MGT 7820: Seminar in Organization Theory

Fall 2010, Tuesdays, 3:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m., SFEBB, Rm. 5122

Prof. Stanislav D. Dobrev
s.dobrev@utah.edu
Office: SFEBB 7107

Course Description

Organizational theory comprises research programs, theories and frameworks that aim to understand the forces that shape the structures of organizations and markets over time.

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the foundation research areas of contemporary organization theory: networks, institutions, ecology, and learning. Our goal will be to not only understand the core arguments of each theory but also to trace the development of each theory over time—how it has evolved as a result of the contributions of scholars in the field. Our focus will be mostly on the current state of the art in the discipline, evaluating past developments and considering future directions.

We will be concerned with three main tasks in this course: (1) understanding and evaluating each theoretical model/segment and the empirical support for (and against) it; (2) examining the compatibility of different models and evaluating whether their predictions can be integrated into a coherent research framework; and (3) seeking and advancing propositions about how existing theoretical models can be developed further and integrated with other perspectives from management, organizational behavior, and economics.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on class participation (40%), a final paper (50%), and a peer review (10%).

Required Advanced Reading

Prior to start of class, read:

Class Participation

While the primary purpose of the course is to teach you the fundamentals of organization theory, an important secondary objective is to develop your skills to critically evaluate research papers in the discipline. Doing so is the best way to learn how to design and structure your own research projects as well as to learn how to develop theory and present it in the format of empirical research papers. For this reason, this course has a seminar format and requires your active class participation.

The material for the course is based almost entirely on empirical research papers. We will discuss four papers in each session and I expect you to be able to participate in a focused, in-depth discussion of all of the assigned papers. You should assign among yourselves in advance the articles you each would like to discuss. In each session, you will be responsible for leading the class discussion on the assigned article. You will also be required to submit by email to everyone in class (including myself) a brief (about one page) summary of that article no later than 5 pm on the day prior to each class day.

It is imperative that for each session you are well prepared to discuss the four research papers assigned for that day. In preparing the articles, it is very helpful to keep the following sets of questions in mind:

1. Introduction
   What is the main research question in this study? Why is it interesting?
   How does it relate to existing evidence on the topic? What’s new?

2. Theory
   What are the main concepts and terms the author relies on? Are they clear and well defined? Are the theoretical propositions constructed using the specified concepts and terms? Why are the theoretical propositions interesting?
   Are they generalizable and falsifiable? What social mechanisms do they uncover? What alternative explanations might there be that are not considered? Are the theoretical propositions organized in relation to each other? Do they hang together as a theory? Does the theory answer the main research question of the paper?

3. Empirics
   Are the links between the theoretical propositions and the empirical hypotheses precise and clear? Are the empirical variables adequate translations of the concepts and terms used in the theory? Does the proposed methodology make sense, given the theory? Is the data sample adequate and appropriate? Does the proposed research design make the most use of the data available?
4. Discussion / Conclusions
   Do the results support the theory? What are the next steps in developing the theory further? What are the scope conditions for the theory? What are the weaknesses of the research design and how can the design be improved in a future study?

Final Paper

The final paper you will write in this course should be the front end of a publishable paper related to organization theory. You will need to come up with an interesting and relevant research question and provide justification for why it is worthwhile to study what you have proposed. Such justification should be grounded in a brief review of the relevant literature. You will then develop theoretical propositions about your ideas and substantiate them with an extensive review of earlier research on the topic from all relevant literatures. The last part of the paper should outline your research design: the data, the measurement, the variables, the model and the expected outcome of the proposed empirical analyses.

The paper should be at least 12 and no more than 20 double-spaced pages long using 12-point times font (excluding any title pages, abstracts, graphs/tables and references). You will have the opportunity to present your paper in class in Session 12 on November 13th. You will need to email a 3-page paper summary to me and your reviewer (see below) prior to class. The final paper is due by 5 pm on December 4th by email.

Peer Review

Much of the work of an academic involves evaluating others’ work. The peer review requirement is meant to help you learn to constructively critique and seek to improve the research of your peers. Each student will serve as a discussant on another student’s paper and write a 3 page evaluation with the following format:

1. your understanding of what the paper is about (i.e., key intended contribution)
2. evaluation of the framing / positioning of the key ideas (i.e., how they relate to the current state of the art)
3. evaluation of the proposed data and methods
4. the fit of the framing and theory with the empirics.

The peer reviews need to be emailed to me and to the author prior to class on November 20th (Session 13). The reviewers will present their evaluations in that session followed by authors’ response and a class discussion.
Course Schedule

Session 1. The 1970s: Origins of Modern Organization Theory
August 21st

Networks:

Ecology:

Learning:

Institutions:

Session 2. The 1980s: Milestones of Modern Organization Theory
August 28th

Networks:

Ecology:

Learning:

Institutions:
Session 3. Density-Dependent Legitimation and Competition
September 4th


Session 4. Individual Meetings I
Circa September 11th

Each student will schedule a meeting with professor to discuss final paper ideas

Session 5. Identities, Categories and Boundary-spanning
September 18th


Hsu, Greta, Michael T. Hannan, and Ozgcan Kocak. 2009. “Multiple category memberships in markets: An integrated theory and two empirical tests.”  

**Session 6 Organizational Niches and Market Partitioning**  
**September 25th**


*American Journal of Sociology* 106: 1299-1337.


**Session 7, Innovation and Entrepreneurship**  
**October 2nd**

*Administrative Science Quarterly* 44: 315-349.

*Administrative Science Quarterly* 45: 81-112.

Scott Shane and Toby Stuart. 2002. “Organizational Endowments and the Performance of University Start-Ups”  
*Management Science* 48: 154-170

Session 8. Organizations in Markets: Status, Learning and Imitation.
October 16th


Session 9. Labor Markets and Career Mobility
October 23rd


Session 10. Individual Meetings II
Circa October 30th

Each student will schedule a meeting with professor to discuss progress on final paper
Session 11. Organizational Change, Inertia and Imprinting  
November 6th


Session 12. Paper Presentations  
November 13th

3-page paper summary due

Session 13. Peer Review Presentations  
November 20th

3-page peer review due

**DECEMBER 4: FINAL PAPERS DUE**