: **QUIZ 1**

Friday, March 20, 2009: **INDEPENDENT RESEACH IDEA BRIEF DUE**

Wednesday, April 29, 2009: **QUIZ 2**

Wednesday, May 13, 2009: **GROUP RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE**