Organizational Behavior
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Seminar Goals

This seminar is designed to provide an introduction to some of the most seminal papers published in the field of organizational behavior with a particular focus on classic and contemporary theories, ongoing controversies, and ground breaking empirical studies. The emphasis will be on providing the foundations to the linkage between theory and research in OB. Because in it is impossible to complete an exhaustive overview of the OB field in few meetings, we will selectively explore some topics to give you a sufficient lay of the land.

Class Structure

Becoming fluid (or at least conversationally fluent) in organizational behavior is an enormous task, one which I am only coming to grips with a decade into the profession. This means that there is a LOT to cover, and to read, on the journey. Thus, I have designed the course so that, each week, you will be required to read a few overview/theory/review papers, and are intended to give you a “lay of the land” on that particular topic, as well as a set of empirical papers.

My choice of these articles is driven by (1) the intention to showcase the most important (in some people’s view) papers on a given topic, as well as (2) the desire to introduce you to the many types of approaches/analytic methods/journal norms there are in the field.

One of the main responsibilities of a PhD student, and indeed of an academic, is to learn how to read, digest, integrate, and explain the fundamental premise, predictions, and findings of other key papers. This class is designed to help you hone that skill, as well as provide you with a background in some of the key concepts and background in the area of OB.

Evaluation Criteria

Coursework in PhD courses is often not very useful. My evaluation criteria for this course are based on (1) meeting the important objective of becoming as fluent as possible in the field of OB, while (2) helping develop your expertise as a generator of new research ideas and writing papers.

Class Preparation and Contributions: 40%

First….a note on attendance

Given the nature of this course, it is essential that you attend each class meeting. The vast majority of the learning that takes place in this course occurs during our class meetings where we discuss the readings at length. If you must miss a class meeting, please discuss that with me in advance. Of course, if something serious arises (e.g., sickness, family problems, etc.), I will obviously be accommodating. In addition, part of showing up to class involves showing up on time. It is inconsiderate to your
classmates to be late for a class meeting and to miss a portion of the class discussion.

Class participation

While attendance is essential, active participation is also critical—you must be both physically and mentally in attendance. Your primary assignment in this course is to be actively engaged in class discussions. This means becoming immersed in the readings and showing up prepared to have a lively, vigorous discussion about the readings and to be willing to take risks in what you’re saying.

In reading the papers and articles for each meeting you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. What is the research question this paper is trying to answer?
2. What are the main theories/research traditions the paper draws upon?
3. What is the main contribution of the paper? How did the paper advance the literature, in your view?
4. What did you find most compelling about the paper (argument, predictions, methods, data, analysis, conclusions, implications)? Least compelling?
5. What interesting questions arose for you as you were analyzing this paper? What new ideas or questions did it inspire in you?

Discussion Leader

Each week one student will be in charge of one paper, where you will prepare to explain what the paper contributes, and your thoughts on what gaps it fills and which it leaves open. In other words, answering the five questions above. It does not mean simply summarizing the readings, but rather being prepared to offer a few questions and comments that hopefully begin a deep discussion of the main issues, strengths, weaknesses, controversies, and gaps in the readings for a particular week.

Research Proposal: 50%

Your job as a PhD student is to learn how to read and integrate the existing knowledge in the field, so you can develop and contribute new understandings to the field. The research proposal should be a 15-20 page paper, providing a theoretically compelling and empirically testable idea. Ideally, this will lead to publishable work.

On November 30, a 5-7 page outline of the idea you are working on will be due. On December 5, the instructor, as well as one or two other students (depending on enrollment) will have read the paper and provide 1-2 pages of feedback to the authors. The final paper will be due by December 21.

Most commonly, what you write in a PhD class goes nowhere. Ideally, that wouldn’t happen as often as it does. Thus, for this paper I would like you to focus on (1) an idea that really compels you, (2) that you can clearly articulate in a research question, (3) and theorize about in a way that leads to testable hypotheses, (4) that can be tested empirically using realistically-collectable data. If you design and deliver such a product, and would like my help in trying to execute the study, I will do so. A paper that started as an idea in a first year PhD class I taught in 2007 was actually published last year in Organization Science, so it can be done.

**Peer Feedback: 10%**

Another core competency of an academic is to provide constructive and helpful feedback (peer review) to others. Therefore, you will be required to read at least two of your peers’ papers, and provide them with 1-2 pages of your thoughts on what is most interesting about the idea, aspects of the theory or design that you find unclear or believe could be improved, suggestions for making the project more compelling, either theoretically or empirically.

**Topics**

We meet for 6 sessions, for two, 2-hour sessions each day. This is not very long. Therefore, the landscape the course overviews is necessarily biased towards my interests and expertise, and is therefore necessarily incomplete. I borrow a paragraph from Susan Ashford’s (University of Michigan) PhD OB syllabus, which rings true: “The field of what could be called “micro OB” is enormous! Despite this, my job is to walk with you on a “guided tour” of the terrain. To do so, I plan to: (1) help you develop a framework to serve as a map of the territory (to help you make some sense of it), (2) point out the most important landmarks and (3) lead you down what I hope will be fruitful paths for your own learning. There will be plenty of “sights” that we will not see and “history” that we will not have a chance to tell. Frequent return visits are recommended! Other goals include helping you to become better “explorers” of literatures yourselves and more capable “builders” of new landmarks for future generations.”

**November 7**  What is organizational behaviour? How to read and write in OB

**November 14** Individual differences and attitudes

Identity

**November 22** Affect

Cognition

**November 28** Leaders

Teams

**December 5** Team Structure

Team Process

**December 12** Prosocial behaviour

Antisocial behaviour

**Session 1: What is organizational behavior and How to read and write in OB**

**What is organizational behaviour?**


**How to read and write OB**


**Session 2: Individual differences and attitudes & Identity**

**Individual Differences and Attitudes**


**Further reading:**


**Identity**


**Further reading:**


**Session 3: Affect & Cognition**

**Affect**


Additional readings:


**Cognition**


**Additional readings:**


Session 4: Leaders & Teams

Leaders

Overview papers:


Additional readings:


Teams


Additional readings:


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Session 5: Team Structure & Team Process

**Team Structure**


Additional readings:


Team Process

Overview papers:


Additional readings:


Session 6: Prosocial Behaviors/Outcomes & Antisocial Behaviors/Outcomes

Prosocial Behaviors/Outcomes


Additional readings:


Antisocial Behaviors/Outcomes


Additional readings:

