PAD 750: Seminar on Social Perspectives to Information Technology in Public and Private Organizations (4 Credits)

Fall 2018  
Monday 5:45 – 9:25 PM

Room  
Husted 304

Instructor  
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Course Overview
This course reviews social sciences perspectives to information technologies in public and private organizations. It starts with readings about the research assumptions underlying studies in technology and organizations as well as readings that discuss the similarities and differences between public and private organizations. The course then turns to readings that discuss a variety of theoretical frameworks developed to study technology in organizational settings. Finally, the course highlights empirical studies into particular phenomena associated with information technology in public and private organizations.

Course Objectives
By the end of the semester, students will:
1. Be familiar with classic and recent research about information technology in public and private organizations.
2. Understand the research assumptions guiding the theoretical ideas and empirical studies conducted in this field.
3. Demonstrate knowledge about a range of social phenomena surrounding the development, implementation, use, and implications of technology in public and private organizations.
4. Synthesize and present original work on these themes through student assignments.

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1 This syllabus has been adapted from a similar course taught by Wanda Orlikowski at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for about 10 years. I want to thank Wanda for agreeing on me using the overall content, strategies, ideas, and readings for this new course. Structural adjustments, additional readings, and a greater focus on public organizations are my own responsibility.
Readings

Most required course readings and other materials should be found on the University Library systems or could be acquire through interlibrary loan. These include mainly selected articles from scholarly journals and a few book chapters. Students are expected to find additional readings, review them, and discuss them in class, when appropriate.

Course Content

August 27 – Introduction to the course
  Introductions
  Review of syllabus
  Instructions for readings and assignments
  Opening discussion


September 3 – No Class – Labor Day

September 10 – No Class – Rosh Hashanah

PART I: PHILOSOPHICAL DOMAIN -- ASSUMPTIONS

September 17 – Research Assumptions in studying Organizational Phenomena


**Supplemental Readings:**


**September 24 – Research Assumptions in studying Information Technology**


Winner, L. “Do Artefacts have Politics?” Daedalus, 109, 1, 1980: 121-136


**Supplemental Readings:**
Orlikowski, W.J. and Iacono, C.S. “Desperately Seeking the ‘IT’ in IT Research: A Call to Theorizing the IT Artifact,” Information Systems Research, 12, 2, 2001: 121-134.


**PART II: THEORETICAL DOMAIN -- PERSPECTIVES**

**October 1 – Functional Perspectives on Technology**

[Commentary about PART I - Due today]


**Supplemental Readings:**


**October 8 – Contextual/Institutional/Political Perspectives on Technology**


**Supplemental Readings:**


**October 15 – Constructivist Perspectives on Technology**


**Supplemental Readings:**


**October 22 – Structurational Perspectives on Technology**


**Supplemental Readings:**


**October 29 – No Class**

**November 5 – Post-Humanist/Practice Perspectives on Technology**


**Supplemental Readings:**

**November 12 – Sociomaterial Perspectives on Technology**


**Supplemental Readings:**

**PART III: EMPIRICAL DOMAIN— PHENOMENA**

**November 19 – Technology and Change (Administrative Reform, Transformational Government)**

[Commentary about PART II - Due today]


**Supplemental Readings:**


**November 26 – Technology, Knowledge, and Information Sharing (Public Sector Knowledge Networks, Information Integration)**


**Supplemental Readings:**


December 3 – Technology, Collaboration, and Co-Production


Supplemental Readings:


December 10 – Epilogue: Reflection on course themes, questions, and implications
[Commentary about PART III - Due today]
Student evaluation and grading

This course has no tests or a final exam. Instead, your work will be evaluated throughout the semester on a variety of assignments. This is a seminar not a lecture course, which means that it is based on active class participation and interaction. Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss all the readings on a particular topic. Class participation grades will be allocated on the basis of both the quality and quantity of contribution.

Students are also required to lead and facilitate two class sessions during the course of the semester. This involves activity before, during, and after the class session. Before the class session, the student should become familiar with all the readings for that class and prepare themes and questions for class discussion. It is recommended that the student meet with the instructor a few days before the class session to discuss the relevance of particular issues and themes. During the class session, the student will provide a brief presentation about each of the readings and then facilitate a discussion about each of them (reading by reading). Once all readings have been discussed, the student will present a 30-40 minute overview of the important themes and issues jointly raised by the readings and then facilitate a discussion of these and related topics for the remainder of the session (prepare a few specific questions for each of the facilitated discussions in your session), including providing closing remarks in the last 10-15 minutes of the class. After the class session, the student will prepare a short
summary (2-3 pages) of the themes and issues discussed, and distribute this to the rest of the class at the next session. Grades for facilitating a session will depend on the level of preparation, framing of overview and summary, and quality of discussion facilitated.

Students should also prepare three (one for each part of the course) commentaries. These two-page papers are due no later than the beginning of the first session of the next part via email in Word format (not pdf), and are intended to evoke some thoughtful consideration of the material read. A summary of a reading, or simply offering an illustration of the topic, is not sufficient. Instead, some critical or reflective discussion is required, for example, exploring an issue or concept in greater depth, raising some theoretical or empirical questions, comparing and contrasting approaches or findings across the readings, etc.

A final reflection paper (5-7 pages) is due at the last class of the semester. This paper provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their ideas about research, and how the course material and their experiences in the class have influenced their understanding of the process and content of research on information technology in public and private organizations.

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

- Frequency and quality of contributions to class discussions and the overall learning environment of the course (20%).
- Session Facilitation (30%)
- Commentaries (30%)
- Final Reflection Paper (20%)

Course policies

This course requires that you work both individually and collaboratively with your fellow students. The interaction of the facilitated discussions is a form of learning by collaboration and represents a significant fraction of your final grade. Reading discussions, class facilitation, and interactions with your fellow students and me are active learning methods. They require that you actively engage with one another, with our guests (if we have), and with me during each class session. These discussions are your opportunity to test your own ideas, and to question and clarify what you’ve heard or read. Your class participation, including these discussions, contributes to 20% of your final grade so they really matter. Here are some guidelines and suggestions:

- Read the assignments and think critically about them. Ask yourself: What are the main assumptions? What are alternative theories or models? What are the strengths and weaknesses?
- Use the readings to enrich your understanding of the topics and bring them into our discussions.
- Be a good listener – this is more than being polite and quiet while others speak – it means really hearing what they are saying and actively comparing their ideas to your own.
- Make points that are relevant to the discussion and link them to the comments of others. Ask other people what they think about your ideas and why they think the way they do.
• Test your ideas – don’t limit yourself to making statements that simply restate facts or the position of the readings’ authors without offering analysis or conclusions– say what you think and why.
• Use some of your comments in our discussions to clarify, summarize, and make associations across the various assumptions, theories, concepts, readings and opinions.
• Share additional readings, resources, or other material relevant to the class.
• Use class meetings to engage in discussion and share your ideas.

Written assignments must be submitted via e-mail as an attached file, in Microsoft Word format, before the class meeting time on the day they are due.

Text in papers should be font 12, double-spaced with one-inch page margins. Please observe the page limits for each assignment. When the assignment calls for 2 pages, you won’t get more credit for writing 3-4 – in fact, you’ll get significantly less. These short writing assignments require you to select and focus on important factors, and to present them in a well-organized way. By the way, spelling and grammar DO count because they affect the quality of your communication, so review your work carefully (or ask someone else to review it) before handing it in. If you need help with your writing, contact the writing center at the university. If your first language is not English, you may want to recruit a native English-speaker to review your assignments before you hand them in.

The due dates for assignments are absolute. These are professional obligations and you are expected to observe them scrupulously, except under extreme extenuating circumstances. Written assignments submitted after the due dates will be accepted only at the discretion of the instructor and may result in an “incomplete.” If accepted, late submissions will be reflected in a lower grade for the assignment.

The course is run on an honor system and therefore considers any case of plagiarism to be a most serious ethical issue. An incident of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course with the possibility of further action being pursued at the university level. I feel very strongly about this issue, so if you have any question about this topic, bring them up as soon as possible. Here are also some University at Albany’s regulations and resources in terms of academic integrity.

Regulations:
https://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/requirements_degree.htm#standards_integrity
https://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html

Resources:
http://library.albany.edu/infolit/integrity

Students Needing Accommodation. Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in this class, please notify the Director of the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 130, 518-442-5490, DRC@albany.edu). That office will provide the instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations.
NOTE on pre-requisites:
The course content presumes that you are familiar with some basic concepts and approaches from Public Administration, Public Management, and Organization Theory. Students should have taken at least one the following courses (or equivalent) as pre-requisites for this course or have the permission of the instructor. If you are interested in taking this course, please, feel free to contact me.

PAD550 Foundations of Government Information Strategy and Management
PAD610 Organizational Theory and Behavior
PAD708 Organizational Behavior and Theory
PAD709 Foundations of Public Administration

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