This is the second core course in the Sociology Ph.D. program curriculum. Its goal is to provide a foundational introduction to social institutions. The institution is arguably the central construct of the discipline. Nonetheless, it vies with “social structure” as one of its least specified concepts. A beginning definition might be that institutions are organized, taken-for-granted complexes of rules, norms, values, symbols, cognitions, and scripts. This course will examine theory on institutional organization, process, and practice in law, family, economy, education, state, and social movements. Though institutional theory has best accounted for social order or reproduction, we will also explore theories of emergence, decline, and change. We will also assess an array of research on institutions.

Macro- and meso-level analysis is required to account for institutional emergence, persistence, change, and entropy. Yet, one can explain institutions by starting with individual action or higher-order processes. Theory that is contemporarily known as “sociological institutionalism” has tended to start at the top. This course starts there, as well, because this way we can follow the development of sociological theory on institutions through its hiatus in the sixties and seventies, and into its energetic re-emergence after that. Then we will move into scholarship that incorporates meso- and micro-dynamics. Students will consider how an institutional focus might apply to their own work.

Course Requirements:

Weekly reading is limited in order to permit close reading of course materials and careful analysis of conceptualization and argument. The work of the course lies here, rather than in absorbing a broad literature in an arena of sociological scholarship. Sufficient participation in the seminar requires honing skills of close reading, analysis of argument, and clear and precise writing. Note that most of the course grade depends on weekly seminar activity.

- **Participation** (25% of grade): This is a small seminar, so it requires everyone’s participation to succeed. Preparation and participation in seminar discussion is expected every week. You can ask questions you prepare ahead of time, seek or provide clarification, or engage in dialogue or debate. Twice in the semester, you will present and lead discussion on assigned readings, some of which only you will read. Please speak to me about strategies if you encounter obstacles to active participation
**Weekly short papers** (50% of grade): Nearly every week, you will write papers of varying lengths and weights (1-5 pages) on the assigned readings. Append two questions for class discussion to your paper. Generally, those questions should illuminate or critically assess the argument in readings. Please avoid asking your peers to apply an argument to an area in which some of us haven’t read (your comments in seminar, though, can do this if you can make them intelligible to others). I will comment on all papers and grade a number of them. Sometimes I will frame a topic. Other times, you should identify each author’s main claim and structure of argument, assess conceptualization, argument, and support, and compare the material assigned.

**Seminar paper** (25% of grade): This paper (TBA) will involve applying theory from the course to material on an institution that interests you.

**Readings:** All materials are posted in Content on the course D2L site. Note that some readings are meant only for the single “presenter.” D2L Content will contain a RESERVE area of relevant materials that are not required. Feel free to post materials there.

1/23: Introduction

1/30: What is an institution?


Presentation by 910 student(s): Omi and Winant: Are “racial formations” institutions, in Jepperson’s terms?

Andrew Cherlin, "Blue-Collar Blues, White-Collar Weddings," in *Marriage-Go-Round,* 2009. Quickly read this to prepare for discussing the following Cherlin article.


2/8: The History of Conceptualizing and Theorizing Institutions


2/13: Related Concepts: Social Structure and Culture


Excerpt, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*.


2/20: Levels of Analysis and Linkage


Presentation by 910 student on Granovetter, “Strength of Weak Ties.”


2/27: Historical and Political Institutionalism: The State and Social Policy

Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 1996, excerpt.


3/6: Institutions and Organizations: Old and New Institutionalism


*The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, 1991, ed. Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, riveted interest in sociological neoinstitutionalism in organizational analysis. It contains an excellent introduction, which I have not assigned. From that anthology:


Continued.

Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, 2008:
   Ch. 2: pp.19-23, 36-45
   Ch. 7: pp. 149-157
   Ch. 8: pp. 181-6.

3/13 New Institutionalism and Dynamics of Institutional Influence


3/20 Spring break!

3/27 Diffusion and Change


4/3 Conceptualizing Institutional Micro-processes


4/10 Institutions and Collective Action 1 (but first, a paper on research methods)


4/17 Strategic and Collective Action