

Sociology 246: Starting a Business or Nonprofit? Lessons from Sociology

TuTh 9:30-10:45AM | Diamond 221

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Office Hours Tuesdays 11:00-1:00

Description:

From Silicon Valley startups to grassroots political campaigns, there are many ways to organize people in order to accomplish collective goals. But how do organizations succeed in competitive environments? What can managers do to ensure employee cooperation? Which business models are most likely to thrive in the new economy? We will read cutting-edge scholarship from sociology and organizational studies to understand what organizations are and how they work. We will extend insights from a wide variety of case studies to discuss different approaches to solving common problems faced by new and changing organizations, with a particular focus on how different organizations foster innovation.

This course is designed as an introduction to organizational theory and innovation studies that can be applied to understand and intervene in formal collaborative enterprises. You will have opportunities to explore your plans for organizing by examining the problems of innovation from two perspectives. We will discuss innovation *of* organizations by examining ecological and market influences on organizational structure, infrastructure and enabling technologies for collaboration, and models of social entrepreneurship. We will also explore possibilities for innovation *in* organizations by addressing how distributed cognition and social learning enable growth and change, how humans interact with their material environments in completing work tasks, and the role of ethics and culture in animating collective enterprises. Your final projects will allow you to apply the abstract concepts you learn in this course to real-world problems you identify in your prospective sector.

Assigned Texts:

1. Nina Eliasoph. 2011. *Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2. Janet Vertesi. 2015. *Seeing Like a Rover: How Robots, Teams, and Images Craft Knowledge of Mars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. (*) Select articles and book chapters posted to Moodle

Evaluation:

Weekly reading responses (due every Thursday after week 1)	20%
Final paper (due April 24)	30%
Group project presentation (May 1 or 3)	15%
Individual memo on group project (due May 1 or 3)	20%

Participation

15%

Course Schedule:

Week	Topic	Required Reading
1.2: Thursday, 2/8	NO CLASS	N/A
2.1: Tuesday, 2/13	How and where do organizations emerge? Fields and ecologies, regulators and markets	*George Ritzer. 2015. <i>The McDonaldization of Society</i> , 8th edition. Los Angeles: SAGE: Ch. 1 and 2.
2.2: Thursday, 2/15	Why do organizations tend to look similar? Institutional logics, formal structures, and isomorphism	*Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 83 (2): 340–63.
3.1: Tuesday, 2/20	Organizing in and around institutions: Inhabited institutionalism	*Binder, Amy. 2007. "For Love and Money: One Organization's Creative and Multiple Responses to a New Funding Environment." <i>Theory and Society</i> 36:547-71.
3.2: Thursday, 2/22	How do markets drive adaptation? The emergence of social entrepreneurship	*Barman, Emily. <i>Caring Capitalism: Measure, Mission, and Market</i> . Oxford: Cambridge University Press: Introduction and Ch. 1
4.1: Tuesday, 2/27	How do organizations innovate to adapt? Hybrid models of capitalism and philanthropy	*Barman, Emily. <i>Caring Capitalism: Measure, Mission, and Market</i> . Oxford: Cambridge University Press: Ch. 7
4.2: Thursday, 3/1	Hybrid models in a global economy: Social learning and the surprising case of an innovative federal bureaucracy	*Aviles, Natalie. 2018. "Situated practice and the emergence of ethical research: HPV vaccine development and organizational cultures of translation at the National Cancer Institute, 1991-2008." <i>Science, Technology, and Human Values</i> .
5.1: Tuesday, 3/6	Theorizing beyond the for-profit firm: Organizing volunteerism for civic action	Eliasoph, <i>Making Volunteers</i> : Introduction and Ch. 1
5.2: Thursday, 3/8	Motivating cooperation in voluntary organizations	Eliasoph, <i>Making Volunteers</i> : Ch. 5 and 6
6.1: Tuesday, 3/13	Conceptualizing and cultivating diversity in organizations	Eliasoph, <i>Making Volunteers</i> : Ch. 12

Week	Topic	Required Reading
6.2: Thursday, 3/15	Mitigation and management in open organizations	Eliasoph, <i>Making Volunteers</i> : Conclusion
7.1: Tuesday, 3/20	Putting your passion into your business	*Fine, Gary Alan. 2009. <i>Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press: Ch. 5.
7.2: Thursday, 3/22	Rethinking organizational culture from the ground up	*Fine, Gary Alan. 2009. <i>Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press: Ch. 7 and 8.
8.1: Tuesday, 3/27	NO CLASS (Spring recess)	N/A
8.2: Thursday, 3/29	NO CLASS (Spring recess)	N/A
9.1: Tuesday, 4/3	Promises and perils of social media as an organizing tool	*Tufecki, Zeynep. 2017. <i>Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest</i> . Yale University Press: Introduction and Ch. 3.
9.2: Thursday, 4/5	Start-ups: The geography and demographics of high-tech entrepreneurship	*Peter Thiel and Blake Masters. 2014. <i>Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future</i> . New York: Crown Business. Ch. 10 and 14.
10.1: Tuesday, 4/10	When algorithms ruled the world: Finance as a case study	*Pardo-Guerra, Juan Pablo. 2013. "Trillions Out of Ones and Zeros: The Sociology of Finance Encounters the Digital Age" in <i>Digital Sociology: Critical Perspectives</i> . Eds. Kate Orton-Johnson and Nick Prior. Palgrave: Basingstoke.
10.2: Thursday, 4/12	Work at a distance: Informational infrastructures and enabling technologies	*Sassen, Saskia. 2017. "Digital Cultures of Use and their Infrastructures" in <i>The Sociology of Speed: Digital, Organizational, and Social Temporalities</i> . Eds. Judy Wajcman and Nigel Dodd. Oxford University Press: New York, NY.
11.1: Tuesday, 4/17	Paperwork and photographs: How material artifacts make bureaucracies	Vertesi, <i>Seeing Like a Rover</i> : Ch. 1
11.2: Thursday, 4/19	Heterarchy and distributed cognition: Structuring organizations for innovation	Vertesi, <i>Seeing Like a Rover</i> : Ch. 5
12.1: Tuesday, 4/24	Blurring the lines between people and technology: Frontiers of organizational theory	Vertesi, <i>Seeing Like a Rover</i> : Ch. 6 and Conclusion

Week	Topic	Required Reading
12.2: Thursday, 4/26	Critical reflections: Diversity in the new economy	Peter F. Drucker. 2002. "The Discipline of Innovation" <i>Harvard Business Review</i>. August.
13.1: Tuesday, 5/1	Critical reflections: Tesla and the consequences of crowdsourcing safety	*Stilgoe, Jack. 2018. "Machine learning, social learning and the governance of self-driving cars." <i>Social Studies of Science</i> .
13.2: Thursday, 5/3	NO CLASS (Colby Liberal Arts Symposium)	N/A
14.1: Tuesday, 5/8	Group presentations – Groups A and B	N/A
14.2: Thursday, 5/10	Group presentations – Groups C and D	N/A

Expectations:

Assigned readings are listed on the syllabus according to the day they will be discussed. You are expected to have completed these readings prior to coming to class on the day we discuss the relevant material. This course is taught in a seminar style. As such, you are expected to come to class prepared to actively participate in discussions about the reading assigned for that day. Always bring a copy of the assigned material to class.

Attendance in seminar is mandatory. If you must miss more than 3 class sessions it is important you notify me or your advising dean.

While you are welcome to study with other students, your weekly responses and final paper should reflect your individual intellectual effort appropriately applied to the class assignments. Group work should reflect the combined efforts of your group members only, and copying or collaboration across groups is not permitted. I take academic integrity very seriously and will forward any suspected academic integrity violations to the appropriate disciplinary body.

If you are concerned about your ability to complete any of these assignments in a timely manner, please communicate with me well in advance. I will always consider granting extensions where they are appropriate.