

**SYLLABUS: COMM 635 F01, CRN 86448**  
**ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE and COMMUNICATION**  
**University of Alaska Fairbanks, TR 5:30-7:00, GRUE401**  
**Fall 2009**

Instructor: Karen Taylor

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Work Phone: 474-6818

Office Hours: M-W 12:30-2:00 (or by appointment)

Office Location: 503C Gruening Bldg.

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**Texts:** Morgan, Gareth (2006). Images of Organization, Updated Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Additional readings available on Blackboard, briefly listed here:

Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership

Deetz, Leading Organizations through Transitions

Trice & Breyer, Organizational Rituals

Ashcroft & Mael, Identification

Berger, Cultural Criticism (Marxism chapter)

Stewart, Charland for social movements

Weick, Managing the Unexpected chpts. 2, 5

Branding article from Organization Studies, also literacy article-- Cynicism article?

Mitchell on learning communities, juxtapose to Hidden Conflict chapter

Bourdieu of course

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## **Course Description**

The course begins from a presumption of familiarity with Structuration Theory—in this case, meaning that each student understands that through communication we construct our organizations and institutions, and yet simultaneously we are produced by and through the institutions and structures in which we live. Or, in Giddens' terms, "Social structures and agency are recursively and reflexively produced," where social structures are a system of rules and resources. Thus to study organizations is to study communication and culture, and to study communication means to always-already study organization(s). The goal of the course is to return to this same starting point with a fuller understanding of its consequences. On a practical level, that goal should mean you are better able to:

1. navigate within the structures of your own life
2. assist organizations to understand the complexities of constitutive communication
3. diagnose unintended consequences and improve alignment for individuals and institutions

## Course Assignments

20% Case Study presentation

20% Final Comparative Paper

20% Group mini-ethnography write-up

20% Illustrative activities (lowest one dropped)

20% Discussion/reading questions (lowest two dropped)

## Statement of Policies for this Class

Student Responsibilities:

A: ATTENDANCE. All students are expected to attend every class. Participation is key to learning, and if you're not present you're not participating. You are also responsible for in-class activities (which cannot be made up). There are some circumstances for which absence is unavoidable, such as illness or family emergency. I should be notified of an absence before or on the day it occurs either through a phone message or via e-mail, and receive documentation of the reason as soon as possible thereafter. A student with an unexcused absence on the day of a scheduled presentation will receive a **zero** for that presentation.

B: TIME. Each student must be prepared to spend time in class and outside of class. Readings are expected to have been completed prior to the day they are listed on the syllabus. Quizzes can begin at any time during the class period, and additional time on the quizzes will not be granted. Quizzes cannot be made up without **written** documentation of justifiable absence.

D: ETHICAL STANDARDS. All interaction in the classroom is to be consistent with the Credo for Ethical Communication of the National Communication Association, which has been adopted by the Department of Communication. Any suspected plagiarism will be penalized, as laid out in the university policy. You are expected to be familiar with the university's regulations as laid out in the Student Code of Conduct.

E: STUDENT SUPPORT: All students are eligible to use the services at the Student Health Center, and are encouraged to go (and get documentation). Students with special needs or concerns need to contact Student Support Services (474-6844) for documentation to present to Instructor. The Office of Disability Services (474-7043) provides accommodations to students with disabilities. The instructor will also attempt to make reasonable accommodations for students with alternate learning styles/needs, whether documented or not, if the student raises these concerns as early as possible.

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## Course Schedule

Sept. 3 – Of butterflies and fairy-tales

8 Morgan Chpt. 2—organizations as machines—typewriter activity

10 Morgan Chpt. 3—organizations as organisms—Shoebox Greeting Cards activity

15 Morgan Chpt. 5—organizations as cultures—narrative activity

17 Trice & Breyer—organizational ritual—what’s in a name activity

22 Schein—cultural analysis—The Bathrooms of Fairbanks activity

24 Bourdieu—cultural capital and power—party planning activity

29 constructing an instrument for analysis

Oct 1 Morgan chpt. 6—organizations as politics—red-green activity?

6 Deetz—organizational change—ethics activity

8 Ashcroft & Mael—organizational identification—partial inclusion?

13 Morgan Chpt. 8—organizations as chaotic—chaos activity

15 Weick—managing the unexpected—tiger teams practice

20 Mitchell & Hidden Conflict—learning communities and unlearning

22 group work on write-up of mini-ethnography

27

29 Morgan Chpt. 9—organizations as domination—role conflict game

Nov. 3 Berger—cultural criticism—deconstructing symbols

5 Stewart & Charland—constructing alternative organizations—X-treme debating

10 branding article, literacy article

12 no class, instructor at NCA

17 presentation of case studies

19 presentation of case studies

24 presentation of case studies

26 no class, Thanksgiving break

Dec. 1 case readings—African Friends and Money Matters

3 case readings—New Asian Emperors

8 case readings—Social Partnering in Latin America

10 final comparative paper due

#### Descriptions of Assignments:

Case Study Presentation—each student will select an organization, one which they can learn about either through documentary research (newspapers, internet, and databases primarily) or through primary research (interviews, observation, and action-learning primarily). The student will apply theoretical constructs learned through the course of the semester, to discover what insights might be gathered by thinking about the organization in terms of a variety of communication-centric approaches. In particular, the student is asked to apply at least two of the metaphors drawn from Morgan's text, and at least two of the approaches in the supplementary readings.

Final Comparative Paper—each student will do their own cultural analysis comparing at least two organizations within the same industry and locale. Students will reflect on similarities and differences, evidence of adaptation to environment and influence on local culture, success or lack thereof assessed using at least three criteria of evaluation, and the relation between organizational histories and projected future conditions. The paper will be approximately ten pages, and I will ask (though not require) that at least one member from each organization analyzed be given an opportunity to provide feedback.

Group mini-ethnography—this will be a relatively highly-structured and short-lived research into an organization of the group's choosing. The advantage is that by having multiple observers, differences in interaction patterns are more likely to emerge. We will jointly devise the observation recording form, and we will pool our collected data into a single co-authored paper. This teaches both about organizational culture and analysis, and also teaches about joint research projects.

Reading Questions/Discussion—every single class period, each student will be expected to bring at least one question based on the reading, and one discussion point. The questions/discussions will be graded on a check/minus/plus system. The students' questions will be used as the prompts for classroom interaction, rather than the instructor providing lectures to orient the class to each reading.

Activities—during most class periods, assuming that time permits, discussion will end with an activity designed to illustrate some of the ideas in each reading. Participation will be graded on a check/minus/plus basis, and often that grading will be done by group rather than by individual.