Education 551. Analyzing School Organizations and the Policy Environment  
Winter 2014, Educational Leadership and Policy section (v. 1/13/14)

Class meetings: Wednesdays 5-8 in 2229 School of Education Building

Instructor: Angeline Spain
Office hours: Wednesdays 3:30-4:30pm and by appointment in SEB 4029
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Catalog description: Reviews important contributions to organization theory and emphasizes their application to the administration of schools. Discusses the structure of organizations, the management of work, and the nature of psychological and interpersonal processes in the workplace.

Course overview: With policy environments pressing American public schools to ensure academic success for all students, educators are increasingly engaging in the collaborative practice of continuous improvement. The collaborative practice of continuous improvement is intended to guide a cyclical process of inquiry, action, and reflection. Key ingredients of this practice include:
• Evaluating instructional practice and student outcomes, by identifying broad patterns of achievement (and non-achievement) and by examining the instructional dynamics that explain those patterns;
• Evaluating the extent to which essential systems are developed, coordinated, and support students' academic success;
• Crafting and implementing programs and strategies to develop and coordinate these interdependent systems; and
• Monitoring instructional performance and outcomes and adapting improvement strategies to further increase students' academic success.
This type of cyclical, continuous improvement is the foundation for "school improvement processes" as mandated by the Michigan Department of Education and many other state departments of education, as well as federal and philanthropic foundation-funded reform initiatives. It also parallels the Deming quality circles commonly seen in the business sector.

Yet carrying out this leadership work is complex and takes on challenges amply illustrated by decades of efforts to reform public education. To investigate and explore the constraints and opportunities faced by educators seeking to engage in the practice of continuous improvement, we turn to theories developed in organizational studies (called in its early years administrative behavior) to guide our analysis of school organizations, the actions of the people that inhabit them, (including teachers, distributed leadership team members, and students), and environmental relationships and resources.

In module 1 of this course we develop familiarity with theories developed in organizational studies and explore how different theories focus our attention on some
features of organizations and downplay others. Next, in modules 2-4, we use these frames to explore and assess how educational scholars have characterized the challenges of organizing for instruction and improvement and develop our own analysis of the school's essential systems. In module 2, we focus on the core work of schools: the delivery of the instructional program. In module 3, we hone in on prominent change strategies that have guided instructional improvement efforts in the United States over the past two decades, paying particular attention to dynamics of professional community in implementation processes. With module 4, we conclude with an investigation into the relationships between the policy environment and education organizations. Throughout the course, we will attend to how these systems are developed, coordinated, and function to support ambitious visions for instruction and learning outcomes.


All other required assigned readings will be available on our course CTools site.

**Recommended text:** Scott, R.W. and Davis, G.F. (2007). *Organizations and organizing: Rational, natural and open systems perspectives.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall. (NOTE: All assigned readings from the Scott & Davis text will be available on CTools)

**Objectives:** One objective of EDUC 551 is to establish understandings of a "systems model" of school organization. A second objective is to develop your capabilities to analyze schools' essential systems and their relationships to instructional practice and outcomes. In EDUC 551, you will develop the knowledge and capabilities needed to:

- Analyze a school's instructional program (e.g., curricula, assessments, instructional designs, and instructional technologies), identify areas of improvement or decline in relation to the existing school improvement plan, and recommend revisions to the school improvement plan.
- Analyze a school's professional community (e.g., culture, professional norms, expectations for students, relationships among staff), identify areas of improvement or decline in relation to existing school improvement plan, and recommend revisions to the school improvement plan.
- Analyze the relationship between the school's instructional program and culture (on the one hand) and environmental decisions, trends, and initiatives (on the other) in order to recommend strategies for sustaining school improvement efforts.

**Michigan Leadership Standards Addressed:** EDUC 551 addresses the elements of Standards 1 and 2 that are focused on the school as an organization, as well as elements of Standard 6 focused on understanding and anticipating decisions, trends, and initiatives in broader environments.

- 1.3: Candidates understand and can promote continual and sustainable school improvement.
- 1.4: Candidates understand and can evaluate school progress and revise school plans supported by school stakeholders.
• 2.1: Candidates understand and can sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning through collaboration, trust, and a personalized learning environment with high expectations for students.

• 2.2: Candidates understand and can create and evaluate a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular and instructional school program.

• 2.4: Candidates understand and can promote the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning in a school environment.

• 6.2: Candidates understand and can act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning in a school environment.

• 6.3: Candidates understand and can anticipate and assess emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt school-based leadership strategies.

Evaluating your performance in EDUC 551:

Participation in class discussion and in peer feedback teams (15% of final grade): The exchange of ideas and ways of thinking is critical to an engaging and stimulating course. In EDUC 551, completion of our assigned readings is key to our collective analysis of educational organizations and their policy environments. You are expected to carefully read the assigned readings before class, and I encourage you to take notes on the main ideas and arguments in our readings, as well as connections you see with your own experiences. Please come to class prepared to discuss the guiding questions (posted on CTools) for each session.

Writing is another way we will work to build our understandings of core concepts in organizational theories and how an organizational perspective can be productively employed in educational contexts. To support you in developing and refining your analytic writing skills, you will be assigned a peer review team for the semester. We will have in-class time to provide and receive structured feedback on each of the memos assigned in EDUC 551 (see below). To ensure our feedback sessions are robust, you are expected to upload your draft to CTools and bring hard copies for your review team.

Three-part performance assessment (75% of final grade): For this course, you will write a series of three analytic memos to the school improvement team in which you critically analyze a school's essential organizational systems. Each part of the performance assessment will be anchored in a teaching case (to be distributed as noted in the syllabus) focused on a school under pressure to improve student achievement due to weak performance on state accountability assessments. Successful memos will demonstrate your capabilities to apply theories introduced in this course and critically analyze a school's essential systems by drawing across multiple sources of evidence.

• Part 1 -- Analyzing the Instructional Program (25% of final course grade): Students will (a) identify strengths and weaknesses in the school's instructional program, (b) assess strengths and weaknesses in relation to the current school improvement plan, and (c) recommend priorities for revising the school improvement plan to strengthen the instructional program.

• Part 2 -- Analyzing the Professional Community (30% of final course grade): Students will (a) identify strengths and weaknesses in the school's professional community, (b) assess strengths and weaknesses in relation to the current school
improvement plan, and (c) recommend priorities for revising the school improvement plan to strengthen the professional community.

- **Part 3 -- Analyzing Environmental Relationships (30% of final course grade):** Students will (a) identify environmental supports for the school's ongoing improvement efforts, (b) identify environmental threats that could undermine the sustainability of school improvement efforts, and (c) proposes a strategy for leveraging supports for continuous improvement while managing threats to sustainability.

Assignments submitted late without prior communication with the instructor will receive no credit.

Due dates (by 12pm on date listed)
2/12: Submit Memo 1, *Analyzing the Instructional Program*, for peer review/CTools
2/19: Submit Memo 1, *Analyzing the Instructional Program*, to instructor via CTools
3/19: Submit Memo 2, *Analyzing the Professional Community*, for peer review/CTools
3/26: Submit Memo 2, *Analyzing the Professional Community*, to instructor via CTools
4/16: Submit Memo 3, *Analyzing Environmental Relationships*, for peer review/CTools
4/24: Submit Memo 3, *Analyzing Environmental Relationships*, to instructor via CTools

**Representing others’ research**
As part of engaging with the readings and the core themes of this course, I expect you to explicitly draw on ongoing conversations in academic and public discourse in our discussions and in your writing. When you draw on ideas in others’ research in your written assignments, please be sure to attribute that work correctly. For guidance about how to do this, please see the American Psychological Association’s Publication’s Manual.

**Student rights and responsibilities**
See the UM student handbook, which details student rights and responsibilities: http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_policies/. Please contact me regarding any necessary accommodations due to religious holidays, disabilities, or any other special needs. It is university policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet certain requirements.

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**Module 1: Conceptual Orientation to Theories of Organization and Organizing**

**Week 1. January 8th: Why analyze schools as organizations?**
- Morgan: Chapter 1 -- "Introduction".

**Week 2. January 15th: Rational systems perspectives**
- Morgan: Chapter 2 -- "Mechanization takes command: Organizations as machines".
• Morgan: Chapter 4 -- "Learning and self-organization: Organizations as brains" (pp. 71-80).
• Scott and Davis: Chapter 2 -- "Organizations as rational systems". (Focus on the introduction, the section on defining characteristics, and the summary/conclusion. Skim the section on selected schools.)

Week 3. January 22nd: Natural systems perspectives
• Morgan: Chapter 5 -- "Creating social reality: Organizations as cultures" (pp. 115-134).
• Morgan: Chapter 6 -- "Interests, conflict, and power: Organizations as political systems" (pp. 149-155).
• Scott and Davis: Chapter 3 -- "Organizations as natural systems". (Focus on the introduction, the section on basic vs. distinctive characteristics, and the summary/conclusion. Skim the section on selected schools.)

Week 4. January 29th: Open systems perspectives
• Morgan: Chapter 3 -- "Nature intervenes: Organizations as organisms".
• Scott and Davis: Chapter 4 -- "Organizations as open systems". (Focus on the introduction, the sections on system levels and emphases, and the summary/conclusion. Skim the section on selected schools.)

Module 2: Persistent Challenges in Organizing for Instruction

Week 5. February 5th: Unpacking the structure(s) of educational organizations
• Memo 1 assignment (Analyzing the Instructional Program) handed out in class
Week 6. February 12th: Autonomy, control, and cultural norms of teaching


➢ *Memo 1 draft due; upload on CTools and bring hard copies for your peer review team*

Week 7. February 19th: Constancy? Digging into the persistence of "real school"


➢ *Memo 1 (final version) due; upload on CTools*

Module 3: Bringing People Back in -- Dynamics of Professional Community and Leadership in Organizing for Instructional Improvement

Week 8. February 26th: Instructional coherence as a foundation for organizing for instructional improvement


No class meeting March 5th – winter semester break.

Week 9. March 12th: Trust and the promise and problems of change


• Memo 2 assignment (Analyzing the Professional Community) handed out in class

Week 10. March 19th: Systemic and standards-based reform


➢ Memo 2 draft due; upload on CTools and bring hard copies for your peer review team

Module 4: Organizing for Improvement and Environmental Relationships

Week 11. March 26th: Managing for improvement in the face of multiple, competing policy demands


• Selected readings on Michigan's teacher evaluation and teacher tenure reform (P.A. 102 of 2011)

➢ Memo 2 (final version) due; upload on CTools

Week 12. April 2nd: (Re)mapping external influences on instructional improvement


Week 13. April 9th: Complexity and the relationship between education organizations and the environment

Readings:


  ➢ *Memo 3 assignment (Analyzing Environmental Relationships) handed out in class*

Week 14. April 16th

Readings:

- To be assigned based on class interests.
  
  ➢ *Memo 3 draft due; upload on CTools and bring hard copies for your peer review team*

Memo 3 (final version) due on April 24th