

ED 761: Higher Education Institutions as Complex Organizations (Fall 2024)

Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education University of Michigan School of Education

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Course Description:

How do administrators manage modern postsecondary organizations? And how should they? How does organizational purpose get defined? How do context and environment influence the way we think about the structure and function of an organization? Why is organizational change so difficult? Why are management and change strategies effective in one organizational setting and futile in another? How do power, discrimination, and inequality influence an organization? These questions, and a multitude of similar thoughts, are central to the content of this class.

It is useful for those involved in postsecondary institutions to understand what organizations are, how they function (and dysfunction), and why. Therefore, this course intends to provide you with insights into the functioning of educational organizations by exposing you to a wide range of viewpoints in the literature that portray colleges and universities as complex organizations. This is not a class on how to do your administrative or faculty job; this is a class on how to understand the context in which you work.

To do this, we will delve into a variety of scholarly literatures, examining a variety of theories and concepts as tools for understanding academic environments. We will argue and discuss the merits of these ideas and theories for describing and explaining the reality of colleges and universities as we understand and experience that reality. In the process, we will engage in a dynamic learning process that involves most basically our own understandings of postsecondary environments. That is to say, all of us already use theories to guide our actions and shape our understandings; some are quite explicit but others are implicit. These personal "mental models" must become part of the conscious discussion in the class. No matter what your purpose is in taking the course, one outcome will be a deeper understanding of your own (possibly changing) viewpoint and a better appreciation of others' views.

Objectives:

1. To provide students with a systematic and critical understanding of organizational theory and research, and the factors involved in the functioning and analysis of

postsecondary institutions, particularly colleges and universities, as complex organizations.

2. To show how these ideas serve as tools for the analysis of organizational situations. The topics covered in the course are chosen to allow students to make connections to various academic contexts, both to encourage students' reflective understanding and critical analysis, and to provide an improved basis for action.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation. As in any graduate course, including a core class, everyone needs to be co-owners of the class and collectively responsible for its quality and outcomes. I take responsibility for the overall design and direction of the course and for the academic requirements, but it will be facilitated as a seminar or inquiry in which we hold ourselves and each other accountable for a strong and rich intellectual enterprise and dialogue.

Your attendance is essential to a successful collective experience. The format of the class requires that each person come prepared to take an active role in class. This means not only having read the assigned materials, but also being prepared to discuss the salient issues, questions, and problems emerging from the readings, to utilize your knowledge and professional experiences in addressing the readings and any class activities, case problems, etc. Class participation also involves opening oneself to challenge and to be challenged by the ideas and topics of the session. Participation is worth 20% of your final grade.

Guidelines for discussion: This classroom will be inclusive of a range of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs. It is my job to ensure that everyone is treated with respect, that a wide range of views are heard, and to invite alternative perspectives. We are in this classroom to learn from each other, not just to confirm what we already think we know. Always remember that when we share our own experiences that they will rarely generalize to everyone in the room. We will challenge ideas when needed for a healthy discussion, but never challenge a person or their right to speak. Please listen carefully, especially when you disagree, and assume that everyone is speaking in good faith and with good intentions. Appreciate when a student is “conversationally courageous” and express gratitude for new thoughts and ideas. If a student ever feels that a discussion did not meet these guidelines, or otherwise has left them with negative feelings about the classroom environment, please let me know.

Guidelines for Zoom (if needed): This class is designed to be in person each week, but we may move to Zoom if needed through UM guidance. Please turn on video during class, but mute audio when not speaking. Please turn off distractions – browsers, social media, and other doodads – and pay extra attention to listening and engaging when people talk. For anyone with hearing difficulties, turn on the live transcript function. All classes will be recorded in the cloud for future use. Feel free to use a virtual background if you'd like to restrict others' view of your living arrangement. If you want to speak, please unmute your microphone, and I will do my best to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Feel free to use the chat function as a backchannel to ask questions

when it's not a good time to interrupt the main speaker, or if you simply feel more comfortable asking your question that way. I will stop periodically for questions, and will often go to the chat questions first.

Group Case Development. The intent of this assignment is to give you a chance to prepare your own case drawn from some organizational aspect or issue in postsecondary education. In small teams, you will write about the case in similar fashion to those examples used in class. The final report calls upon you to provide a complete case description that will be shared with the class. Work on case development and analysis will proceed in the following manner:

1. A brief description of the topic will be due **September 24** (by email; please cc all members of your group).
2. An outline of the major aspects of the case is due **October 22** (by email; please cc all members of the group). This short document should discuss the narrative focus of the case, outline of major events, and describe the sources you intend to use for the case. Students should not change their case topic after this time.
3. For the final case design, you are asked to craft a strong central "story line" describing the key aspects of the case problem. Sufficient detail is necessary for others to make sense of the case problem, but, as authors, the team needs to balance the level of discrete detail with the conceptual threads necessary for the case to be comprehended by the reader. It is important that the case be complex enough to suggest multiple analytic perspectives without becoming too context-specific as to be only understood by those who wrote the case (e.g., watch "insider" language and jargon). More conversation about the drafting of cases will take place throughout the term. Relevant accompanying documentation [attachments, memos, system drawings, etc.] should be turned in with the final case, if you choose to use them, as appendices. Complete cases must be distributed by email on the Friday before the scheduled class presentation. **Group cases will be due November 26** (30% of grade). I will upload cases to Canvas.

Criteria for evaluating the final case assignment have two parts. The first is the writing of the actual case. Cases will be evaluated for the clarity and professionalism with which the report is presented, the comprehensive care with which the case situation is described and analyzed, and the complexity and relevance of the case. Final cases should be about 15 pages, single spaced, not including appendices or references.

Group Panel Presentation. Each team will lead a discussion about the case as a panel presentation (no PowerPoint). The presentation should illuminate how various theories learned throughout the course apply to the case. Group presentations will be **December 3**. (10% of grade)

Final Exam. An in-class final exam will take place on **December 10**. The first part will take place in class over two hours. The second part is written at home. Both parts are available now in Canvas. (40% of grade)

Course Texts:

Bastedo, Michael N. 2012. *The Organization of Higher Education: Managing Colleges for a New Era*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Birnbaum, Robert. 1991. *How Colleges Work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

March, James G. 1994. *A Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen*. New York: Free Press.

All additional readings are in Canvas.

Services for Students with Disabilities

All students are welcome in this course. The University of Michigan recognizes disability as an integral part of diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment for students with disabilities. Students who are experiencing a disability-related barrier should contact Services for Students with Disabilities <https://ssd.umich.edu/>; 734-763-3000 or ssdoffice@umich.edu). For students who are connected with SSD, accommodation requests can be made in Accommodate. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your SSD Coordinator.

COVID-19 or Other Communicable Illness

I am committed to protecting the health and safety of the community. We are all responsible for protecting the collective health of all members by being mindful and respectful in carrying out the UM's health and safety guidelines, which may well evolve over time. We are all expected to adhere to the required safety measures and guidelines of the State of Michigan and the University of Michigan, such as not coming to class when ill or in quarantine. Any student who is not able and willing to comply with campus safety measures for this course should contact their academic advisor to discuss alternate course options.

Regardless of the required safety measures, all students and visitors are welcome to wear masks in this class. The course recordings are posted on Canvas for those who have COVID infections or required isolations or quarantines.

Gender Identity

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in accordance with their personal identities. In this class, we will have the chance to indicate the name that we prefer to be called and, if we choose, to identify pronouns with which we would like to be addressed. Remember that all students can and should indicate their personal pronouns via Wolverine access, using the *Gender Identity* tab under *Student Business*. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly and support your classmates in doing so as well.

Policies on Late Papers and Missed Classes

Papers are accepted late with a penalty of half a grade per week, with exceptions only for medical emergencies and religious holidays. The grade penalty is non-negotiable, but one late assignment does not generally hurt the final grade. Missed classes may also lower the class participation grade. Students who miss three class sessions must withdraw from the course without prior written approval from the instructor.

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 27: Introduction to the Course [*course reading only, no in-class meeting*]

Birnbaum, Chapters 1-4

Bastedo, Chapter 1, "Organizing Higher Education: A Manifesto"

September 3: Individual Decision Making: Limited Rationality

March, Chapter 1, "Limited Rationality"

Bastedo, Michael N. 2009. "Conflicts, Commitments, and Cliques in the University: Moral Seduction as a Threat to Trustee Independence." *American Educational Research Journal* 46: 354-386.

September 10: Individual Decision Making: Rules, Repairs, and Risk

March, Chapter 2, "Rule Following"

Bastedo, Michael N. 2017. "Cognitive Repairs in the Admissions Office." Unpublished paper.

O'Meara, KerryAnn, Lindsey L. Templeton, Damani K. White-Lewis, Dawn Culpepper, and Julia Anderson. 2023. "The Safest Bet: Identifying and Assessing Risk in Faculty Selection." *American Educational Research Journal* 60: 330-366.

September 17: Group Decisions and Implicit Bias

[NCID DEI event 3:30-5]

Bastedo, Chapter 8, "Diversity: A Bridge to the Future?" (Smith)

Banaji, Mahzarin R., Max H. Bazerman, and Dolly Chugh. 2003. "How (Un)Ethical Are You?" *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 56-64.

Ely, Robin J. and David A. Thomas. 2001. "Cultural Diversity at Work: The Effects of Diversity Perspectives on Work Group Processes and Outcomes." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46: 229-273.

Rivera, Lauren. 2012. "Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms." *American Sociological Review* 77: 999-1022.

Case Study: Strategic Plans (2.0) for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (U-M units)

September 24: Ambiguity and Organizations

March, Chapter 5, "Ambiguity and Interpretation"

Birnbaum, Chapter 7, "The Anarchical Institution" [optional]

Cohen, Michael D. and James G. March. 1974. "Leadership in an Organized Anarchy." Pp. 195-229 in *Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President* (2nd Ed.) Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Weick, Karl. 1976. "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21: 1-19.

Garces, Liliana M., Brianna Davis Johnson, Evelyn Ambriz, and Dwuana Bradley. 2021. "Repressive Legalism: How Postsecondary Administrators' Responses to On-Campus Hate Speech Undermine a Focus on Inclusion." *American Educational Research Journal* 58: 1032-1069.

Case Study: University of Colorado

October 1: Bureaucratic Structure & Governance

Birnbaum, Chapter 5, "The Bureaucratic Institution"

Bastedo, Chapter 3, "Governance Research" (Hearn & McLendon) [optional]

Clark, Burton R. 1993. "The Problem of Complexity in Modern Higher Education." Pp. 263-279 in Sheldon Rothblatt and Björn Wittrock (eds.), *The European and American University Since 1800: Historical and Sociological Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Birnbaum, Robert. 1989. "The Latent Organizational Functions of the Academic Senate: Why Senates Do Not Work But Will Not Go Away." *Journal of Higher Education* 60: 423-443.

Ray, Victor. 2019. "A Theory of Racialized Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 84: 26-53.

Case Study: Georgetown University

October 8: Workshop: Design Thinking for Organizational Change

Brown, Tim. 2008, June. "Design Thinking." *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 84-92.

IDEO. 2017. *Design Thinking for Educators* (pp. 1-37 only). Palo Alto: IDEO.

Podcast: Meet [Pounce, the Georgia State Chatbot](#).

Case Study: The Good Kitchen or Better Service, Faster

October 15: Fall Break

Fall Break - no class! I do encourage you to work with your group at a time of your choosing on your case study development. I am also available to meet with groups to help facilitate the work on a tutorial basis.

October 22: Disciplines and Professions

Abbott, Andrew. 1988. Chapters 1 & 5 in *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Expert Division of Labor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Abbott, Andrew. 2002. "The Disciplines and the Future." Pp. 205-230 in Steven Brint (Ed.), *The Future of the City of Intellect: The Changing American University*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Small, Mario Luis. 1999. "Departmental Conditions and the Emergence of New Disciplines: Two Cases in the Legitimation of African-American Studies." *Theory and Society* 28: 659-707.

Case Study: Texas Tech University

October 29: Strategy

Bastedo, Chapter 2, "Strategic Thinking in Higher Education Research" (Gumport)

Bastedo, Chapter 5, "Institutional Strategy" (Toma)

Porter, Michael E. 1996 (November/December). "What is Strategy?" *Harvard Business Review*, pp. 61-78.

Winston, Gordon. 1999. "Subsidies, Hierarchy and Peers: The Awkward Economics of Higher Education." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13: 13-36.

Case Study: Syracuse University (A only)

November 5: Resource Dependence and Academic Capitalism

Special Guest Star: Tom Finholt, Vice Provost

Bastedo, Michael N. and Nicholas A. Bowman. 2011. "College Rankings as an Interorganizational Dependency: Establishing the Foundation for Strategic and Institutional Accounts." *Research in Higher Education* 52: 3-23.

Jaquette, Ozan, Bradley R. Curs, and Julie R. Posselt. 2016. "Tuition Rich, Mission Poor: Nonresident Enrollment and the Changing Proportions of Low-Income and Underrepresented Minority Students at Public Research Universities." *The Journal of Higher Education* 86: 635-673.

Slaughter, Sheila and Gary Rhoades. 2005. "The Theory of Academic Capitalism." Pp. 1-34 in *Academic Capitalism in the New Economy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Courant, Paul and Amy Dittmar. 2019. Report on the State of the Budget Model and Budget System at the University of Michigan (abridged). [optional]

November 12: Practical Organizational Change

Heath, Chip and Dan. 2010. *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. New York: Crown.

Read Chapter 1 and "Switch in One Page." Then read one assigned section (Direct the Rider, Motivate the Elephant, Shape the Path).

Case Study: Gender Equity at HBS

November 19 & 26: ASHE & Thanksgiving Weeks

Please work with your group during these two weeks to further your case study due on November 26. I am also available to meet with groups to help facilitate the work.

December 3: Student Presentations

Case study documents will be circulated on November 26th.

December 10: Final Exam

Revised: July 26, 2024