

**EFOP 3095: Organizational Perspectives on Educational Improvement  
Fall 2024**

**Instructor**

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Office Hours: By appointment

**Teaching Assistant**

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**Schedule**

Thursdays, 11am-1:40pm

Posvar 4318

**Zoom room, as needed:** <https://pitt.zoom.us/j/92987088804>

**Passcode: Orgs!**

**Course Description**

This seminar will focus on learning environments as organizations. Drawing on theoretical and empirical work from a range of organizational contexts, we will interrogate processes of change and persistence at multiple levels. We will also explore how improvement efforts targeting organizational features can intervene and perhaps improve teaching and learning, with a particular eye towards issues of equity and justice. In order to grapple with the concepts from the literature, students will apply multiple organizational lenses to a setting they know well, culminating in a brief research proposal.

**Learning Goals**

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Be conversant in multiple strands of organizational theorizing
  - Name key contributions of seminal articles
  - Identify and summarize empirical applications
- Flexibly apply multiple organizational lenses to analyze different facets of a setting
  - Identify an appropriate lens for particular question(s)
  - Use empirical analyses to critique and refine the lens itself
- Reason about processes and outcomes across levels

In addition, students will continue building their abilities to:

- Read and synthesize academic literature quickly and effectively
- Provide and receive thoughtful feedback and critique to and from peers

## **Course Structure**

Students are responsible for the following **each week**, unless otherwise noted:

### ***Read & Annotate***

- Carefully **read all assigned texts**
- **Add two to three** annotations per paper to our shared copies of the readings (on Perusall).
  - Annotations may include notes about key ideas, points of connection or contrast between readings, clarifying questions, etc.
  - Each comment may highlight a new section of text and/or be written as a “reply” to another student’s comment.
  - **Due Wednesdays by noon (via Perusall)**

### ***Memo***

- **Write 250-400 words** about how you have seen one of the core concepts from the readings appear in an organizational context you know well. If you’re not sure, try to articulate the questions you are sitting with.
  - Skip two weeks of your choosing
  - **Due Thursdays by 9am (via google docs)**

### ***Participate***

- **Participate in class sessions** in alignment with our class norms. If you need to attend class remotely, please do so. The richness of our class will come from class discussions, so everyone’s presence is needed at each session, unless circumstances prevent it.

In addition, students are responsible for the following:

### ***Critique & Discuss***

- **Read and provide written feedback** on your partners’ memos, via google docs
  - Feedback should address:
    - In what ways does/doesn’t the memo represent an apt application of the author’s chosen lens?
    - What does this lens seem to reveal/obscure about the setting?
    - What questions does the memo raise for you about the setting and/or the lens?
  - **Due alternating weeks: Thursday September 19, October 3, October 17, October 31, November 14 (via google docs)**

### ***Comparative Analytic Memo***

**Due: Thursday, November 21 (via Canvas)**

Submit an extended memo analyzing one organization or context through two or three different organizational lenses. Students are encouraged to draw heavily on their existing memo text.

### ***Brief Research Proposal***

**Due: Draft Thursday December 5 (via Canvas)**

**Due: Final Thursday December 12 (via Canvas)**

Students will motivate and briefly outline the research design for a study drawing on one or more lenses from class. Proposal may take one of two forms:

A. Propose an extension or companion study to an empirical article read in class. The extension should use a different conceptual lens, method and/or level of analysis. Include a clear justification for what the extension would allow us to learn independently, as well as what we might learn from a comparison of the two.

B. Propose an original research study. Situate your study in a clear conceptual framework, drawing on one or more organizational lenses addressed in class. Be sure to explain what kinds of data you would collect, how you would analyze them, and what kinds of results you might expect to find.

### **Assessment & Course Grades**

You are each full human beings, with complex adult lives including multiple competing priorities. As graduate students with personal and professional goals related to the themes of the course, your degree of engagement will likely have natural consequences of far more significance than any grade you receive from me. As such, my focus as an instructor will be on providing support, structured accountability, and qualitative feedback.

We understand that life happens. Extensions are available for most assignments. If you anticipate that you will not be able to complete an assignment on time, contact me with as much advance notice as possible, including a suggested alternative deadline. You do not need to provide a reason for the request. Likewise, if you need to miss a session, please contact the instructor and TA as soon as possible, and we will do what we can to provide an alternative arrangement.

Students who complete all assignments satisfactorily and attend all sessions (or make alternative arrangements as needed) will receive an A in the course. Students who do not will receive a B, or in extreme cases, an incomplete.

### **Acknowledgements**

This syllabus has been updated and refined biannually since 2020. It was initially adapted from the syllabus for this course prepared and taught by Dr. Jennifer Russell, most recently in 2018.

### **School Policies**

**Basic Needs.** We cannot learn effectively when our basic human needs are not met. The University has [resources](#) available for students who find themselves uncertain of how they will pay a bill, access food, secure medication, maintain their housing, travel for a family emergency, etc. The Care and Resource Support (CARS) Team can be reached at 412-624-5756 or

[PittCares@pitt.edu](mailto:PittCares@pitt.edu). If you are facing any of these uncertainties I also encourage you to contact me, if you feel comfortable doing so, as I may be able to help you locate additional resources, as well as make appropriate academic accommodations.

**Disability Services.** If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu), (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for these courses.

**Statement on Classroom Recording.** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use. Some classes may be recorded by the instructor via Zoom. If this is a concern, please let me know.

**Departmental Grievance Procedures.** The purpose of grievance procedures is to ensure the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students in their relationships with each other. When a student in the School of Education believes that a faculty member has not met his or her obligations (as an instructor or in another capacity) as described in the Academic Integrity Guidelines, the student should follow the procedure described in the Guidelines by (1) first trying to resolve the matter with the faculty member directly; (2) then, if needed, attempting to resolve the matter through conversations with Dr. Lori Delale O'Connor, the Chair of the Department of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy; (3) if needed, next talking to the academic integrity officer of the school, Assistant Dean Andrea Zito; and (4) if needed, filing a written statement of charges with the academic integrity officer.

**Academic Integrity.** Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

See the [Pitt Graduate Catalog](#) and [School of Education section](#) for more information.

## Organizational Perspectives on School Improvement – Tentative Schedule

Week	Session
1  Aug. 29	<b>Course overview: Why study organizational theory?</b>
2  Sept. 5	<p><b>Organizational Learning</b></p> <p><b>SKIM</b> (annotations optional): Levitt, B., &amp; March, J. G. (1988). Organizational Learning. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>, 14, 319–340.</p> <p><b>READ:</b> Farrell, C. C., Coburn, C. E., &amp; Chong, S. (2019). Under What Conditions Do School Districts Learn From External Partners? The Role of Absorptive Capacity. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>, 56(3), 955–994.</p> <p><b>AND</b> Bensimon, E. M. (2005). Closing the achievement gap in higher education: An organizational learning perspective. <i>New Directions for Higher Education</i>, 2005(131), 99-111.</p> <p><b>WRITE:</b> Description of Focal Organization Weekly memo A</p>
3  Sept. 12	<p><b>Institutional Pressures &amp; Organizational Legitimacy</b></p> <p><b>SKIM</b> (annotations optional): Meyer, J. W., &amp; Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>, 83(2), 340–363.</p> <p><b>AND</b> DiMaggio, P. J. and W. W. Powell (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. <i>American Sociological Review</i> 48(2): 147-160.</p> <p><b>READ:</b> Boxenbaum, E., &amp; Jonsson, S. (2017). Isomorphism, Diffusion and Decoupling: Concept Evolution and Theoretical Challenges. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T. Lawrence, &amp; R. Meyer (Eds.), <i>The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism</i> (pp. 77–97). SAGE Publications Ltd.</p>

	<p><b>PICK 1 of 3:</b>  Coburn, C. E. (2004). Beyond decoupling: Rethinking the relationship between the institutional environment and the classroom. <i>Sociology of Education</i>, 77(3), 211–244.  <b>OR</b>  Mehta, J. (2013). The penetration of technocratic logic into the educational field: Rationalizing schooling from the progressives to the present. <i>Teachers College Record</i>, 115(5).  <b>OR</b>  LeTendre, G. K., Baker, D. P., Akiba, M., Goesling, B., &amp; Wiseman, A. (2001). Teachers' Work: Institutional Isomorphism and Cultural Variation in the U.S., Germany, and Japan. <i>Educational Researcher</i>, 30(6), 3–15. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030006003">https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030006003</a></p> <p><b>WRITE:</b>  Weekly memo B</p>
<p><b>4</b>   <b>Sept. 19</b></p>	<p><b>Persistence &amp; Change Across Levels</b></p> <p><b>READ</b></p> <p><b>pp. 1024-1026</b> - Lawrence, T. B., Leca, B., &amp; Zilber, T. B. (2013). Institutional Work: Current Research, New Directions and Overlooked Issues. <i>Organization Studies</i>, 34(8), 1023–1033. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613495305">https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613495305</a></p> <p><b>PICK 2 of 3:</b>  Anderson, E. R., &amp; Colyvas, J. A. (2021). What Sticks and Why? A MoRe Institutional Framework for Education Research. <i>Teachers College Record</i>, 123(7).  <b>OR</b>  Bridwell-Mitchell, E. N. (2015). Theorizing Teacher Agency and Reform: How Institutionalized Instructional Practices Change and Persist. <i>Sociology of Education</i>, 88(2), 140–159. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040715575559">https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040715575559</a>  <b>OR</b>  Weddle, H., Hopkins, M., Lowenhaupt, R., &amp; Kangas, S. E. N. (2024). Shared Responsibility for Multilingual Learners Across Levels of the Education System. <i>Educational Researcher</i>, 53(4), 252–261. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X241227913">https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X241227913</a></p> <p><b>WRITE:</b>  Weekly Memo C  Peer Feedback on Memos A &amp; B</p>
<p><b>5</b>   <b>Sept. 26</b></p>	<p><b>Racialization</b></p> <p><b>PICK 3 of 4:</b></p>

	<p>Ray, V. (2019). A Theory of Racialized Organizations. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 84(1), 26–53.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Wooten, M. E., &amp; Couloute, L. (2017). The production of racial inequality within and among organizations. <i>Sociology Compass</i>, 11(1), e12446.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12446">https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12446</a></p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>McCambly, H. N. (2024). Rising tides don't create racialized change: Analyzing institutional change projects in postsecondary philanthropy's college completion agenda. <i>The Journal of Higher Education</i>, 95(4), 526-556.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Ishimaru, A. M. and S. Takahashi (2017). Disrupting racialized institutional scripts: Toward parent–teacher transformative agency for educational justice. <i>Peabody Journal of Education</i> 92(3): 343-362.</p> <p><b>WRITE:</b> Weekly Memo D</p>
<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>Oct. 3</b></p>	<p><b>Social Networks</b></p> <p><b>WATCH:</b> What is Social Network Analysis? (2015, August 21).  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT3EpF2EsbQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT3EpF2EsbQ</a></p> <p><b>PICK 2 of 4:</b></p> <p>Rigby, J. G. (2016). Principals' Conceptions of Instructional Leadership and Their Informal Social Networks: An Exploration of the Mechanisms of the Mesolevel. <i>American Journal of Education</i>, 122(3), 433–464. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1086/685851">https://doi.org/10.1086/685851</a></p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Coburn, C. E., Russell, J. L., Kaufman, J. H., &amp; Stein, M. K. (2012). Supporting sustainability: Teachers' advice networks and ambitious instructional reform. <i>American Journal of Education</i>, 119(1), 137-182.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Prado Tuma, A. (2020). The Organizational Landscape of Schools: School Employees' Conceptualizations of Organizations in Their Environment. <i>American Journal of Education</i>, 126(2), 231–263. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1086/706922">https://doi.org/10.1086/706922</a></p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Campos-Martinez, J., Pössel, F. C., &amp; Inzunza, J. (2015). Mapping neoliberal reform in Chile: Following the development and legitimation of the Chilean system of School quality Measurement (SIMCE). In <i>Mapping Corporate Education Reform</i> (pp. 106-125). Routledge.</p>

	<p><b>WRITE:</b> Weekly Memo E Peer Feedback on Memos C &amp; D</p>
<p><b>7</b></p> <p><b>Oct. 10</b></p>	<p><b>Pause &amp; Reflect</b></p>
<p><b>8</b></p> <p><b>Oct. 17</b></p>	<p><b>Frames &amp; Social Movements</b></p> <p><b>READ:</b> Kellogg, K. C. (2009). Operating room: Relational spaces and microinstitutional change in surgery. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>, 115, 657–711. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1086/603535">https://doi.org/10.1086/603535</a> <b>AND</b> Morel, R. P. (2021). Strange Frame Fellows: The Evolution of Discursive Framing in the Opt-Out Testing Movement. <i>Teachers College Record</i> (1970), 123(5), 1–32. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300507">https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300507</a> <b>AND</b> Vossoughi, S., &amp; Vakil, S. (2018). Toward what ends? A critical analysis of militarism, equity, and STEM education. <i>Education at war: The fight for students of color in America’s public schools</i>, 117-140.</p> <p><b>WRITE:</b> Weekly Memo F</p>
<p><b>9</b></p> <p><b>Oct. 24</b></p>	<p><b>Sensemaking &amp; Implementation</b></p> <p><b>READ:</b> <b>PICK 2 of 4:</b> Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., &amp; Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. <i>Organization Science</i>, 409–421. <b>OR</b> Allen, C. D., &amp; Penuel, W. R. (2015). Studying Teachers’ Sensemaking to Investigate Teachers’ Responses to Professional Development Focused on New Standards. <i>Journal of Teacher Education</i>, 66(2), 136–149. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487114560646">https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487114560646</a> <b>OR</b> Turner, E. O. (2015). Districts’ Responses to Demographic Change: Making Sense of Race, Class, and Immigration in Political and Organizational Context. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>, 52(1), 4–39. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214561469">https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214561469</a> <b>OR</b> Coburn, C. E., Toure, J., &amp; Yamashita, M. (2009). Evidence, Interpretation, and Persuasion: Instructional Decision Making at the District Central Office. <i>Teachers College Record</i>, 111(4), 1115–1161.</p>

	<p><b>WRITE</b> Weekly Memo G Peer Feedback on Memos E &amp; F</p>
<p><b>10</b></p> <p><b>Oct. 31</b></p>	<p><b>Routines</b></p> <p><b>PICK 3 of 5:</b> Feldman, M. S., Pentland, B. T., D’Adderio, L., &amp; Lazaric, N. (2016). Beyond Routines as Things: Introduction to the Special Issue on Routine Dynamics. <i>Organization Science</i>, 27(3), 505–513. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2016.1070">https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2016.1070</a></p> <p><b>OR</b> Spillane, J. P., Parise, L. M., &amp; Sherer, J. Z. (2011). Organizational Routines as Coupling Mechanisms: Policy, School Administration, and the Technical Core. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>, 48(3), 586–619.</p> <p><b>OR</b> Hatch, T., Hill, K., &amp; Roegman, R. (2016). Investigating the Role of Instructional Rounds in the Development of Social Networks and District-Wide Improvement. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>, 53(4), 1022-1053.</p> <p><b>OR</b> Stelitano, L. &amp; Russell, J. L. (2020). Organizing for Inclusion: Exploring the Routines that Shape Student Supports. <i>American Educational Research Journal</i>.</p> <p><b>OR</b> Coburn, C. E., Spillane, J. P., Bohannon, A. X., Allen, A-R., Ceperich, R., Beneke, A. &amp; Wong, L-S (2020). <i>The Role of Organizational Routines in Research Use in Four Large Urban School Districts</i> (Technical Report No. 5). Boulder, CO: National Center for Research in Policy and Practice.</p> <p><b>WRITE:</b> Weekly Memo H</p>
<p><b>11</b></p> <p><b>Nov. 7</b></p>	<p><b>Institutional Logics</b></p> <p><b>PICK 3 of 5:</b> Ocasio, W., Thornton, P. H., &amp; Lounsbury, M. (2017). Advances to the Institutional Logics Perspective. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T. Lawrence, &amp; R. E. Meyer (Eds.), <i>The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism</i> (pp. 509–531). SAGE Publications Ltd.</p> <p><b>OR</b> Bridwell-Mitchell, E. N., &amp; Sherer, D. G. (2017). Institutional Complexity and Policy Implementation: How Underlying Logics Drive Teacher Interpretations of Reform. <i>Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis</i>, 39(2), 223–247. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716677567">https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716677567</a></p>

	<p><b>OR</b> Saito, H. (2011). Cosmopolitan Nation-Building: The Institutional Contradiction and Politics of Postwar Japanese Education. <i>Social Science Japan Journal</i>, 14(2), 125–144. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/ssij/jvq060">https://doi.org/10.1093/ssij/jvq060</a></p> <p><b>OR</b> **Mehta, J. (2013). The penetration of technocratic logic into the educational field: Rationalizing schooling from the progressives to the present. <i>Teachers College Record</i>, 115(5).</p> <p><b>OR</b> ***Rigby, J. G. (2016). Principals’ Conceptions of Instructional Leadership and Their Informal Social Networks: An Exploration of the Mechanisms of the Mesolevel. <i>American Journal of Education</i>, 122(3), 433–464. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1086/685851">https://doi.org/10.1086/685851</a></p> <p>** Previously assigned for Week 3 *** Previously assigned for Week 6</p> <p><b>WRITE:</b> Weekly Memo I</p>
<b>12</b>	<b>Synthesis and Review</b>
<b>Nov. 14</b>	<p><b>WRITE:</b> Peer Feedback on Memos G, H &amp; I</p>
<b>13</b>	<b>Research Design Part I</b>
<b>Nov. 21</b>	<p><b>WRITE:</b> Comparative Analytic Memo</p>
<b>Nov. 28</b>	<b>THANKSGIVING BREAK</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Research Design Part II</b>
<b>Dec. 5</b>	<p><b>WRITE:</b> Brief Research Proposal Draft</p>
<b>15</b>	<b>WRITE:</b>
<b>Dec. 12</b>	<p>Final Brief Research Proposal</p> <p><b>CELEBRATE: END OF THE SEMESTER!</b></p>