Substantive Area: Sociology of Organizations

Date: June 2020

Overall Scope & Expectations

The act of reading and synthesizing excellent prior scholarship is an important step to cultivating the ability to participate in research as a professional; that is, the journey is as valuable as the end product. Passing exams demonstrate (a) a breadth and depth of familiarity with the theoretical and methodological issues in organizations scholarship, both classical and contemporary; (b) an ability in writing to organize well the theories, issues, debates, and arguments in the field; (c) a capacity to critically evaluate the intellectual and evidential merits of major positions and research programs in the field; and (d) an ability to take a position on the issue or debate in question and make a reasoned argument drawing on relevant evidence.

To accomplish these goals, as you read, we strongly encourage you to think both with depth and breadth, and to showcase both skills in your exam answers. Depth means being able to retain important detailed information about some arguments, theories, or evidence. Breadth involves being able to demonstrate synthetic thinking, identifying commonalities and discrepancies between works, or changes in general patterns in the field over time. Excellent exam answers also demonstrate the ability to identify critical gaps or problems in prior scholarship and point to productive future research directions -- a core skill of professional academic practice.

Organizational scholarship is a vast and rich interdisciplinary field that draws together social scientific work by sociologists, social psychologists, economists, political scientists, cultural anthropologists, and management scholars. Broadly, this subfield seeks to understand the origins, structure and dynamics of complex organizations, and their relationship to their environment. Students will be expected to be familiar with key issues, the dominant theoretical perspectives, and the latest empirical research in the field. Some core issues include:

- What are "organizations"? Why and how do people organize collectively? How is an organizational lens distinctive from the analytic gaze of other subfields of sociology? How is a sociological approach to organizations distinctive from that of other disciplines in the organizations subfield?
- How can we study organizing or organizations sociologically? What are the dominant methodological approaches that have been used to effectively analyze social organization? What are the strengths and weaknesses of different methodological approaches, especially vis-a-vis larger theoretical interests, puzzles, and questions in

organizational scholarship? What issues of ethics or data bias might be arise in particular methodological approaches?

- What factors enhance or constrain organizational performance? What explains why some organizations have been more successful, effective, or efficient than others? Why do some organizations expand and others die out?
- Why do organizations pursue particular paths (e.g. strategies, product niches, growth trajectories etc) and not others?
- How do organizations select and shape the people who comprise them? What are the causes and consequences of particular hiring and firing patterns? How and to what extent do leaders matter? How do organizations induce cooperation, coordination, or compliance among members? What factors make this internal social coordination more or less successful?
- How do the external environments of organizations shape organizations' choices, actions, or outcomes?

Exam Preparation

Recommended Courses & Journals

Many of the readings, theoretical perspectives, and core issues from the exam are also reflected in the graduate Sociology of Organizations syllabus. Taking that seminar is considered helpful, though not required, preparation for the exam. Students who have not taken the seminar should review the most recent syllabus.

Becoming a regular consumer of knowledge in your field is an important professional skill. Students may find it helpful to be passingly familiar with current research on organizations, such as that published in the *American Sociological Review*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, and *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Additionally, influential work on organizations may be found in *Organizational Science*, *Academy of Management Journal*, or *Management Science*.

Reading List

In keeping with departmental guidelines, the Organizations exam reading list has approximately 2000 pages of reading or less (the equivalent of approximately 65 papers or chapters of 30 pages each). The streamlined reading list endeavors to stay close to readings from the graduate syllabus as much as is possible.

The reading list has two required sections that all exam takers will read: "Classics & Foundations" and "Contemporary Masterworks." Together these include roughly 1100 pages of reading.

Each exam taker will additionally select two "student choice modules" containing approximately 400-500 pages of reading each. The student choice modules are a compromise between customization and standardization. These modules enable deeper dives into substantial thematic areas within organizational scholarship, as might be represented by a week's theme on a grad syllabus (e.g. "Discrimination within Organizations" or "Network Approaches to Organizations") or which focus on the substantial overlap between organizational scholarship and major thematic areas within the department (e.g. "organizing religion," or "organizing schools"). We currently offer several modules that are already developed based on prior exam reading lists, including 1) Organizing States, 2) Organizing Social Movements, 3) Motivation, Ethos, and Organizational Culture, 4) Choice, Strategy, and Change

If there is a substantial area of organizational scholarship that is not (yet) represented by a module, students can petition the committee to develop, in collaboration with the student, a module representing high-quality touchstone pieces in that area. Note that modules should focus on important general thematic areas reflecting a substantial body of scholarship, and are not intended to be idiosyncratic to an individual student's research project interests. The idea is that over time we will develop a relatively robust menu of modules that will be general enough for future students to choose.

Exam Procedures

Exam Format

On the day of the exam, students will have six hours on one day in which to complete the essays for the Organizations exam. Exam questions will be composed by the Organizations exam committee, and students will not have access to the exam questions until the day of the exam. Students will receive multiple exam questions on the day of the exam, from which students will select three (3) essays to complete for the Organizations exam (estimating approximately 2 hours per essay). Although students will be given some choice, at its discretion the exam committee may make some questions required.

Notes

In the exam, students are permitted two pages of approved student-authored notes. These notes may be single spaced, but no smaller than 11-point font. Attempting to pre-draft an exam answer in these notes violates the spirit of the exam. Therefore, notes will not include full paragraphs or essay outlines. Given that the exam emphasis is on student knowledge and synthesis, notes for the Organizations exam shall not contain any direct quotations. Notes may, for example, include student-created figures such as concept maps, or definitions of key concepts or theories paraphrased in the student's own words.

Any notes must be approved by the respective area exam committee one week in advance of the exam (please email to all exam committee members). Approved lists and notes will be given to the Graduate Studies Coordinator, who will print out these materials for the student to have on the day of the exam

Citation Expectations

Attributing ideas to their source is a bedrock of the scholarly endeavor in general and remains additionally important on the exam as a means of demonstrating your use of and mastery over various readings on the list. Students may bring a bibliography of the exam readings with them into the exam. The committee prefers that students follow ASA author-year guidelines for in-text parenthetical citations (e.g. Johnson 2000). However, memorization is not the goal of the exam. It is not necessary to provide a full bibliography for exam essays.

Exam Results

Policy Regarding Rewrites

Students will be assigned one of two grades for their exam: pass or fail. Students will <u>not</u> be allowed to rewrite parts of their exams in order to change a failing grade to a passing one. They will, however, be encouraged to retake the area exam the next semester (or another appropriate time).

Feedback

After the committee renders its decision, the student will be notified of the results by email. The student will then be asked to schedule a meeting with the committee chair to discuss both strengths and weaknesses of the students' performance. This meeting will be scheduled for all students, regardless of whether they pass or fail the exam. Other committee members may provide written feedback to each student, or they may set up a separate meeting to discuss the students' exam performance. This decision will be left at the discretion of faculty on the committee