

# ORGANIZATIONS IN SOCIETY

Sociology 342 (7104)

Fall 2012

M/W/F 1:40-2:35pm, Lecture Center 4

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the sociological study of organizations. We are surrounded by, and live our lives within, organizations: schools, businesses, religious groups, government, voluntary associations, prisons, hospitals. We may relate to them as students, as employees, as members, as customers, as opponents, or as clients. Often, we hardly notice the ways our lives are entangled with them. Yet our interactions with organizations are constant.

In this class, I try to help you acquire a set of tools for understanding the organizations that surround you. During the course of the semester we will look at organizations from several perspectives. The first views organizations as rational, efficient ways of organizing complex human activities. The second looks at organizations as political, not just rational: they are full of individuals and groups seeking power, creating alliances, and pursuing their interests. The third looks at organizations as a cultural arena: they shape our behavior by creating norms, feelings of belonging, and a sense of how we should and shouldn't behave. We will use these lenses to look at a variety of organizations, from restaurants to universities to healthcare organizations to tech startups and beyond.

At the end of this semester, I hope you will be able to think about organizations in a new way—as powerful systems that allow us to get things done, as the sites of human political dramas, and as structures that shape our emotions and behavior. The goal is to better understand how organizations work so that in your own life you can negotiate your way through them, accomplish the things you want to get done, or even change them.

## REQUIRED BOOKS

There are two required books for this class. Both are available at the campus Barnes & Noble and at Mary Jane Books. Unfortunately, the library does not own a copy of either book, so there is no copy on reserve. We will not start using the books until the beginning of October, so

you still have time to save money by ordering them on the internet. Any edition is okay. All other readings will be available on electronic reserves ([ereserves.albany.edu](http://ereserves.albany.edu)). The course password is **organizations**.

Fine, Gary Alan. 1996. *Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pfeffer, Jeffrey. 1992. *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your grade will be based on **three exams** and a number of **short writing assignments**. The final exam is cumulative, but weighted more heavily toward the last third of the course. The first two exams are a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. The second exam covers slightly more material than the first, hence counts for slightly more of your total grade. The final exam also includes an essay component. We will discuss them more as they approach.

### **Breakdown of points**

First midterm exam	20%	Monday, 10/1
Second midterm exam	25%	Friday, 11/2
Final exam	35%	Thursday, 12/13 at 10:30am
<u>Short writing assignments</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>As announced in class</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

### **Short writing assignments**

There will be ten short writing assignments of about one page in length. Approximately half will be in-class assignments and half will be take-home assignments. In-class assignments are, obviously, handwritten. Take-home assignments must be typed and a hard copy turned in. They should not be handwritten. I do not accept assignments by email; please be sure you have access to a working printer.

The writing assignments are meant to encourage you to think about and apply the course material. They are not intended to be “pop quizzes.” Writing assignments will not generally be announced in advance, so if you miss a class, be sure to ask a classmate or the TA whether a take-home assignment was given. They are graded as follows:

0	Not completed (0 points)
✓-	Did not meet basic requirements (6 points)
✓ (late)	Adequate or better, but turned in after the beginning of class (8 points)
✓	Adequate to very good—and on time (10 points, full credit)
✓+	Excellent—bonus point (11 points)

Although there is not a strict curve, typically 10-20% of assignments will receive ✓+s.

Two things to note:

- 1) **Take-home assignments are due at the beginning of class.** Assignments turned in after the beginning of class will still be accepted, but will receive a “✓ (late)” and get 8/10 points. Assignments turned in after the end of class will not receive credit.
- 2) **Assignments can only be made up under conditions of similar seriousness as those that would warrant making up an exam.** The teaching assistant will have discretion over allowing make-ups in case of extreme circumstances.

**Extra credit:** Anyone who completes 9 assignments will receive a 2.5-point bonus added to their assignment grade (not to the overall semester grade). Anyone who completes 10 assignments will receive a 5-point bonus. You can get more than 100% on the assignments, with bonus points.

**Watch out!** Missing a large number of writing assignments can hurt your grade substantially. In the past, a majority of the class has completed nine or ten assignments, which will put you in the A range. If you miss three assignments, you are down into the C- range (unless you have multiple ✓+s). If you miss four, you are down to a D-.

Here is an example of **how writing assignments affect the final grades** of two students with the same exam performance—a 79% average, or a C+:

<b>Student 1</b> [✓s on all ten assignments]				<b>Student 2</b> [✓s on only five assignments]			
Midterm 1	77%	* .20	= 15.40	77%	* .20	= 15.40	
Midterm 2	81%	* .25	= 20.25	81%	* .25	= 20.25	
Final exam	79%	* .35	= 27.65	79%	* .30	= 27.65	
Assignments	<b>105%</b>	* .20	= 21.00	<b>50%</b>	* .20	= 10.00	
<b>Final grade</b>	<b>B</b>		<b>= 84.30%</b>	<b>C</b>		<b>= 73.30%</b>	

The grading scale is as follows:

A	92-100%	C	72-77%
A-	90-91%	C-	70-71%
B+	88-89%	D+	68-69%
B	82-87%	D	62-67%
B-	80-81%	D-	60-61%
C+	78-79%	E	Under 60%

I reserve the right to bump borderline grades up for exceptional effort or in-class participation. I will not bump any grades down.

## OTHER CLASS POLICIES

**Missed exams:** Students may make up assignments or exams only with documentation of a legitimate excuse for missing the assignment or exam, such as serious illness or death in the







