Soc 288/PS 388: Institutions and Society

Winter 2019 Schedule: MoWe 11-12:20pm Kresge 2-415

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Course Overview

This course approaches the study of sociological institutions—often referred to as ‘the rules of the game’—from a design perspective. We’ll work to understand how these institutions emerge and address existing societal problems, ultimately analyzing the potential of different institutional configurations to encourage or discourage desired outcomes. We focus on both coordination-type dilemmas (e.g. how to parent, which side of the street to drive on, who provides health care) and collective-action dilemmas (e.g. how to police fishermen going over quota, farmers reining in downstream pollution). We end with a study of how institutions persist—possibly beyond their useful lifespan—such as the persistence of the intentionally inefficient ‘QWERTY’ keyboard, and a conversation about why it’s difficult to enact policy change.

The course has two overarching goals. This first is to develop a new way of approaching and analyzing social institutions. The second is to build skills in critical analysis of what we cover in the course through recursive writing--the process of drafting, writing, revising, and editing.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify institutional structures within societies
2. Explain how institutions apply to social problems and the ways institutions are used to address these problems
3. Critically analyze and evaluate institutional forces in formats beyond those discussed in classroom and textbook, particularly using examples in the media
4. Demonstrate writing competency through practice and revision of work

Course Requirements

This course will cover a variety of different topics and uses the readings as a jumping off point for an engaging class discussion. This quarter we have some partnerships with the city of Evanston and a local elementary school where we will apply what we learn in class.

Assignments

Implementation Assignments (18%, deadline ongoing) Our course has a manageable reading load to encourage you to focus on the details from the texts. Because we all lead busy lives, it can be difficult to prioritize the reading. In the second week of class, we will collectively design an institution to incentivize staying on top of the readings--the assignment designed (structure has varied from year to year) will be regular but a small commitment. Learning objectives 1,2,3
Engagement (18%, deadline ongoing) A large part of the course will be student engagement. The core of our discussions will focus on how different institutions have been designed to grapple with different problems; your opinions and experience will enrich our conversation. As such, you should prepare for our discussions by doing the reading prior to class and being ready to offer insights. Engagement is calculated from attendance (50%) and the type of engagement in class (are you prepared, asking good questions, etc). Your lowest three days are dropped. Learning objectives 1,2,3,4

In-class quiz (10%, in class: 1/23). To help solidify our understanding of institutions, we’ll have a short in-class quiz. Learning objective 1

Institutional Memos (25% total, 10% Memo I and 15% Memo II) There are two short institutional memos for the class. Our objective is to take a complex situation and analyze it using an institutional lens. Regardless of whether or not you become a social scientist, you will likely need strong writing skills. In this course, you will work to plan, edit, review and revise your writing. Rubrics distributed as the deadlines draw near. Learning objectives 1,2,3,4

- Memo I (Coordination) due 2/15
- Memo II (Collective Action) due 2/28

Final Project (29%) The final project offers the opportunity to apply what we’ve done in the course to a situation of your choosing. Ideally, the memos you write will help shape your thinking and provide a draft foundation for your final project, regardless of whether or not it is a paper. (This project subdivided into smaller elements) Rubrics will be distributed as the deadlines draw near. Learning objectives 1,2,3,4

- Proposal Workshop TBD
- Outline due + Project workshop 3/11
- Project due 3/18

You can choose to do a final research paper of 8-10 pages, or you can select a multimedia project, such as by making a podcast, a webpage, a video, or a presentation with voiceover. Be as creative as you’d like – we will have a proposal workshop in class to go over the options in greater detail as the deadline draws near. Some helpful links are included below.

- Knight lab (podcasts and interactive timeline): https://knightlab.northwestern.edu, more detail here https://devicelab.knightlab.com
- Webpages: http://sites.northwestern.edu
- Video: https://digitallearning.northwestern.edu/article/2016/05/19/create-videos-easily-one-button-studio, booking info here: http://northwestern.libcal.com/booking/mudd_lbs
- Presentation/PPT: BlueJeans (on Canvas)

The grading scale is as follows

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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-92.9</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89.9</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-86.9</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>80-82.9</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>77-79.9</td>
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<td>73-76.9</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-72.9</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-69.9</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>&lt;60</td>
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Books and Materials

Many articles will be available through Canvas (noted on the reading schedule). Note that this schedule is a living document–check back on Canvas to see if there are any changes. I've requested all the supplemental readings from books but if they aren't scanned yet, we may need to adjust the schedule.

The textbook for this course is: American Society How it Really Works (2nd edition) by Erik Wright and Joel Rogers. Both the book and the ebook versions are fine. But you will be responsible for the readings and content as covered in the second edition ISBN: 978-0-393-93885-2

General Policies

Academic Integrity

University education is predicated on original work and the intellectual integrity of the persons engaged in creative discovery. Northwestern University is committed to maintaining a cooperative, open intellectual climate in which those who search for knowledge and understanding receive credit for their personal contributions. Accordingly, all students in this course are expected to abide by scholarly norms and University policies regarding academic integrity. These policies, and resources about best practices to employ in order to abide by them, are available through the WCAS website. Violations of these standards, even if "unintentional," may result in serious sanctions. It may be required to turn in written work for this course through TurnItIn on the course’s Canvas site a plagiarism prevention system that identifies "matched text" that is used without proper citation. You will also have the opportunity to submit your papers to TurnItIn to check that all sources you have used are properly acknowledged and cited. Note that all submitted papers will be included as source documents in the TurnItIn reference database, solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

Attendance

Regular attendance in class is vital for learning and academic success. I take daily attendance for each lecture meeting, as a means of both ensuring that students are present and of helping me to become better acquainted with you. Students should contact me if they are unable to attend lecture; regular absences will be reflected in the engagement grade (and likely impact performance in other aspects of the course). See the `engagement' description for how this factors into your grade.

Access & Inclusion

Difference enhances both the teaching and learning experiences. The classroom is a space where all students are welcome, regardless of age, dis/ability, ethnicity, gender identity and/or expression, national origin, race, religious non/belief, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious non/belief, and alignment with other identities or contexts. Furthermore, if any student has a particular consideration, including learning and participation style, that affects their ability to meet course expectations, please see me as soon as possible. I am personally committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive learning environment for each and every student. Please, do not hesitate
to contact me with specific needs or concerns, and the sooner the better. Maintaining transparency (and communication in general) with your instructor is not only a good professional skill, but also a good way to develop a more one-on-one relationship. Furthermore, accommodations are far easier and effective to arrange when planned than when rushed. In short, I will make every effort to ensure students equal access. Please let me know how I can help make this class work for you.

My classroom is intended to be a constructive and critical space, wherein all students feel comfortable engaging openly with the material, each other, and oneself. However, this is only possible when everyone commits to this endeavor. I expect you to do so, and to help your peers (and me) to do the same. While I very much encourage (and celebrate) dissent and/or debate, I will not tolerate disrespect in my classroom. Please let me know if you feel the principles expressed in this syllabus are not being upheld so that I can address it as soon as possible.

Communication

I am generally available via email at the address above, and will do my best to respond within 24 hours of contact during the week and 48 hours on weekends. In addition to the office hours above, there will likely be time at the end of each class meeting to discuss individual issues. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with any questions or concerns. It’s helpful for me if you put 'SOC288' or 'PS388' in the heading. If you’ve made it this far, send me an email with the topic you’re most looking forward to discussing. In general, I do ask that you check the syllabus before contacting me because the answer you seek is most likely there already.

Writing

While the main objective of the course is to encourage students to think critically and constructively about research–their own and others’–students should also aim to clearly express their ideas in writing. This is seldom straightforward or easy, but good writing allows the reader to understand the argument at hand, while bad writing often reveals muddled thinking. See the rubric for explanations of expectations for each of the memos and the final paper. For outside resources, consult http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/advising/degree/writing.html "Standard Formatting." Unless otherwise specified, written work submitted for this course should use 12 point font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Most assignments will be turned in on Canvas but some work will be done and submitted in-class.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will receive a 5% point reduction each day they are late (e.g. 0.5 point off a 10 point assignment for each day late). Deductions will begin after a two-hour grace period, and will accumulate with each 24 hour period after that. No assignments will be accepted more than 5 days after the deadline.

Missed Exams

There is one exam in this course. Missing the exam will result in a 0 except in exceptional circumstances. Late assignments receive the treatment outlined above.

Religious Observances
Northwestern University recognizes the need for students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays during the academic year. In cases of religious observance, I follow the guidelines set forth by the Provost here: https://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/accommodations-for-religious-holidays/ In brief, please notify me early in the course if you have a conflict during the term, and appropriate accommodations will be made. Note that you must notify me before the date, not after.

Student Accommodations

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential. SSD is responsible for providing, coordinating, and facilitating reasonable accommodations and services to ensure that all Northwestern students with disabilities have the opportunity to fully participate in academic programming and all other facets of University life. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs, although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

Electronic Devices

In order to foster a respectful, mindful, and engaged classroom environment, the use of electronic devices, including laptops and tablets, is allowed in class at the instructor’s sole discretion. Cell phones and similar devices should be silenced and put away throughout class time. The Internet, in its magnificent glory, has transformed our consciousness, but it has also eroded our concentration. Thus, if students are found to be consistently distracted or distracting by use of any and all technologies, the use of these technologies will be appropriately, and/or severely, constricted.

Readings/Misc Info

This course is organized around four primary themes: Coordination, Collective Action, Path Dependence and Institutional Change. Most weeks we will read one chapter from the text and augment that with additional readings and/or podcasts or other media. The book is intended to give a brief overview of the topic which we then further develop with the other readings. Readings are to be completed before the day listed on the syllabus. THE LINK WILL DOWNLOAD THE CANVAS FILE--Please read/listen to that document! URLs are there as FYIs in case you want to review the material or cite it.