I Overview and Objectives

Many of the daily challenges managers face originate from a need to coordinate and control organizational and individual action to meet broader social objectives. Public managers who hope to address these challenges require an understanding of 1) the unique institutional context of organizations and 2) the behavior of individuals within these organizations. Such knowledge can help managers identify factors affecting organizational performance and can provide managers with tools to more fully realize organizational goals and resolve organizational problems.

In this course, we will examine several theories that seek to explain the actions of organizations (organization theory) and the behavior of individuals within organizations (organizational behavior). Our goal is two-fold: 1) to explore relevant research in public administration and 2) to bridge theory and practice in ways that will help you approach and successfully address complex management problems.

Upon completion of the course, you should have:

1. Gained a basic understanding of prominent organization theories and organizational behavior theories,

2. Acquired the knowledge and abilities necessary to think critically about organizational action and the behavior of individuals within organizations, and

3. Learned tools and strategies for understanding, interpreting, and responding to the internal and external contexts of public organizations.
II Instructional Methods

To meet these goals, this course uses readings, lectures, discussions, cases, and individual and group assignments. Readings provide an important foundation for class discussion and must be completed prior to each class. Lectures will be used to highlight key points from the readings and provide additional information to supplement the readings. Cases and assignments will give you the opportunity to apply what you have learned to real world issues and scenarios.

We will often discuss how researchers would (or should) go about answering practically important organization theory and organizational behavior questions. Doing this is a good way to think critically about how organization theory and organizational behavior apply to the real world. It is also a good way to think about how someone working inside an organization might go about designing an organizational intervention/policy that is intended to boost worker motivation and/or organizational performance.

III Required Materials

There is no textbook for the course. We will read original research published in academic journals. As noted above, I will supplement the readings with general comments and direction on the topics that we consider. Most class sessions cover two readings and a case study.

All course materials are posted at the following site (you do not need a dropbox account to access these materials): https://www.dropbox.com/sh/j0afemfvx4vxxm8/AAB3eBq4mKLqxp_d9KD02Uuya?dl=0

IV Policies and Points of Emphasis

- Some of the articles that we read use quantitative methods that you may not be familiar with. In these cases, try to get through as much of the methods portion of the articles as you can. It is not important that you fully understand the methods, but it is important that you understand an article’s substantive content. I will never test you explicitly on methodological issues, but we will sometimes discuss whether the data and measures used by the researcher are appropriate.

- During the course of our class meetings, we may not always get to every reading that is listed on the syllabus. Nevertheless, you are responsible for all readings.

- I use Blackboard to send group emails to the class. These emails go to your official GMU student email address, so please check this regularly or arrange for it to be forwarded automatically to a personal email account that you check daily.

- I respectfully request that you not use electronic devices, including laptops and cellphones, during class, as these distract from your engagement in class discussions. There will be a break during each class, and so you will have a chance to check your smartphone then. If
there is a special reason that you need to use a laptop in class, please discuss this with me in advance.

V Assignments

[1] **Class participation:** Your presence and active participation are expected at all class sessions. There are four prerequisites for successful participation:

(a) **Be here on time.** If you’re not here, you can’t contribute to class discussion. I understand that students sometimes have to arrive late to class or miss class. If this is the case, please notify me in advance. Although I will not directly penalize you for non-attendance, be aware that absences will indirectly hurt you by preventing you from participating in class, thereby lowering your participation grade.

(b) **Be prepared.** To contribute to class discussion, you must come to class having carefully completed all assigned readings.

(c) **Be willing to speak up.** You will get the most out of this course if you share your thoughts with one another. I expect each of you to participate fully in all class discussions. I also expect you to ask questions about things you don’t understand. Although this can be intimidating, asking questions helps your classmates, as well as you, by moving the discussion forward in a new direction. If you feel uncomfortable talking in class, please send me an email or set up an appointment to talk early in the semester.

(d) **Be courteous.** The final component of successful participation is treating your classmates in a respectful and professional manner. Listen carefully to the comments and questions that your classmates voice. You may learn something new from their perspectives, and you will be able to avoid simply repeating something that another classmate has said earlier in the discussion. Also, it is perfectly acceptable for you to voice disagreement with an opinion provided by another student; open debate often leads to the most thoughtful and informative class discussions. However, please voice your disagreement in a kind and considerate manner.

[2] **Research Paper:** In your paper, you will use the organization theory and organizational behavior literatures to answer a question that interests you. The paper should be about 12 pages long (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, one-inch margins, Times New Roman font), not counting references. Additional guidelines for the paper assignment are at the end of the syllabus.

A paper proposal is due no later than October 25th. The proposal should be no longer than 250 words. It should include the following: (1) your question, (2) an explanation of why it is important, (3) and at least five potential sources, all from peer-reviewed journals. The proposal is not graded and I will not return comments to you unless there is a problem with it. Its purpose is to let me know that you are on the right track. Though the proposal is not graded, you will lose points on your final paper if the proposal is late.

- **Research paper grading criteria:**
- **Organization and structure**: The assignment employs a logical framework and analyzes a critical issue.

- **Depth of analysis**: The assignment demonstrates a thorough consideration of relevant issues. The information is gathered from appropriate sources and is presented in a persuasive manner.

- **Creativity and insight**: The material is presented in an original, engaging, and interesting manner.

- **Integration with course readings, lectures, and discussions**: To the extent possible, the assignment draws on, applies, and seeks to extend the concepts covered in class.

- **Style**: The assignment is smoothly and professionally written, using appropriate grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

- **Timeliness**: The assignment is turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized.

[3] **Midterm and Final Exams**: The mid-term and final exams will consist of one or two essay questions. You will draw primarily on class lectures, discussions, and readings for your answers. Both exams are “open book” and “open note.” Details will be discussed in class.

  - **Exam Grading criteria**: High-quality exams are characterized by the following:

    - **Breadth**: they discuss all relevant concepts, theories, and issues in the course of constructing an argument.

    - **Analytical Depth**: they engage relevant material in a meaningful way; that is, they do more than repeat what is said in lectures and readings. They provide an argument, not a summary.

    - **Clarity**: they make sense; they are not characterized by vagueness.

    - **Justification**: assertions are backed up with evidence from the readings and lectures.

    - **Organization**: they are well-organized and free of egregious spelling and grammar errors.

    - **Connections**: they make connections between different sections of the course.

    - **Concreteness**: they bring in examples from the real world to illustrate theoretical concepts (these ideas can come from cases or from prominent current or past events; failing that, they can come from personal experience).

    - **Technical proficiency**: they do not make mistakes when discussing key theoretical concepts (e.g., they do not attribute a key theoretical concept to the wrong individual; they do not misinterpret a theoretical proposition).
Aesthetics and Intangibles: they are well-written; they display insight and sustained critical thinking.

VI Grading

Class participation  20%
Midterm exam       27.5%
Final exam         27.5%
Research paper     25%

VII Summary of Important Dates

Midterm exam          10/11
Research paper proposal 10/25
Research paper        12/6
Final exam            12/13

VIII Schedule

August 30             Introduction, the Economic Approach
September 6           How to Know Whether Something Works
September 13           Public and Private Organizations: Similarities and Differences
September 20           Structure and Political Control
September 27           Work Motivation I: Money
October 4              Work Motivation II: Love
October 11             Midterm Exam
October 18             Decisionmaking in Organizations
October 25             Groups and Teams
November 1             Race and Gender in Organizational Life
November 8             Leadership
November 15            Organizational Culture
November 22            No Class: Thanksgiving Break
November 29            Work-Life Balance
December 6             The Organization-Citizen Interface: Nudging Citizens
December 13            Final Exam
IX Course Outline

Introduction, the Economic Approach (8/30)


How to Know Whether Something Works (or, Doing Research on Organizations) (9/6)


Public vs. Private Organizations (9/13)


Structure and Political Control (9/20)


**Work Motivation I: Money** (9/27)


• Case study: “Wrong Answer: In an era of high-stakes testing, a struggling school made a shocking choice.” Rachel Aviv, *The New Yorker*, July 21, 2014

**Work Motivation II: Love** (10/4)


**Midterm Exam** (10/11)

**Decisionmaking in Organizations** 10/18)


**Groups and Teams** (10/25)


**Race and Gender in Organizational Life** (11/1)


• Case study: Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department, United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, March 4, 2015 (pp. 1–9; pp. 62–63; pp. 88–89; skim rest)

**Leadership** (11/8)


**Organizational Culture** (11/15)


• Case study:
Thanksgiving Break (11/22)

Work-Life Balance (11/29)


- Case study:

The Organization-Citizen Interface: Nudging Citizens (12/6)

- Social and Behavioral Sciences Team Annual Report, Executive Office of the President, September 2016


Final Exam (12/13)
Appendix: Research Paper Assignment

Purpose

The purpose of the paper is for you to answer a question that’s relevant to the organizational theory/organizational behavior fields. These are huge fields, and so there are many relevant questions. One of my past students has, for example, asked the following question: Are privately run prisons more or less effective than publicly run prisons? Another example: Do performance pay systems work? That is, do they motivate employees to work harder (and better)?

Almost any question that has to do with organizational performance or individual work motivation and/or performance is fair game. And there are other non-performance related questions that would be acceptable—questions having to do with organizational structure, for instance. If in doubt, ask me.

Content Guidelines

1. The paper should explain why the question you’re asking is important. Why does what you’re writing about matter? In other words, it should answer the “So what?” question.

2. The paper should be grounded in theory. For example, suppose you ask, Does the public sector outperform the nonprofit and for-profit sectors? In addition to reviewing what relevant existing studies have found, you should also discuss why we would expect—in theory—public and private sector organizations to perform differently. Another example: suppose you ask, How does goal ambiguity affect organizational performance? In addition to reviewing what existing studies have to say, you should also discuss why—in theory—we would expect goal ambiguity to affect organizational performance.

3. The paper should offer an evaluation of the quality of evidence offered by the existing empirical literature. Basically, do you believe what the studies you’re looking at say? Are they good or bad? While you may not be an expert in issues of research design, common sense goes a long way in this area. Common problems include studies not accounting for important factors (omitted variables) and measuring things in strange ways (measurement validity). For example: if a study claims to offer some evidence about teacher performance, does it measure teacher performance in a reasonably valid manner?

4. The paper should offer a (perhaps tentative) answer to the question it’s examining. Given the research you’ve reviewed, what do you think the answer to your question is? How confident are you in that answer (this will depend a lot on the quality of the evidence)? Would you feel comfortable/confident acting on the research you’ve reviewed?

5. The paper should cite a minimum of ten peer-reviewed journal articles.
Formatting

The paper should be no longer than 12 double-spaced pages (one inch margins, 12 pt. Times New Roman font), not including references. Please use in-text citations (Author, Year) to cite references, not footnotes or endnotes. For the works cited section, please use the APA citation style (see the link below): http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/1/.

Grading

In addition to assessing whether the paper meets the content guidelines described above, I will grade the paper based on the following criteria (also noted in the body of the syllabus):

- **Organization and structure**: The assignment employs a logical framework and analyzes a critical issue.
- **Depth of analysis**: The assignment demonstrates a thorough consideration of relevant issues. The information is gathered from appropriate sources and is presented in a persuasive manner.
- **Creativity and insight**: The material is presented in an original, engaging, and interesting manner.
- **Integration with course readings, lectures, and discussions**: To the extent possible, the assignment draws on, applies, and seeks to extend the concepts covered in class.
- **Style**: The assignment is smoothly and professionally written, using appropriate grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- **Timeliness**: The assignment is turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized.