OVERVIEW

This course provides a PhD-level introduction to research on business. It aims to fulfill two objectives. First, it seeks to provide students with an understanding of some of the main (non-economic) perspectives used in modern research on business organizations. The course does not attempt, however, to cover every facet of the literature – a broad field – or provide a complete intellectual history of the subject. In this sense, you should view it as a complement to courses, such as P116 and P124, which provide deeper reviews of the literature and greater historical background. The readings in this course instead serve more as a context for understanding the evolution of research streams and as a means of developing the analytical tools students need to pursue their own research. Second, the course aspires to teach students how to construct new theory. Although graduate courses often focus on critiquing others’ research, the academic profession requires proficiency in theory building and testing. Though developed from a strategy perspective, the readings will likely interest students of organizational economics, organizational behavior, public policy, political science, sociology and other related disciplines.

FORMAT

DISCUSSION (25% of the grade): Each week, students will discuss three (or occasionally four) papers. Typically, the trio includes one ‘classic’ of organization theory, one modern application of the perspective, and one recent empirical piece building on the same intellectual framework. This light reading load presumes that students will read carefully and think about each paper prior to class.

Each student will also be required to facilitate and lead class discussion two or three times during the course (depending on the class size). They will be expected to present the main ideas of that week’s readings to the rest of the class both pointing out complements and contrasts, as well as contributions to the field (without discussing the individual readings in detail). Presenters will also be responsible for leading class discussion by posing reflective and provocative questions to their classmates. Details of who will lead each session will be provided in class. I will inform you by email about the logistics of the first session.

CRITIQUING (25% of the grade): Students must submit a two-page note criticizing one of the readings by 7:00 pm the evening before class. Please send these as email attachments to me by this time. Each student will provide a 5-10 minute overview of his/her assigned reading as part of the class discussion. Everyone, however, is expected to prepare all the required readings, not just the ones they are writing about.

WRITING (50% of the grade, 4 assignments and a final paper): With the exception of the first paper, which involves the analysis of some existing theory, all assignments for the course culminate in the production of the front end of a research
paper, consisting of a clear research question, a theoretical framing for investigating that question, and a carefully considered research design. Students will turn in these components in stages, which will allow the instructor to offer guidance in developing the project. Only the final paper will receive a grade. Students should view the various assignments as opportunities to improve their understanding of what makes a good theory.

Depending on the number of participants in the course, we may devote the last part of the class in the week each assignment is due to students’ presentations of their written assignments.

**COURSE PLAN**

1) THEORY AND SOCIAL MECHANISMS


2) ORGANIZATIONS AS STRUCTURED ACTION


Background readings (optional):


3) ORGANIZATIONS AS EVOLVING SYSTEMS


Background readings (optional):


4) INTERACTING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: EXCHANGE PARTNERS I


Background readings (optional):


5) INTERACTING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: EXCHANGE PARTNERS II


**Background readings (optional):**


6) INTERACTING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT: INSTITUTIONS


**Background readings (optional):**


7) RIVALS, COMPETITION AND LEGITIMATION


Background readings (optional):


8) VERTICAL DIFFERENTIATION/STATUS HIERARCHIES


Background readings (optional):


9) HOMOGENIZING PROCESSES II: IMITATION AND LEARNING


Background readings (optional):


10) PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION ON “TRAINING AS ACADEMICS”