Organizational Concepts and Theories (EAC 787)
Department of Adult and Higher Education
Spring 2009
Tuesdays 4:30-7:15

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Purpose and Objectives

Colleges and universities are large, complex systems. When examining postsecondary education through an organizational lens, we take a broad view by looking at the entire system internally and externally, not simply as divisions, departments, or functions. Organizational analysis emphasizes conceptual models and the ways we can overlay these models on real institutional contexts and problems. In addition to understanding and applying these conceptual frames, we also explore issues of leadership and organizational change.

The primary goals of this course are to examine a vast array of theory, research, and literature on organizations, particularly higher education organizations and their management, and to develop the ability to think critically about colleges and universities as organizations. The specific course objectives are:

- To explore the breadth of literature related to organizational theory both inside and outside the field of higher education (e.g. business, psychology, economics, sociology, political science).
- To apply organizational theory to institutional problems and situations.
- To think as a generalists rather than as a student affairs administrators, registrars, institutional researchers, instructors, or financial officers. This means thinking at a variety of levels simultaneously – exploring internal and external forces, across different administrative offices, and from a university-wide perspective. This develops a systems approach and allows for engagement in complex critical thinking;
- To enhance understanding of other course work by providing an organizational context for issues and topics related to curriculum, finance, students, etc.
- To develop the capacity to work with different education constituencies by understanding the multiple cultures that develop within organizations.
- To learn about the various external influences that impact educational organizations and the many differences among organizations within postsecondary education.
- To develop an understanding of some of the perennial problems of organizations such as inadequate structure, dysfunctional culture, miscommunication, shortcomings of leadership, cultural conflict.
- To refine skills of analysis, synthesis, and communication concerning issues and ideas salient to organizations.
- To create a specialized knowledge on organizations for advanced graduate work such as theses, comprehensive exams, and dissertations.

This course is primarily intended for graduate students with interest in the areas of higher education, policy analysis, student affairs, educational leadership, public administration, urban and regional planning, and other kindred fields both inside and outside the college of education. I designed this course especially for those who are currently in, or are preparing for, professional positions that emphasize
administrative, academic, research, student affairs, policy analysis, institutional research, or consultative roles related to higher and adult education in institutions or agencies in the public or private sectors.

### Valuing Diversity

It is my belief that the diversity you bring to this class is a valuable resource because varied backgrounds and opinions enhance discussion. Research, including some of my own, suggests that learning is improved by exposure to diversity in the classroom. It is my intent to present materials and activities that utilize and are respectful of diversity: gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, and other background characteristics. I welcome and appreciate your suggestions about how to improve the value of diversity in this course. Please let me know of ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you or for other students or student groups.

I also understand that you may celebrate religious holidays that conflict with the class schedule or may have a disability that requires special accommodations. You will not be penalized because of observances of your religious beliefs. Whenever possible, I will give you reasonable time to make up any academic assignment that is missed due to participation in a religious observance. It is your responsibility to inform me as soon as possible of any intended absences for religious observances.

I will make reasonable accommodations for students with verifiable disabilities. A student with a documented disability or any other special need who wishes to discuss academic accommodations should contact me as soon as possible. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services for Students at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509, 515-7653, [http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm_action/dss/](http://www.ncsu.edu/provost/offices/affirm_action/dss/).

### Academic Honesty

I expect you to abide by the code of academic integrity throughout this course and all other courses at North Carolina State University. I encourage you to collaborate with others as you think about, outline, and proofread your work. However, oral and written work must be your own, unless explicitly noted in the syllabus. You must acknowledge any scholars or classmates whose work you quote or refer to in any way. In addition, you must not turn in any written work for which they have already received credit in another course. I will not tolerate academic dishonesty, including cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism and will report any violations to the Dean of the Graduate School (or designee). For specific definitions or examples of academic dishonesty and nonacademic misconduct with possible sanctions, see the NC State Code of Student Conduct at [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/student_services/student_conduct/POL445.00.1.htm](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/student_services/student_conduct/POL445.00.1.htm). If you have questions about the code, or your obligations under the code, please contact the Director of Office of Student Conduct (919) 515-2963.

### Readings

**Required texts** (available at the bookstore and from most electronic booksellers):


**Recommended text** (available at the bookstore and from most electronic booksellers):

Other Readings – Required and additional:
In addition to the required texts listed above, you will read additional book chapters and articles. I have been placed all of them on electronic reserve (noted with an * in course schedule) on VISTA at http://vista.ncsu.edu/. I provide both required and additional readings; you are NOT required to read the additional readings (hence the name ☺) that I provide. Some might be useful as you work on the written assignments for the course. They also are there for students who want more information on a topic or for those who seek a different perspective than what is presented in our required readings. Below is a list of references where I draw some of our readings and other books and journals that I have found useful in understanding colleges and universities.


Journals and periodicals (to name a few):

- *Academy of Management Review*
- *Administrative Science Quarterly*
- *American Journal of Sociology*
- *American Sociological Review*
- *Economics of Education Review*
- *Educational Policy*
- *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory & Research*
- *Journal of Higher Education*
- *Review of Higher Education*
- *Research in Higher Education*
- *Sociology of Education*

**Lecture Presentations and Other Materials**

When appropriate, I will post lecture/discussion slides on the VISTA course website by 2pm the day of class. I will notify you via e-mail if/when the slides are available. You may find it useful to bring a printed copy of them to class. I also will post other materials on the course website including assignments and handouts.

**Methods of Instruction and Course Expectations**

I employ a variety of approaches of instruction and rely heavily on your active participation in class discussions and activities. I will evaluate you on a combination of individual assignments, group work, and class participation.

1. **Class participation**—(10%) A large body of research suggests that active involvement in class enhances student learning. You not only learn from others, but you also learn by articulating your thoughts and getting feedback from your peers. Therefore, I designate a portion of your grade to class participation. The participation grade is not merely a grade for attending class – participation credit is earned through active involvement in class discussions, small and large groups, and so forth. I expect you to attend and to be involved actively in the class. I expect you to participate in discussions in a manner that demonstrates thoughtful reflection and understanding of the subject matter, as well as respect for your colleagues in the class. To do so, you must complete the readings that are assigned for each session of the class prior to attending that class session. Active participation also means that you are willing to listen to other points of view and to change his or her mind. This means you must listen to others, respond thoughtfully, demonstrate an understanding of the issues, and show a willingness to learn and grow.
Please note that class attendance is required and is included in the class participation grade. If an absence is unavoidable, notify me in advance by electronic mail. Two absences will result in a significantly lower course grade. Three absences will result in a grade of “F”. Arriving late or leaving early constitutes a partial absence; I consider two partial absences as one missed class. Absence from class to observe a religious holiday, to serve jury duty, to participate in required military service, or to take comprehensive exams in your graduate program are exceptions to the above policy.

2. **Organizational theory in the news**—(15%) You will enrich your understanding of organizations by frequently making connections between principles discussed in class and real-world situations. In addition to relating class issues to your own work situation, you can make connections by noting articles in the press about organizational issues. Our focus is on higher education organizations; therefore, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* are the most helpful sources. I will randomly assign you to one class period in which you will choose an article from the press relating to the topic of that particular class. You should email a link to the article, along with a one paragraph abstract of the article, to the entire class and the instructor by 5pm the Sunday before your presentation. You will give a 15 minute presentation (2-3 minutes for article overview, 7-8 minutes for readings analysis, and 5-7 minutes for discussion facilitation). Questions to address in the presentation include, but are not limited to the following:
   a. What are the key issues in the article (be brief)?
   b. What additional information can you add?
   c. What connections can you make to the course readings for the day?
   d. In what ways can the readings help describe or explain the situation?
   e. How can the readings help inform the situation?
   f. What information is missing that would help better describe, explain, or predict the situation?

3. **In-class position papers**—(20%) Three times (unannounced) during the semester, you will construct a brief position papers (approximately 15 minutes of writing) based on the week’s readings in response to prompts that I provide. The higher education faculty consider the material from this course as core material for the doctoral comprehensive exams in the higher education program. Therefore, it is important to develop a command of the concepts covered in this course. This exercise ensures comprehension of the readings while also allowing you to practice recollection, succinct and clear presentation of ideas, and application of theory, skills that are necessary to be successful during the comprehensive examinations. I expect you to refer directly to our readings for the week when making your argument.

4. **Case Analysis**—(25%) You will analyze a case description that I will give you week 7 (February 24). You should come prepared to discuss the case on March 24 (week 11). You should also prepare a case analysis (five to seven double-spaced pages) for submission on our course website prior to the class session. Student consideration of the case should focus upon five questions: (1) what are the basic empirical facts of the problem; (2) what are its causes or antecedents; (3) what other information is needed; (4) in what ways do the theories and concepts from our class readings inform the case; (5) and what kind of action seems warranted? Keep in mind that the assignment calls for you to make judgments about what is core to the problem at hand and what is peripheral and irrelevant, and the evaluation of the case analysis attends more to your insight, effort, and engagement than to whether or not a “correct” response is provided (in fact, there is no single correct answer to the assignment). A good analysis is guided by and makes frequent reference to our readings.

5. **Group project**—(30%) You will form and work in teams of three to develop a term paper and presentation. Over the semester you will construct a 15-20 page paper (double-spaced) in which you identify a problem within an organization. Select a problem within an organization or unit (department, college, community college, university) to analyze and use three of the conceptual
frames or theories examined in this course (e.g., human resource, political, bureaucratic, cultural, environmental) to guide your discussion. I must approve your topic. This project should begin early in the course. The project includes the following steps:

1. Explore opportunities for finding a problem in a higher education institution and/or unit to serve as the case study for the theory.
2. Select specific case/problem and discuss the initial team tasks to be completed in preparation for the presentation and paper. Coordinate tasks among team members.
3. As the semester develops, consider the problem using the different concepts covered in the class.
4. Select three of the frames or concepts that you will use to analyze your case.
5. Collect relevant information and propose a change to the organizational structure and/or behaviors and/or solution to the problem with reference to the scholarly literature.
6. Organize a 30-minute in-class presentation that will elicit discussion. The presentations should include suitable audio-visual aids and handouts.

**Brief description of problem**

You will provide me with a brief description (2-3 double-spaced pages) of the organizational problem prior to class on week 4 (February 3). Be sure to consider the following in your description:

1. Be careful in developing your problem. This ends up being much more difficult than you might expect.
2. A problem statement is not just a listing of a situation.
3. Be sure your problem is narrowly defined. Do not list an assortment of problems. The paper needs focus.
4. Make sure it is an organizational problem. Parking on campus might be an organizational problem, but it might be an architectural issue.
5. Provide evidence or symptoms of the problem. Convince me it exists.
6. It is not advisable to pick a problem for which you are deeply and personally embedded. You need to be able to examine the situation objectively. If the issue is extremely personal, write a section where you describe your biases.

**Final Paper**

The final paper should incorporate the various lenses. The paper should build on and develop theories that worked particularly well in explaining the problem. It may be useful, although not necessary, to note why other lenses were not helpful. Although it may be a good way to begin the project, the paper should not be a compilation of three separate papers authored by each group member that you cut and paste together. You need to develop a comprehensive and coherent argument. I recommend you follow a two step process. First diagnose the problem then conduct a critical analysis.

1. The final paper should have a one page revised description of the problem with the key elements as you see them at the end of the term.
2. The longest section should be your analysis through the various frames. Focus on the frames where they helped you to examine the issue most.
3. The paper should conclude with a set of recommendations for resolving the issue.
Final Paper Presentation
For the final paper presentation, you will develop a presentation based on the paper, explaining the problem, your analysis of the issue, and some possible resolutions or next moves to address the problem. Presentations should be in a professional manner using PowerPoint or handouts. It is important that your presentation elicits discussion. You will have 30 minutes for your presentation and discussion. I will randomly assign groups to present during either week 13 or 15 (April 7 or 21). Some tips:
1. Do not spend too much time on your problem and leave too little time for analysis.
2. Do not focus your presentation on lenses that did not help you understand the problem.
3. Be sure to find a way to get the class involved (e.g., discussion, activity).
4. Practice and time yourself.

Due Date & Grading
The final paper is due week 15 (April 21). The overall project is worth 30 points (out of 100) toward your final grade—5 points for peer analysis of effort, 5 points for presentation, and 20 points for final paper.

→ Please submit all written assignments to the VISTA course website prior to the class meeting when they are due. Please do not email them to me or submit paper copies, as I tend to lose things in the electronic and paper shuffle.

→ Note: All assignments should be turned in on time unless other arrangements are made well in advance of deadlines. I WILL NOT accept any late assignments.

→ Please practice oral presentations, both group and individual, to ensure that you adhere to the time allotted. If you go over time, I will cut your presentation short and will deduct points for the assignment grade.

→ All formal written work should adhere to APA style as described in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th Ed.).

Grading
Your final grade for this class will be based upon the following:

| Participation | 10 points |
| Organizational theory in the news | 15 points |
| In-class position papers | 20 points |
| Case analysis | 25 points |
| Organizational analysis group project | 30 points |

Your final grade will be calculated using the following scale:

| 97—100 points | A+ |
| 93—96.9 points | A |
| 90—92.9 points | A- |
| 87—89.9 points | B+ |
| 83—86.9 points | B |
| 80—82.9 points | B- |
| 77—79.9 points | C+ |
| 73—76.9 points | C |
| 70—72.9 points | C- |

I strongly discourage incomplete grades. I have seen numerous cases where students become overwhelmed trying to wrap-up incomplete grades. Because a large portion of your grade is dependent on group work, assigning an incomplete grade comes with added complications. If it is absolutely necessary for you to take an incomplete, you must arrange it with me prior to March 24.

Instructor Responsibilities
I have high expectations not only for you but also for myself. You should expect that I will:
• Be prepared for class, read and return your work in a timely manner, and be interested and engaged in your work;
• remember that each of you brings a different background, experience, and perspective to this course;
• learn from you;
• meet with you individually or in groups upon request and be available in person, by telephone, and by e-mail;
• and work hard, have fun, and empower you to develop greater understandings of the topics that are covered in this course.

Course Schedule
There are any number of ways to approach the study of colleges and universities as organizations. I structure the course schedule around the main concepts of organizational theory and its various applications to colleges and universities. We begin the class by reading Birnbaum’s *How Colleges Work*, a fundamental text on the organization of colleges and universities. This book gives us a common language to discuss how we apply organizational theory to complex organizations; you will notice that we revisit it throughout the semester. We then begin to explore organizational theory, in general, followed by an examination several theoretical lenses through which to examine organizations. We end the semester by synthesizing the various frames and theories and exploring relevant topics such as decision making, leadership, and organizational change. The course concludes with a capstone experience, the final group paper and presentation.

Throughout the course schedule, I offer several “questions to consider” as you are doing your weekly readings. These should help guide your reading and should help you integrate the various readings within and across weeks. They will also help frame our discussions of the readings.

It is my experience that every class moves at its own pace. That being said, there may be times throughout the semester where I need to make adjustments to the schedule, assigned readings, and/or assignments. I reserve the right to make these changes, in consultation with the class, and will post the revised syllabus on our course website.

Schedule key: * - Available on course website ([http://vista.ncsu.edu/](http://vista.ncsu.edu/))


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**Week 1, January 13** – Introductions, expectations, and setting the stage

**Week 2, January 20** – Getting started: Introduction to higher education as a complex organization

**Required readings:**
Birnbaum – entire book

**Additional readings:**
Questions to consider: Along what lines do different institution types differ? That is, how are their basic characteristics, interactions among people within in, coupling, and measures of effectiveness different? And how does institution type matter in American higher education – how does it shape the experiences of faculty and administrators? What organizational characteristics mark American higher education? And is higher education inherently poorly run because it is so loosely coupled and subject to constraints and challenges not found in other organizational types, particularly corporations? Is any amount of predictability possible in organizations when sensemaking and culture is not rational? Is predictability even desirable? Does Birnbaum’s framework of four institution types – the collegial, bureaucratic, political, and anarchical – resonate with you? What is the cybernetic institution? Is this concept potentially useful in improving the management of American higher education? Two decades since its publication, is the Birnbaum book still relevant?

**Week 3, January 27 – Organizational theory**

**Required readings:**
B & D – Chapters 1-2 (p. 3-44)

**Select ONE of the following:**

**Additional readings:**
Birnbaum – Chapter 1 (p. 3-29)

Questions to consider: What is theory? What is organizational theory, and how does it apply to colleges and universities? How are higher education organizations distinct from other organizations? How do we talk about and view higher education organization? Why are colleges and universities so complex? How do theories such as institutional isomorphism apply to colleges and universities?

**Week 4, February 3 – Structure & bureaucracy**

**Required readings:**
B & D – Chapters 3-5 (p. 45-118)
Additional readings:
Birnbaum – Chapters 3 & 5 (p. 56-82, 105-127)
Morgan – Chapter 2 (p. 11-32)

Questions to consider: How do structures impact organizational processes? What elements of the higher education system are noted as being reinforced by certain structures? How do structures reify behaviors and patterns of activity? What are the strengths and weakness of this lens for understanding higher education institutions? How do professionals and faculty fit into a bureaucratic structure? Think about the various organizational structures (trustees and boards, academic freedom, tenure, collective bargaining, faculty senate)? What are accountability, autonomy, professional power, and organization of work?

Assignment due: Description of problem for group project

Week 5, February 10 – Organizations & their environments

Required readings:
*Morgan – Chapter 3 (p. 33-70)

Additional readings:
Birnbaum – Chapter 2 (p. 30-55)

Questions to consider: How does the external environment impact organizations and organizational processes? To what degree are higher education institutions affected by the external environment? How do campuses respond to resource reduction or expansion? What is adaptation and population ecology? What are the strengths and weakness of this lens for understanding higher education institutions? To what extent do colleges and universities act like firms? Is it useful to think of colleges as businesses?

Week 6, February 17 – Human resources & collegial

Required readings:
B & D – Chapters 6-8 (p. 119-190)

Additional readings:
Birnbaum – Chapter 4 (p. 85-104)
Questions to consider: To what degree are organizations defined by the people within them? How do intergroup relations, interpersonal skills, and development impact organizational processes? How do the assumptions of human resources theories translate into higher education? What is a collegium? What are
the strengths and weakness of this lens for understanding higher education institutions? Does shared governance work? Does shared governance enhance the success of colleges and universities? What role do faculty senates play in organizational functioning?

**Week 7, February 24 – Politics & the marketplace**

**Required readings:**
B & D – Chapters 9-11 (p. 191-250)

**Additional readings:**
Birnbaum – Chapter 6 (p. 128-150)
Morgan – Chapter 6 (p.149-206)

**Questions to consider:** What are the major characteristics of the political organization? How do the assumptions of the political model relate to principles you read about in Birnbaum? What are the strengths and weakness of this lens for understanding higher education institutions? What is academic capitalism? To what extent do you agree with Slaughter and Rhoades’ argument about academic capitalism? In what ways does academic capitalism affect the way colleges and universities are organized and governed?

**Week 8, March 3 – No class (spring break)**

**Week 9, March 10 – Culture and symbolism**

**Required readings:**
B & D – Chapters 12-14 (p. 251-310)

**Additional readings:**
Morgan – Chapter 5 (p. 115-148)
Questions to consider: What is culture? How has it been defined differently? How does it impact the institution? What are myths, rituals, stories and metaphors? How is culture different than climate? How do the assumptions of the cultural model relate to principles you read about in Birnbaum? What are the strengths and weakness of this lens for understanding higher education institutions? In what ways does institutional theory help us understand how colleges and universities are organized?

Week 10, March 17 – Domination

Required readings:
* Morgan – Chapter 9 (p. 291-336)

Additional readings:

Questions to consider: Is domination a useful metaphor for colleges and universities? Why or why not? Does the metaphor still apply? What are the strengths and weakness of this lens for understanding higher education institutions? What is institutional racism and sexism? How can we overcome domination? Are there emancipatory organizational practices?

Week 11, March 24 – Synthesis & decision making

Required readings:
B & D – Chapters 15 & 16 (p. 311-340)

Additional readings:
Birnbaum – Chapters 7-8 (p. 151-200)
Morgan – Chapters 10 & 11 (p. 337-366)

Questions to consider: How do the frames fit together? How does the integration of the frames help us understand how colleges and universities are organized and behave? How do organizations make decisions? Specifically, how do colleges and universities make decisions? How do members of organizations make decisions? What role does information play in making decisions?

Assignment due: Case analysis

Week 12, March 31 – Leadership & change

Required readings:
B & D – Chapters 17, 18, & 20 (p. 341-396, 411-434)

**Additional readings:**
Birnbaum – Chapter 9 (p. 201-229)
Morgan – Chapter 8 (p. 241-290)

**Questions to consider:** How does higher education change? How do leaders change colleges and universities? Can they? What insight do the frames we studied this semester give us in terms of leadership and change? Can a president transform a college or university? How much authority does a president have?

**Week 13, April 7 – Group presentations**

**Week 14, April 14 – AERA (no class) – Work on your group project**

**Week 15, April 21 – Group presentations**

**Assignment due: Group project**
## Course Overview

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