

SOCY 308 – Sociology of Organizations
Fall 2025 – Sloan 104 Class Time: Mon/Wed 14:20-15:35

Professor: jimi adams (jimi.adams@sc.edu)

Office: Sloan 216

Office Hours: Mon 13:00-14:00 (drop in, or by appointment –
<https://calendly.com/jimiadams>)

NOTE: Drop-in hours will be in person only. Appointments can be virtual (a link will be auto-generated) or in person.

Course Description

Organizations are a ubiquitous feature of social life. While these organizations are occasionally a focal element of our daily lives, at others we take them for granted. In this course, we will seek to more intentionally consider the role organizations play in our lives and how we engage with them. To accomplish this, we will draw on a balance of: (1) theoretical perspectives that organizational scholars have developed for making sense of organizations' form, changes, causes, and consequences, (2) empirical examples that investigate the implications of those perspectives, and (3) the methods researchers employ for studying organizations.

Our approach will primarily rely on (i) assigned readings that reflect original scholarship on organizations, (ii) lecture and in-class exercises to make sense of ideas extracted from and complementing the assigned readings, and (iii) written and (brief) oral presentation assignments that apply those concepts. At times, these tasks will ask you to engage with material that is beyond your current skillset (e.g., readings with statistics you aren't expected to understand); so we will also (iv) work to develop approaches of strategic reading etc. that foster our ability to maximize our efforts.

Objectives

By the end of the semester, participants will:

- **Describe** several primary theoretical orientations scholars leverage to make sense of organizations.
- **Account** for how empirical examples conform to and/or diverge from those theoretical perspectives.
- Gain additional **familiarity** with the range of methods researchers use to study organizations.
- **Develop** skills in strategic engagement with scholarship (e.g., reading for *critical analysis*).
- **Communicate** each of those in clear, concise, and accurate written *and* oral formats.

Assigned Readings

All required readings and supplemental materials will be available via Blackboard.

Course Structure & Requirements

Class sessions will entail a mix of lecture, discussion, and active learning approaches. Typically, this will be broken into didactic elements on Mondays, followed by applied elements on Wednesdays (though this schedule may be adjusted periodically to accommodate scheduling needs).

Requirements

I – Participation (40 points maximum): Our in-class approach will aim to be “seminar” style, that includes some lecture elements, but relies on active engagement by everyone. As such, you should come to *each* class prepared (i.e., having completed the assigned readings and any other preparation elements) and ready to actively participate in these sessions. To reflect the importance of these

contributions, your course grade will include two forms of participation. First, you will periodically be able to sign up for “assigned” presentation elements that will help “set the stage” for elements of class sessions. These will offer opportunities for 10 points earned apiece. Second, you will be assessed on your active contributions to in-class discussions (the remainder of your participation grade will reflect these contributions).

II – Exams (50 points each): We will have TWO in-class exams: Oct 13 during a regular class session, and Dec 12 during our assigned final exam slot. These will be a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions, and will focus on *application* of the ideas we introduce in class.

III – Reflection Writings (5 points each, 50 points maximum): To “concretize” your understanding and application of course concepts, I will periodically ask you to compose brief written reactions in-class. These will typically take one of two forms – (a) at the beginning of class I will periodically ask you to provide a brief overview of the key points of the reading assigned for that day; these are intended to facilitate our subsequent discussions in class; (b) at the end of a class session, I will periodically ask you to critically engage with the material from that class session (e.g., applying an idea we developed to a hypothetical organization, interpret a case in light of material, etc.). There will be at least 12 of these opportunities available across the semester.

IV – Case Study Write-Ups (30 points each): You will apply concepts we develop in class to make sense of an existing organization. The first of these will be a “single case” application, where you will focus on leveraging a theoretical idea from class to a single organization. The second of these will be a “comparative case” approach asking you to consider the similarities/differences between multiple organizations on a single theoretical construct. More detailed description of these assignments will be provided in a separate handout on Blackboard. The deadlines for these assignments will vary depending upon which concept you are addressing in your write-up.

Grading

Grading Expectations:

Grades you earn will reflect how thoroughly your work demonstrates the particular assignment requirements *and* overall course aims, which will correspond to the following sets of expectations:

- A Work that, **in addition to** meeting an assignment's **minimum requirements**, also **consistently reflects engagement** with other material from the course where appropriate & in ways that **exceed course objectives** will earn grades in the A range.
- B Work that, **in addition to** meeting an assignment's **minimum requirements**, also **occasionally reflects engagement** with other material from the course where appropriate, in ways that **meet course objectives** will earn grades in the B range.
- C Work that **addresses only** an assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the C range.
- D Work that **incompletely addresses** an assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the D range.
- F Work that **fails to address** an assignment's **minimum requirements** will earn grades in the F range.

Please note now that there are NO extra credit opportunities in this course. For this course to be successful and for you to be successful in this course, we need everyone keeping up with requirements throughout the semester.

Final Grade Computation:

Your final grade will be determined by summing the number of points earned from each of the above categories. Letter grades will be determined from your point total as follows:

<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Points Range</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Points Range</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Points Range</u>
A	231+	C+	194-199	D	151-168
B+	220-230	C	176-193		
B	200-219	D+	169-175		

Any student accumulating 150 or fewer points will receive an F for the course.

Course Expectations**What we all can expect from each other:**

Behave in a manner reflecting common courtesies. Show up to office hours or other appointments as scheduled. Maintain professionalism in all electronic communication (e.g., email/Blackboard messages). Put forth our best efforts to maintain a productive and welcoming course.

What I expect from you:

1 – Make a concerted effort to bring the best you can to the course. This means doing readings each week, completing required assignments on time, putting forth effort into the evaluated elements of the course. It also means taking ownership over the grades you earn.

2 – Treat others in the class with respect. This includes simple norms of regular interaction in an online forum and thoughtfully considering the contributions of others. At times we'll potentially cover material of a sensitive nature; being able to respect other's expressed opinions makes critical discourse possible.

Personal Computers Use: Personal electronics may be used only for legitimate classroom purposes, such as taking notes, downloading class information, or working on an in-class exercise.

What you can expect from me:

1 – Make a concerted effort to bring the best I can to the course. This means leading a class appropriate to its level, selecting "up to date" material that helps illustrate the course's key aims (though I'll aim to keep covid from over-taking our course, even despite its direct relevance), regularly being available for interaction via Blackboard & office hours, and adapting as is appropriate for the needs of the class.

2 – Treat others in the class with respect. This includes being prepared for class, returning graded materials in a timely manner with useful feedback, seeking to be impartial in the assessment of student work, while holding it to the standards of the course and college. It also means fostering an environment where diverse perspectives can comfortably be shared in class.

Due Dates & Late Assignments:

- Reflection Writings and Participation Elements will be completed in class (or submitted via Blackboard by a specified time). Given that there will be more opportunities for these than are necessary for full course credit, late and/or make-up submissions will not be accepted. You can miss 2 of each with no grade penalty – *for any reason*.
- Case Study elements will have variable due dates. As such, you are *strongly* encouraged to not submit them late; plan ahead and select the ones you will complete; if it looks like you might not get it done in time, consider completing one of the following options instead. Given this flexibility, if late, case study write-ups will be deducted 25% if they are 5 minutes to 24 hours late, 50% if 24-48 hours late, and will not be accepted if more than 48 hours late.

Course Communication:

- *The Syllabus* has answers to the most common questions pertaining to the course. Be sure check the syllabus first, before asking me about due-dates, assignment requirements, etc.
- *Office Hours* are available to add to your experience in this course. **Please make use of them.** These are meant to supplement required course work and in-class elements. As such, while I am happy to discuss course materials or other aspects of sociology/academia in general with you during this time, they should not be viewed as an opportunity to ask, "What did I miss in class?" (You should find peers in the class with whom you can share notes for that purpose.)
- *Blackboard* will be used for the majority of communication in this course. You can find a copy of the syllabus, additional assigned readings, and all assignments there. I will also post any lecture notes after each class. To make your experience in this course successful, you should expect to make this resource a *regular* part of your preparation for this course.
- *E-mail* should be used for quick communications (things that can be responded to in no more than a few sentences); use office hours for anything requiring more depth. You should only use your USC email account for communication related to this course; I will not read/respond to emails from your personal accounts (e.g., Yahoo!, Hotmail, etc; honestly they very regularly get filtered from my inbox). Please consider e-mail as subject to the same standards of communication as you would all other forms written material in this course (i.e., you should use complete sentences, proper punctuation, etc.). I will typically respond to email within **48 hours**.

University, CAS, and other Important Administrative Policies

Academic Integrity. You are expected to practice the highest possible standards of academic integrity. Any deviation from this expectation will result in a minimum academic penalty of your failing the assignment (i.e., receiving a zero) and will result in additional disciplinary measures. This includes improper citation of sources, using another student's work and any other form of academic misrepresentation.

Plagiarism. Using the words or ideas of another as if they were one's own is a serious form of academic dishonesty. If another person's complete sentence, syntax, key words, or the specific or unique ideas and information are used, one must give that person credit through proper citation.

Please remember that avoiding plagiarism is only a minimal threshold for maintaining academic integrity. Additionally, the first tenet of the Carolinian Creed is, "I will practice personal and academic integrity." There are useful resources on what this entails available for you at:

- [Carolinian Creed](http://www.sa.sc.edu/creed) (<http://www.sa.sc.edu/creed>)
- [Academic Responsibility](http://www.sc.edu/policies/staf625.pdf) (<http://www.sc.edu/policies/staf625.pdf>)
- [Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](https://www.sa.sc.edu/academicintegrity/) (<https://www.sa.sc.edu/academicintegrity/>)

If you remain unsure what this means for your successful participation in and completion of assignments in this course, ask, don't assume.

Accommodations for Disabilities and Other Personal Circumstances - Please notify me if you believe you will have trouble completing course assignments or meeting course requirements for any reason, including, but not limited to: disabilities; family circumstances; poor health; or economic hardship. All discussions will be confidential. I will make reasonable accommodations to ensure your inclusion and success in the course. Students with disabilities can contact the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC: <http://www.sa.sc.edu/sds/>) at 803-777-6142, sadrc@mailbox.sc.edu, or at LeConte College, Room 112A for additional assistance.

Student Success Center – In partnership with USC faculty, the Student Success Center (SSC; www.sc.edu/success) offers a number of free programs to assist you in better understanding your course material and to aid you on your path to success. SSC programs are facilitated by professional staff, graduate students, and trained undergraduate peer leaders who have previously excelled in their courses. Resources available to you in this course include:

- Peer Tutoring: You can make a one-on-one appointment with a peer tutor. Drop-in Tutoring and Online Tutoring may also be available for this course. Visit their website for a full schedule of times, locations, and courses.
- Peer Writing: Improve your college-level writing skills by bringing writing assignments from any of your classes to a Peer Writing Tutor. Similar to Tutoring, you can visit the website to make an appointment, and to view the full schedule of available drop-in hours and locations.
- Success Consultations: In Success Consultations, SSC staff assist you in developing study skills, setting goals, and connecting to a variety of campus resources. Throughout the semester, I may communicate with the SSC via Success Connect, an online referral system, regarding your progress in the course. If contacted by the SSC, please schedule a Success Consultation. Success Connect referrals are not punitive and any information shared by me is confidential and subject to FERPA regulations.

Writing Center – This course has many of writing assignments. The University Writing Center (<http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/write/university-writing-center>) is open to help any USC student needing assistance with a writing project at any stage of development.

Counseling Services - The University offers counseling and crisis services as well as outreach services, self-help, and frequently asked questions:

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_health_services/medical-services/counseling-and-psychiatry/index.php

Grades of Incomplete: The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course. Students have up to one year (three semesters) to complete course requirements. Dr. adams is the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete. Incomplete work must be finished within the time allowed or the “I” will automatically be recorded as an “F” on your transcript.

Course Schedule Overview

NOTE: this schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and on Blackboard.

Aug 20	Introductions & Course Overview
Aug 25	“Organizations” vs. “Institutions” Reading: (Bouma 1998)
Aug 27-Sep 3	Bureaucracy Readings: (Ritzer 1983; Selznick 1943)
Sep 8	Organizational Flexibility Readings: (Hamel and Zanini 2018; Podolny and Hansen 2021)
Sep 10-15	Goals Readings: (Simon 1964; Zald and Denton 1963)
Sep 17-22	Leadership Readings: (Barker 1993; Spisak et al. 2015)
Sep 24-29	Culture Readings: (O'Reilly and Chatman 1996; Rivera 2012)

Oct 1-6	Loose Coupling Readings: (Kellogg 2009; Weick 1976)
Oct 8	Review
Oct 13	Exam 1
Oct 15	Organizations, Industries, and Fields Reading: (Stinchcombe 1968)
Oct 20-22	Organizational Ecology Readings: (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000; Hannan and Freeman 1984)
Oct 27-29	Institutional Theory Readings: (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977)
Nov 3-5	Formal vs. Informal Structure Readings: (Argote and Epple 1990; McEvily, Soda, and Tortoriello 2014)
Nov 10-12	Networks Readings: (Podolny 2001; Powell 1990)
Nov 17-19	Embeddedness Readings: (Granovetter 1985; Nickerson and Silverman 2003)
Dec 1-3	Resource Mobilization Readings: (King 2008; McCarthy and Zald 1977)

Dec 12 Exam 2 @1230**Full References**

Argote, Linda, and Dennis Epple. 1990. "Learning Curves in Manufacturing." *Science* 247(4945):920–24.
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Barker, James R. 1993. "Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managing Teams." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38(3):408–37.

Bouma, Gary. 1998. "Distinguishing Institutions and Organisations in Social Change." *Journal of Sociology* 34(3):232–45. doi:10.1177/144078339803400302.

Carroll, Glenn R., and Anand Swaminathan. 2000. "Why the Microbrewery Movement? Organizational Dynamics of Resource Partitioning in the U.S. Brewing Industry." *American Journal of Sociology* 106(3):715–62. doi:10.1086/318962.

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Hamel, Gary, and Michele Zanini. 2018. "How a Chinese Appliance Maker Is Reinventing Management for the Digital Age." *Harvard Business Review* Nov-Dec:51–59.

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- Podolny, Joel M., and Morten T. Hansen. 2021. "How Apple Is Organized for Innovation: It's about Experts Leading Experts." *Harvard Business Review*, 101–9.
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