MACRO-ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY: ORGANIZATIONS IN SOCIAL CONTEXT
SOC 1315: SPRING SEMESTER 2015

Meetings: January 22 – May 5, 2015: Tuesday & Thursday 10:30 – 11:50 am
ROOM = Smith-Buonanno Hall 106

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Mary Fennell
INSTRUCTOR OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays 10:30 - noon
Contact Information: 211 Maxcy Hall; phone: ext. 3-2527; email: mary_fennell@brown.edu

TEACHING ASSISTANTS:
Tina Park:
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday 9 – 10:30 am
CONTACT: email: tina_m_park@brown.edu
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Zachary Wilmot:
OFFICE HOURS: Thursday 2:15 – 4 pm
CONTACT: email: zachary_wilmot@brown.edu
LOCATION: Maxcy 106

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Macro-Organizational Theory focuses on the organization and its social/economic environment. This class will explore various definitions of the organization’s environment and the many types of macro-level organizational structures in which sets of organizations interact, function, compete, and cooperate. Important questions to be asked include the following:

- What is an organizational environment and how do organizations “deal” with what is outside of their boundaries?
- How are the boundaries of organizations defined/recognized/function?
- How do environments influence organizational strategy and performance?
- What are the major theories for assessing macro-level organizational phenomena?
- What are the many ways in which organizations relate to other organizations?

Course Format
The course is designed to help students develop theoretical knowledge, apply that knowledge to real organizations, and use the knowledge interactively by critically assessing their own experiences and observations in organizational settings. Thus, the course takes a three pronged approach to teaching about macro-level organizational dynamics, which includes: 1) classic and contemporary theoretical readings; 2) in-depth analysis of one particular macro-organizational situation throughout the semester (creating the “case study” of the Ebola Crisis), and 3) opportunities to apply various theoretical approaches to case information about the Ebola Crisis, which was and is (in many ways) a case of multiple types of organizational actors (across sectors and nations), taking steps to combat Ebola, stumbling into unfortunate miss-steps and missed opportunities, interacting across organizational and national boundaries in dysfunctional ways, and sometimes interacting with each other in a coordinated fashion.

The theoretical readings in the course are organized around three (3) framing issues (defining levels of analysis, organizational boundaries and interactions across organizations) and five (5) theoretical
traditions (transaction cost economics, resource dependence, institutional theory, population ecology, and networks of organizations). Taken together, these 3 issues and 5 theories comprise some of the core knowledge for analyzing macro-level organizational dynamics. Each topic will be addressed through a series of related readings, lectures, and discussions. The knowledge gained from the readings on each topic is synthesized and applied to your work on building the case analysis of the Ebola crisis. The case analyses will provide the context for students to observe, assess and make recommendations about macro-level organizational dynamics through their own insights about the Ebola crisis, and the marshalling of additional materials and/or data about the crisis.

THE EBOLA CRISIS: AN EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE ORGANIZATIONS FAILING TO RESPOND

Less than a year ago, a small number of Ebola cases was discovered in Guinea, a nation in West Africa. The symptoms of Ebola are similar to those of cholera, hemorrhagic fever, malaria and Lassa fever, so at first diagnosis was confused and delayed. Now, there are over 20,000 cases of Ebola and over 8,000 confirmed deaths, in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. This area of West Africa is characterized by a very thin infrastructure of medical resources and medical personnel and a long history of distrust of outsiders (a remnant of the slave trade and colonial labor conscription). The three nations had little to no coordinating offices or any ability to share health information on outbreaks. Information to the populations of these nations was spotty, subject to error, and only fed fears of outsiders. This epidemic is still raging, despite an early (and erroneous) report that the disease was under control, an unfounded conclusion based on incomplete data. The major organizational actors in this sorry story are numerous: the governments of the three West African nations and their health departments, the World Health Organization, Doctors Without Borders, the Centers for Disease Control in the US, the United Nations, the contagious disease experts from diverse western nations, and a variety of other NGOs and global health organizations.

Your job this semester (working with your team) is to tell the story of this health disaster, but to tell it from the point of view of one of those focal organizational actors. As you will quickly discover, there is no single story here: rather, there are multiple and diverse actors and multiple narratives. The disaster of the Ebola epidemic is not easily credited to the fault of one agency or one decision-maker. It is a disaster that demands a macro-organizational perspective; an understanding that the organizational environment of a disease is equally important in planning strategies to control that disease, as are the cultural and biologic environments of that disease.

TEXTBOOKS:

REQUIRED FOR PURCHASE:

1) Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural and Open Systems Perspectives: W. Richard Scott & Gerald F. Davis. 2007; Pearson. (referred to as SCOTT & DAVIS)

2) Organizations & Environments: Howard E. Aldrich, 2008; Stanford University Press (referred to as ALDRICH)


RECOMMENDED FOR PURCHASE:

All four of these books are available at the Brown University Bookstore. A number of readings will be used from the Handel reader, but most of these articles are also available through ejournals at the Brown University Library. Used copies of the four texts should be available at the bookstore and through Amazon. The readings listed on the syllabus correspond to each topic being covered in a particular week. Each set of readings must be completed before the beginning of that unit.

**ATTENDANCE:**

Students are expected to attend ALL class sessions and ALL Discussion Sessions ON TIME. Frequent absence, lateness, or leaving class or discussion early will be reflected in your final grade (we will keep track of attendance and tardiness). You are allowed three excused absences in total, from class during the term. An excused absence will be granted for extenuating circumstances that MUST BE DISCUSSED IN ADVANCE WITH THE PROFESSOR AND/OR TA VIA E-MAIL. If you miss class due to illness, please email me before class meets, and then bring a note from Student Health Services (or your personal MD).

If you are an athlete with expected absences due to off-campus games/meets, **your coach or assistant coach must provide a complete list of expected away-dates that will cause you to miss class, as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester. I will need you to send that to me along with the three dates you intend to use for your excused absences clearly specified.** You will still be responsible for material covered on those dates.

All quiz dates are listed in the syllabus; all quizzes are held during class time. If you need special accommodations for extra time please come see me. If you will miss a quiz date due to a team game/meet on that date or another pre-arranged excused absence, you must arrange in advance for an **early makeup date.** All students are expected to participate fully in cooperative class and discussion group activities. Attendance will be taken in class randomly throughout the term, and regularly in Discussion Sessions. A policy for attendance in Discussion Sessions will be provided before Sessions begin.

**GRADING:**

Your overall performance will be based on 100 possible points, assigned as follows:

1. **Class Attendance** [10 pts]: Your participation will be judged based on your steady attendance and punctuality in class. Random attendance checks will be taken. I will use cold-calls about readings and issues in lectures frequently. If you are called upon and are not present, your absence will be noted.

2. **Discussion Section Participation** (20 points): Your participation in Discussion Sections will be judged on the basis of your steady attendance, punctuality, and the quality of your contributions to building the case on Ebola. The course TA(s) will evaluate your attendance and quality of discussion contributions using a standard rubric which will be posted week 3 of the semester.
Discussion Sections will begin by the 3rd week of classes. Assignment to specific Sections will occur during the 1st two weeks of the term. The TAs will be sending everyone a Doodle poll with options listed for discussion section dates/times. Information about Discussion Section sign-ups will be provided during Week 1, and will be posted on Canvas. DO NOT FAIL TO SIGN UP FOR A DISCUSSION SECTION!

3. **Three Quizzes** [45 pts – 15 pts each]: As reflected on the schedule of instruction below, there are three in-class, independent, closed-book quizzes related to recent course material and analysis of the term case. The quizzes are designed to assess your knowledge of the readings and ability to synthesize knowledge from the readings with content covered in lectures and information about the case. Quizzes are generally composed of 5 long-form multiple choice questions.

4. **Ebola Crisis Case Study Paper** (25 points; team responsibility): You will be working within a team of 4-6 students from your Discussion Section, and each team will be assigned to develop the social science case-study of the Ebola Crisis from the point of view of one particular focal organization (or class of organizations). You will build the Case Study Paper using documentary data, published data on Ebola, media reports, and other readily obtained data sources (i.e., you do NOT need to conduct primary data collection through interviews, observation, or surveys, etc.). You will also choose (as a team) a particular theoretical framework for explaining what happened and why it happened. Your team report may be part of a “mini-conference” at the end of the semester, in which teams from all of the Discussion Sections will present results of their case studies, and compare across focal organization perspectives on the development of the epidemic, attempts to constrain the spread of Ebola, and efforts to work with other organizations. Templates for the Case Study Paper outline and Mini Conference presentations will be posted by mid-term.

**FINAL EBOLA CRISIS CASE STUDY PAPERS WILL BE DUE THE FIRST DAY OF FINALS WEEK: WEDNESDAY MAY 6 AT NOON. PLEASE SUBMIT BOTH ELECTRONIC AND PAPER COPIES OF YOUR TEAM PAPERS TO PROFESSOR FENNELL. DO NOT MAKE PLANS TO LEAVE TOWN UNTIL YOUR TEAM PAPER IS FINISHED AND HANDED IN ON MAY 6, 2015.**

5. Presentation at the Mini-Conference (date to be determined) will be discussed later in the semester. Exemplary presentations may be awarded extra credit points.
NOTE: THERE IS NO COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM IN THIS CLASS.

For students taking the course for a grade, as a general rule I consider 90-100 points roughly equivalent to an A, 80-89 points, roughly equivalent to a B, and 70-79 points roughly equivalent to a C. For students taking the course satisfactory/no credit you must earn at least 75 points to receive credit.

LECTURE AND DISCUSSION SECTION ETIQUETTE:

You need to come to class on time, and give lectures and Discussion Sections your full attention. Please turn off your cell phones and do NOT open laptops during either lectures or Discussion Sections. It would be far better to LISTEN to the lecture, take part in the Discussion, and take notes the old fashioned way. We will provide copies of the PowerPoint lectures a day or two after the lecture is given, so you will have the complete outline for each lecture. However, interpreting and retaining the material will be much easier if you have listened to the additional comments made each day (which are not usually on the PowerPoint) and the questions that arise during each lecture.

HONOR CODE POLICY:

I will assume that all students in this course have carefully read the Codes for Academic and Student Conduct. Cheating – in any form – will not be tolerated. This applies to all aspects of student work in this course, including quizzes and daily attendance sign-in.
NOTE: Discussion Sections will begin Week 3. Before then, please scan the entire Yin volume on Case Study Research. It will be important for you to get a sense of how case studies are used within the social sciences, and what kinds of data can be used to build the story of an event involving multiple organizations.

WEEK 1: JANUARY 22: INTRODUCTIONS

Review of the syllabus and course requirements;
The Macro-Level in Organizational Analysis;
The Ebola Crisis

READINGS: Scott & Davis Chapters 1 through 4 (scan/review)
Aldrich Chapter 1
Yin: BEGIN SCANNING ENTIRE VOLUME


2. Key Messages (CDC): Ebola Virus Disease, West Africa October 16 2014


4. CDC Case Counts: January 6, 2015

http://nyti.ms/1zSw9s7


WEEK 2: JANUARY 27, 29: OPEN SYSTEMS and ORGANIZATIONAL FIELDS

Focus on the Ecological Level: Organizations as Open Systems
Levels of Analysis WITHIN the Ecological Level
Combined Theories: Thompson; Scott & Davis’ Layered Model
Organizational Fields

READINGS: Scott & Davis Chapters 4 and 5: close read
Aldrich: Chapter 1 continued…
Yin: Continue scanning entire volume.

THURSDAY JANUARY 29: SPECIAL LECTURE: PROFESSOR MARK LURIE:
“UNDERSTANDING EBOLA AS A DISEASE”

WEEK 3: FEBRUARY 3, 5: DEFINING ENVIRONMENTS; THE BOUNDARIES OF ORGANIZATIONS

BEGIN MEETING WITH DISCUSSION SECTIONS THIS WEEK

READINGS: Scott & Davis: Chapters 7, 9
Aldrich: Chapters 9, 10
Yin: NOTE: BY THIS WEEK YOU SHOULD HAVE SCANNED THIS ENTIRE VOLUME. BEGINNING NEXT WEEK YOUR TA WILL SPECIFY CHAPTERS FOR SPECIAL FOCUS DURING DISCUSSION SECTIONS.

WEEK 4: FEBRUARY 10, 12:

FEB 10: SPECIAL LECTURE: DR. KATHY TAKAYAMA, Sheridan Center for Teaching & Learning:
“WORKING IN TEAMS”

NOTE: PLEASE BE SURE TO SIT WITH YOUR CASE STUDY TEAM!
FEB 12: DEFINING ENVIRONMENTS; SPANNING ORG’L BOUNDARIES;

READINGS: Scott & Davis: Chapter 9 (review), Chapter 10
          Aldrich: Chapters 11 and 12; pages 106-135

WEEK 5:

TUESDAY FEB 17: NO CLASS: LONG WEEKEND:

THURSDAY FEB 19: SPECIAL LECTURE: MS. CARINA COURNOYER,
                   LIBRARY DATA RESOURCE SPECIALIST
                   SHORT REVIEW FOR QUIZ # 1

WEEK 6: FEBRUARY 24, 26:

TUESDAY FEB 24: QUIZ #1

THURSDAY FEB 26: THE FIRST OF 5 THEORIES: ORGANIZATIONS INTERACTING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS;
                   TRANSACTION COST ANALYSIS

READINGS: Scott & Davis: Review Chapter 9
          Handel: Pages 263-294:
                   Readings from Jensen & Meckling (1976)
                   Williamson (1981)
                   Perrow (1981)

WEEK 7: MARCH 3, 5:

COMPLETE TRANSACTION COST ANALYSIS

THE SECOND OF 5 THEORIES: RESOURCE DEPENDENCE

READINGS: Scott & Davis: Chapter 9 (review)
          Aldrich: Chapter 5
Handel: pages 225-242:

**WEEK 8: MARCH 10 & 12: CATCH UP/REVIEW: TRANSACTION COST ANALYSIS AND RESOURCE DEPENDENCE THEORY**

**MARCH 12: REVIEW SESSION**

**WEEK 9: MARCH 17, 19:**

**MARCH 17: QUIZ #2**

**MARCH 19: BEGIN THE THIRD OF 5 THEORIES: INSTITUTIONAL THEORY**

**READINGS:** Scott and Davis: Review Chapter 10


**ADDITIONAL READINGS: AVAILABLE ON EJOURNALS or CANVAS:**


**WEEK 10: NO CLASSES: SPRING BREAK (MARCH 24, 26)**

**WEEK 11: MARCH 31 & APRIL 2:**

**FINISH UP INSTITUTIONAL THEORY:**

**READINGS:** Review readings from Week 9 on Institutional Theory
Begin readings for Week 12
WEEK 12: APRIL 7, 9: THE FOURTH OF 5 THEORIES: POPULATION ECOLOGY

READINGS:  Scott & Davis: Chapter 10 (review)  
            Aldrich: Chapter 2  
            Handel: pages 254-261: 
            Reading by Carroll & Hannan: “Density-Dependent Processes,”  

WEEK 13: APRIL 14, 16: THE FIFTH OF FIVE THEORIES: NETWORKS OF ORGANIZATIONS

READINGS:  Scott & Davis: Chapter 11  
            Aldrich: Chapter 13  
            Handel: pages 315-346: 
            Excerpt from Powell: “Neither Market Nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization” 1990 (from Research On Organizational Behavior, Vol.12, pp.295-336);  

WEEK 14: APRIL 21: REVIEW

   APRIL 23: QUIZ #3

WEEK 15: APRIL 28, 30: READING PERIOD: 
WORK ON EBOLA CASE STUDIES

MINI CONFERENCE ON EBOLA: APRIL 30

FINAL TEAM CASE STUDIES ON EBOLA: DUE WEDNESDAY MAY 6 AT NOON. PLEASE SUBMIT BOTH ELECTRONIC AND PAPER COPIES OF YOUR TEAM PAPERS TO PROFESSOR FENNELL. DO NOT MAKE PLANS TO LEAVE TOWN UNTIL YOUR TEAM PAPER IS FINISHED AND HANDED IN ON MAY 6, 2015.