

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
BOSTON, MA 02215

Formal Organizations

CAS SO304

Fall 2005

MWF 1-2

Professor Laurel Smith-Doerr

96 Cummington St. #257

ldoerr@bu.edu

Office hrs: W 10-12; Th 3-4

I. Course objectives

Organizations are an important part of our daily lives; almost every activity we engage in brings us into contact with them. Sometimes formal organizations are portrayed in a rather simplistic way as either a limitation of individual liberties or inevitably the best way to get things done. In contrast, this course will require a more in-depth, critical examination of organizations based on social science theory and research.

This course stresses the observation of organizational and economic behavior within its social context. We will address such questions as: how do people in organizations make decisions, how do organizations interact with their larger social environment, and how are economic relations embedded within social contexts? Course material is geared toward the students' application of theories to organizations and careers that interest them, and to current events. For example, we'll look at how the globalization of organizations affects products, employees, consumers, and broader political cultures. (Think about not only where were your shoes made but where your software was programmed.)

II. Reading materials

The following required texts have been ordered through the university bookstore:

Friedman, Thomas L. 2005. *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century*. Farrar. (TF)*

Handel, Michael. 2002. *The Sociology of Organizations*. Sage. (MH)*

Smith-Doerr, Laurel. 2004. *Women's Work: Gender Equality vs. Hierarchy in the Life Sciences*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. (SD)*

*The abbreviations for each author's text in parentheses are used in the reading assignments below.

In addition, I strongly recommend that you subscribe to a reputable news periodical (e.g., *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*). You will need to have current event clippings for your short application papers.

III. Course assignments

Students are expected to demonstrate knowledge of course material in both written and oral form. Three exams (including the final) will be given during the semester. No make-up exams will be given; missing a test means receiving a zero score. Each student's lowest exam score, however, will be dropped. Attendance and participation in class discussions will also constitute a portion of the grade. Satisfactory participation includes attendance and familiarity with the required reading materials. Understanding of the readings will be demonstrated in students' three short (3-5 page) application papers. In these papers, you will summarize the argument in the reading (i.e., in the reader or book chapters) assigned for that day's class, and apply a current news story to the author's argument. During that day's discussion you will be called on to provide the author's perspective to the class, showing your understanding of the material orally as well. To that end, *each Application Paper is due at the beginning of the class on the day the reading is assigned.*

Late assignments will not be accepted. (In special, documented cases, late papers may be accepted at the professor's discretion, but will be penalized for each day the assignment is late.) Students are responsible for class periods they miss, including information about assignments. Assignments for the course should be typed double-spaced and are due at the beginning of the class period.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Exams: 40% (Two best scores=20% each)

Application papers: 45% (15% each)

Participation: 15% (Attendance, discussion, involvement)

Final grades are final and cannot be raised by 'extra credit' after the end of the semester. If you are concerned about your performance, come see Professor Smith-Doerr during the semester at her office hours; sooner is better to improve your understanding of the course material.

IV. Other requirements

Students enrolled in this course must respect the professor, each other, and the guidelines of the university. Additionally, derogatory language directed at individuals or groups (i.e., racism, sexism, homophobia) will not be tolerated. All work for the course must represent your own, original effort. Plagiarism is taken seriously by Boston University, the Department of Sociology, and Professor Smith-Doerr. Plagiarism includes copying from on-line sources. This is your only warning: **DO NOT COPY MATERIAL FROM THE INTERNET AND ATTEMPT TO PASS IT OFF AS YOUR OWN.** Academic misconduct will be prosecuted as outlined in the College of Arts and Sciences Academic Conduct Code.

V. Schedule of course topics and assignments

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic/Assignments</u>
Sep. 7	Orientation/introduction.
Sep. 9	Why Bureaucracy? Read MH #1 (Weber), and #17 (Michels)
Sep. 12	Why Big Business? Read MH #24 (Chandler)
Sep. 14	The Machine model of organization. Read MH #2 (Taylor), and #3 (Braverman)
Sep. 16	The machine that squashed the world flat? Read TF Ch. 1, and MH #30 (Edwards).
Sep. 19	The Human backlash. Read MH #7 (Homans) and #9 (McGregor).
Sep. 21	How organizations really work. Read MH #13 (Dalton) and #15 (Burawoy).
Sep. 23	Can workers be controlled? Read MH #27 (Kunda) and #8 (Bramel and Friend).
Sep. 26	Women in the Old Boy's club. Read MH #28 (Kanter) and SD Intro-Ch. 1.
Sep. 28	Review power issues in organizations.
Sep. 30	Who manages the managers? Read MH #14 (Jackall), and #29 (Collins).
Oct. 3	Irrationality in organizations. Read MH #16 (Allison), #36 (Lipsky).
Oct. 5	Organizing technology? Read SD Ch. 2, and MH #11 (Rubinstein).
Oct. 7	Oops—nuclear and space shuttle accidents. Read MH #32 (Perrow) and #33 (Vaughan).
Oct. 10	Columbus day holiday
Oct. 12	International irrationality? Read MH #12 (Graham), and TF Ch.2. Last chance to hand in Application Paper #1 .
Oct. 14	Exam 1.

Oct. 17	No organization is an island. Read MH #4 (Burns and Stalker) and #5 (Woodward).
Oct. 19	No nation is an island? Read TF Ch. 3-4.
Oct. 21	Review perspectives on technology and rationality.
Oct. 24	Co-dependent organizations. Read MH #18 (Pfeffer and Salancik).
Oct. 26	Does class matter in organizations? Read MH #31 (Clawson et al).
Oct. 28	Efficiency stories. Read MH #21 (Jensen and Meckling), and #22 (Williamson).
Oct. 31	But where's power? Read MH #23 (Perrow).
Nov. 2	Organizations have ecology. Read MH #20 (Carroll and Hannan)
Nov. 4	Organizations are copycats. Read MH #19 (DiMaggio and Powell).
Nov. 7	Yet organizational culture can change. Read SD Ch 3.
Nov. 9	Social capital matters. Read TF Ch. 5-6.
Nov. 11	Veteran's day holiday
Nov. 14	Interorganizational networks. Read MH #25 (Powell) and #26 (Harrison).
Nov. 16	(no class mtg)
Nov. 18	(no class mtg)
Nov. 21	Flexibility and innovation. Read SD Ch. 4-7. Last chance to hand in Application Paper #2 .
Nov. 23	Thanksgiving break
Nov. 25	Thanksgiving break
Nov. 28	Connection between political and economic spheres. Read TF Ch 7-8.
Nov. 30	Regional networks. Read TF Ch. 9.
Dec. 2	Workers in the new world economy. Read TF Ch. 10.
Dec. 5	Economic development. Read TF Ch. 11-12.

Dec. 7	Globalization in the future? Read TF Ch. 13
Dec. 9	Exam 2.
Dec. 12	Sociology of formal organizations. Read MH Introduction p. 1-16. Last chance to hand in Application Paper #3.
Dec. 17 (Sat.), 12:30- 2:30	Final Exam.