

PLSC 431W Public Organization Theory Winter 2016

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Hours: M-W 8-9, 11-12,
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INTRODUCTION

This course deals with the key ideas in organization theory and organization behavior, with emphasis on public organizations. Organization theory deals with how people behave in organizations and how organizations behave, that is, how they learn, how they compete or adapt, how they related to clients, financial supporters, the public and the press. Organization behavior deals with social science based knowledge about specific management problems such as how to motivate people, how to exercise leadership, how to reduce turnover, and how to handle stress. While this course focuses more broadly on organizations and less on prescriptions for solving particular problems, it tries to concentrate as much as possible on public organizations and how organization theory can be useful to managers. The key question for managers is why do we do things *this way*, and how can we improve the way we do things, if we can improve at all.

You may well find some of the reading difficult, the ideas unfamiliar, or too many ideas to a page. Regardless of whether the reading is simple or hard, you need to master the arguments in it. Leave yourself enough time to read the material at least twice before the end of the class, for it probably cannot be absorbed in one brief reading. Also, practice outlining the major steps or points in an argument, and asking yourself if all the steps or points that need to be there (for your understanding) are there, and if there is sufficient evidence presented to be convincing. Do you have counter evidence, from your own experience, from your previous readings, or from elsewhere? Get into the material and argue with it, wrestle it to the ground until you can make it yours.

You are required to read the assigned material prior to class. We may be doing some in-class exercises and some online discussions for credit, and you may be lost unless you have read the material. We discuss and explain the work in class. We do not just outline material you should have read. You should strive to be an active participant in the class if you expect to get the most out of it. Your ideas and questions count. They make class more lively and relevant to your collective experiences. Moreover, I cannot guess what you do not understand, so you have to tell me, and to do that you have to have at least seriously attempted to do the reading. Please do not be shy about asking questions, your classmates will undoubtedly be grateful that someone was bold enough to ask what they did not understand. If you prefer to ask questions by email or by phone, that is fine, just not as helpful as asking them in class. Good class participation contributes toward a good grade. Therefore, attend all the classes and be prepared. There is simply too much material for you to try to absorb it just prior to writing your exams.

RATIONALE:

This course is based on the assumption that almost all students in it intend to make a career in either public or non-profit administration. Both of these careers inevitably occur in organizations, either large or small. One of the basic assumptions of organization theory is that no organization ever perfectly fits its environment or has its structure perfectly aligned with its goals. Therefore, all organizations are always in need of changing in order to more closely fit their environment or more properly align structure and goals. This then means that the administrators of these organizations need to be able to recognize the problems, diagnose the causes, and suggest alterations that result in a better match between organization, environment, structure, and goals. I hope that upon finishing this course all students will better be able to do this.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will

- Develop and employ successful, flexible writing and reading strategies that support sustained inquiry in a discipline.
- Use writing strategies that achieve the purposes for writing and address the expectations of audiences within a disciplinary context.
- Formulate research questions and employ strategies for researching and responding to questions.
- Use discipline-specific genres to communicate information.
- Understand conventions for communicating, disseminating, and interpreting information within a discipline.

TEXTBOOK:

There is one book for this class:

The grades will be based on the following: class participation, 5-6 short writings, and a final paper that combines the best of the short writings. The weighting is:

Participation	5%
Online Discussions	20%
Short Papers	35%
Final Project	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

If in class exercises are done for credit their 'grades' will be rolled into the weighting of the Discussions and Short Papers.

Schedule: We will attempt to cover the material in one chapter each week. The chapters focus the application of public administration organizations, and I will use them to relate PA to the four main types of theories of organization. We will try to see how various theories apply to the careers in which you will probably be working. The lectures will be wide-ranging, and thus you

should not expect a precis of each chapter each week. Rather, the lecture will be used to pull together concepts mined from the text in a way as to make them practical for the potential public administrator, public manager, non-profit administrator/manager, or mid- to upper-level firefighter/police officer. This means that missing any class may well damage your grade and missing very much may mean you will fail the course.

The final paper will be discussed at length in class, but essentially, you are to write a series of reports [approximately one every two weeks] on a local government [city, township, or county] of your choice [except Detroit, and maybe a few others] that could be expected to be presented to that local government. The government should have a population of between 25,000 and 100,000, more or less, and should be easily accessible to you physically and online. You will write as an outside consultant hired to “revamp” the local government organization. At the end, your “final exam” will be a report that could be presented to the elected government of your subject on the possibilities of changing their organization to better meet their future needs and challenges. Each ‘section’ of the report will be presented to you in class with a “delivery date” of a week or so. At the end I will expect a completed report joining all the sections into a single, cohesive and coherent report. You will be expected to lay out the current organizational situation and to make recommendations for changes based on your research of the community as well as what you learn in class. I will expect quite a few re-writes of the sections leading to a very good report at the end. I suggest that you make plans to meet with me individually outside of class for help and guidance. It is a very good idea to take your first drafts to The Writing Center [or you can send them by email] for the sort of minor editing that improves the ‘look’ of the paper and prevents me from hyper-ventilating as I read [and mark up in red] them.

Be prepared to read the Paper Rules that I want you to follow online. Also, start doing a really good job of proofreading your work before you hand it in if you want to avoid multiple rewrites.

We will stick as close as possible to the syllabus. I do not change the due dates, nor do I like to give extensions (and those for cause only at my discretion). Part of good writing is being on time. Not many bosses will forgive you for being late with needed writing. If the due dates give you difficulties, see me as early as possible to make appropriate arrangements. The date of class discussion may depart from the syllabus in case of illness of the instructor, bad weather, or if some part of the course needs more class time than I envisioned. You are still responsible for the reading on the due date. Falling behind on the writing assignments is usually the main predictor of failing the class.

This is a tough class for many, but many also learn very important things in it relative to their future. Missing even a single class might well damage your grade. If you find you cannot attend full time on time you need to talk to me immediately.

Week 1. Introduction. Learning and Public Organizations. Why should a practitioner be interested in theory? Metaphor as theory. Implications of theory for behavior. Metaphors of organizations. Organizations as brains; as schools; as prisons; as sports teams; as plants or animals. All metaphors are partial, broadening your view. Closed and open systems. Ecological explanations.

Assignment: for next week, Pick a city to study.

Week 2. Thinking about organizations. Why do we have them? Could we do without them? What are the alternatives? Why study them?

Assignment: for next week, Read Ch. 1 in Kettl. First work due

Week 3. Early observation and thinking about organizations. Key Dimensions. How do we differentiate, study, and describe organizations. Rational, natural, and open organizations. Where do the basic concepts of organization theory come from?

Assignment: for next week, research your government, second work due, Read Ch. 2 in Kettl.

Week 4. What do the various dimensions of organizations mean? How has politics altered the theories of organizations? Structure, function, and behavior. Defining structure. How structure defines behavior and vice versa. Forms and Outcomes. Functions, formal and informal. Explanations. Rationality and natural causes.

Assignment: for next week, read Ch. 3 in Kettl.

Week 5. Making organizations work, and overview. Is auto-pilot possible? The fundamentals: Power and its outcomes; Leadership; Decision-making; Communication; Change; and the role of information. What happens where?

Assignment: for next week, third work due, read Ch 4 in Kettl .

Week 6. Power and Leadership in Context. Organizational Environments. Environment and ecology are key concepts for understanding organizations. Which is which? Who or what decides the boundaries? Internal and external environmental issues.

Assignment: third section due, read Ch 6 in Kettl [we skip Ch 5]

Week 7. Decision-Making. Focus and Locus. Context. Formal and Informal. Sub-cultures.

Assignment for next week, fourth work due, read Ch 7 in Kettl

Week 8. Communication. What is communication? How is it used? By whom? How can it be improved?

Assignment: for next week read Ch. 8 in Kettl.

Week 9. Organizational effectiveness and organizational theory. Revisiting our beginning. Models to consider. Is effectiveness a goal or a function of organizations, and should it (or they) be?

Assignment: fifth work due, read Ch 9 in Kettl

Week 10. Managing Organizational environments. Why do we do what we do, and how should we do it, knowing more about organization theory?

Assignment: for next week read Ch. 10 in Kettl

Week 11. Managing Organizational environments. Discussing how to write about your organization as a whole.

Assignment: Overview of theories and text, sixth work due, read Ch 11 in Kettl

Week 12. Managing Organizations: recognizing the problems, implementing the changes.
Assignment: seventh work due

From this point, our schedule will be driven by in-class discussions of your research. Each student will need to be ready to be ready to begin making the final product.

Week 13-14. Discussion of how to pull what you know together into a comprehensive but relatively brief [16+ pages] report that can be of use.

RULES OF THE GAME

Class meets two days a week for 14 weeks. You are adults. I expect you to attend class and to be on time. No electronic equipment may be used during class with the exception of those needed in cases of disabilities or used to take notes. To the extent that I find you using laptops or smart phones or tablets to do non-class activities you may be asked to stop and/or leave the class. Cell phones must have their rings turned off. Calls must be taken outside of the classroom. If you wish to use a laptop to take notes, you may, with the caveat that, should I wish to see what you're doing, upon being asked you must raise your hands from the keyboard/touchpad and turn the screen so that I can see it.

The format is lecture/discussion. I encourage students to raise their hand to interrupt me if you believe you have a pertinent question or point.

If you have any difficulties in the course, contact me right away. The end of the semester is much too late.

There will be at least five short papers as sections of a full report required. They will be discussed in class. You will in all likelihood get a better grade if you are in class to hear how I want the sections written. You will be expected to write or learn to write as public administrator or contractor and not as a literary stylist. **The papers are due the exact second class starts in my email inbox. One second late is the same as one day late. One-third of a letter grade is deducted for each day late. Papers later than one week late will not be accepted except at the sole decision of the instructor.** Papers must be emailed to my emich.edu account. See the "Paper Rules" file posted on the course homepage for further directions. You may also provide a hard copy, but I won't be using them.

If there are any issues you are concerned about, or anything that makes learning difficult for you in this class, I strongly encourage you to talk with me privately, either in my office or by email. If you perceive that I have not been treating you as you believe I should, please have the courtesy to point it out to me at once.

On the other hand, humor and give-and-take lighten the load. I tend to tell a lot of bad jokes. Just remember, simply because you (or I) think something is humorous does not make it so. Please remember that we are part of a large and disparate group while we are in class. Arrangements will be made to the extent possible for students with special needs, religious observations, or in some other circumstances. If you feel that there is an ongoing or temporary situation in which you need an accommodation, please stop by my office or email me with the

facts as soon as possible. In some cases, supporting material may be requested. While I will obviously follow both the law and university policy, in cases which fall outside those lines, I will be the final arbiter. I will make every effort to work with you to provide an environment which makes it possible for you to maximize your learning experience in this class.

PAPERS

I have rules for writing the papers that are required. These rules are [or will be] posted on the course homepage. Please read them carefully, since failure to do so may well affect your grade.

GRADES

As a student, you are responsible for your own grade. Grades do not come from out of the blue, and I don't "give" grades. You earn them. I have found that those who sit in the front row, come to class regularly and on time, pay attention and take notes seem to get more A's and B's than others. Think about it. I will try to help you out by going over the material in class and during office hours, but I will not merely be condensing "the important parts" of the book so you don't have to. Read the book. **If you or having difficulty or think you might be having trouble understanding the material, it is your responsibility to contact me immediately. I'm here to help, but I don't read minds, there is one of me and there are many of you.**

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Cheating and plagiarism are unacceptable events in the learning experience. Any student found guilty of an act of academic dishonesty will receive a grade of 0 (zero, not an E) for the work in question as well as possibly an E for the course in cases of gross dishonesty. In addition, students found guilty of such acts will be referred to the university system for possible further disciplinary action. Consult your student handbook for definitions, procedures, and punishments. If you have any doubts about what constitutes academic dishonesty, see me.

Plagiarism is presenting the work, words, or thought of others as your own. Books, articles, newspaper stories, interviews, conversations, videos, and so on should all be properly cited if you use material from them ***even if you paraphrase them***. The easy rule is, if in doubt, cite.

MAKEUP EXAMS AND REGRADES

Anyone who wishes to take a makeup exam missed for any reason must inform me BEFORE the exam is given. Anyone who believes they missed an exam for reasons beyond their control and without their prior knowledge may petition the instructor for a makeup. However, in both cases, the instructor may ask for supporting evidence of the justification for missing the exam and is the sole authority in the question of the adequacy of both the reason for missing the exam and the evidence. Makeups will be given only at the discretion of the instructor under these rules.

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating and plagiarism will be punished to the full extent allowed by University rules and regulations. Plagiarism is generally defined in your student handbook as presenting as your own work that done by someone else, even if only an idea and/or not quoted directly. Cutting and pasting from the web is absolutely forbidden, under any and all circumstances. Cite, quote, and when in doubt, ask the instructor. Those caught cheating will be given a zero for the work in which the cheating occurred. Possible plagiarism will be dealt with on a case by case basis. In addition, you may be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Services for discipline that can result in either a suspension or permanent dismissal. The *Student Conduct Code* contains detailed definitions of what constitutes academic dishonesty, and it can be accessed online at www.emich.edu/sjs

More on this in the classroom.

THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM

Laptop computers may be used in the classroom, under the following conditions: when asked, a student must immediately raise her/his hands from the computer and then allow the instructor to see the screen. That is, it is expected that the laptop (or netbook) will be used solely for classroom purposes and not for IMing, emailing or reading email, SMSing friends, Social Networking, playing games, or other use deemed frivolous by the instructor. Should this occur, a first warning will be given. A second offense will result in the use of the device being banned for the student for the rest of the semester.

Communications devices of all types cannot be used in the classroom with the exception that cell phones may be set to vibrate, for students who can demonstrate to the instructor a need to receive incoming communications. This would include emergency personnel and those who can otherwise demonstrate the need. The final decision belongs to the instructor alone.

Texting may not happen in the classroom. That is, students may neither text out nor read messages coming in. No headsets or ear buds may be worn in the classroom. No ipods nor similar devices may be used in the classroom.

In short, with the exception of laptops or netbooks, no electronic devices may be used at any time by any student that can't provide proof of their need.

Classroom Management Issues: Students are expected to abide by the *Student Conduct Code* and assist in creating an environment that is conducive to learning and protects the rights of all members of the University community. Lack of civility and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated and may result in a request to leave class and referral to the *Office of Student Services (SJS)* for discipline. Examples of inappropriate classroom conduct include repeatedly arriving late to class, using a cellular phone, or talking while others are speaking.

Students With Disabilities: If you wish to be accommodated for your disability, EMU Board of Regents policy #8.3 requires that you first register with the Access Services Office (ASO) in room 203 King Hall. You may contact ASO by telephone at (734) 487-2470. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with ASO promptly as you will only be accommodated from the date you register with them forward. No retroactive accommodations are possible.

