Small Groups

Overview

The purpose of this course is to develop analytical and diagnostic skills in sociological theorizing and research in small groups. It is also designed to give practical experience in research in group setting. At the same time, it is directed toward understanding social change in groups and by group dynamics. During the semester, students will learn to:

1) Conceptualize and carry out field research in group settings;
2) Develop theory through comparison of various groups;
3) Diagnose problems about group dynamics.

A case study of a small group is essential to all the goals of the course. Each student will choose a group to study throughout the semester. The choice should be a small group to which the student perhaps already belongs or can readily gain access. Over the course of the semester, a series of key concepts will be used to guide the case analyses.

The course will proceed as follows. The class will be divided in “small groups” for group discussion and team presentation purpose. We will first have reading assignments that introduce the key concepts about group dynamics. Class lecture outlines are designed to help you be focused on theoretical discussions about these key concepts. Each time after reading and reviewing class lecture outlines, each student will use these key concepts to examine his or her group, writing a short paper base upon the student’s analysis.

By the end of the term, each student (1) should have enhanced ability to analyze small groups; (2) be more skillful in designing and conducting sociological research in group settings; (3) have a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the key concepts about small groups as analytical tools, and (4) have six medium length papers that, taken together, comprise a brief case analysis which can be developed into the springboard for a serious presentation on small groups.

Requirements

1. Four Short Papers (they will account for 40% of your final grade)
   There will be a series of four required short papers (2 pages minimum). They will
give you opportunities to creatively and critically reflect on your own experience with the group of your choice. The key to write a good paper is to review the key concepts in the readings and address the key issues using the key concepts under discussion at the time. These papers are due on every Monday before 11:00 pm starting from the second week of the semester. They must be sent to me as email attachments. It’s essential to send in your papers on time. Late papers will be docked 5 points per day late, inclusive of weekends. A timely submission will automatically earn 50% of the points regardless of the quality of your paper.

2. Participation (30% of your final grade)
   I do care about your attitude towards learning. In fact, the class depends on engaged learning that is guaranteed through informed reading and active participation. Students are required to actively participate in class discussions at least twice a week. Also, it’s vital that you come to the discussions prepared with assigned readings so that you can actively participate. I’ll post the discussion questions and initiate discussions. You’ll get 20 points for each time you participate in a discussion. I expect to hear your voice frequently throughout the semester in our online classroom. I reserve the right to deduct up to 10% from your final grade if I am convinced that you are not serious about this class. On the other side of the token, if I am convinced that you have truly made your efforts, I will add up to 10% to your final grade. I also reserve the right to fail any student who fails to participate in discussions for more than 50% of the time.

3. A Final Project (It will account for 30% of your final grade)
   It will be a final research project. I would assume that by the end of the semester you will be able to integrate all your six short papers into a coherent case study. The theme for the final project should be about fundamental cause of organizational change. This theme will be introduced in the beginning and carried throughout the course. It is centered on the key assertion that policy for resolving problems in complex organizations must address the cause of that problem. Theme such as this is easier to consider with a particular case in mind. Consequently, a case study of an organization is essential to all the goals of the course, including the final project. Your research project must be typed and no less than 10 double spaced pages. It is due on Saturday, July 2nd. No late submission will be accepted.

Grading

Final grades will be based on a possible total of 400 points.

1. Papers = 160 points for total of four papers. Each paper will be graded on a perfect score of 40.
2. Final Paper = 120 points
3. Participation = 120 points. Each active participation will earn you 20 points.

The grade breakdown is as follows:
372-- 400  A  360-- 371  A-
352-- 359  B+  332-- 351  B  320-- 331  B-
312-- 319  C+  282-- 311  C  270-- 281  C-
240-- 269  D+  220-- 239  D  <220  F

Note: all final grades are final, unless a calculation error was made. Under no other circumstances will a course grade be changed. Further, there will be no extra credit.

Required Texts


Outline, Exercises and Readings

Week One
Introduction: What are group dynamics? What is the Sociological Approach to small groups?

Reading: Chapters 1 & 3

Paper 1: Guideline posted online, Due: 5/30 at 11:00 pm

Week Two
Group Formation

Reading: Chapters 4, 5, 7

Paper 2: Guideline posted online, Due: 6/6 at 11:00 pm

Week Three
Group Productivity

Reading: Chapters 9 & 10

Paper 3: Guideline posted online, Due: 6/13 at 11:00 pm

Week Four
Issues of Human Rationality

Reading: Chapters 8 & 12

Paper 4: Guideline posted online, Due: 6/20 at 11:00 pm
Week Five
Group Context and Change

Reading: Chapters 11 & 13

No paper due. Start your final project.

Week Six
Final Project Week: concentrate on writing your final project

I would assume that by the end of the semester, you will be able to exam the life of the small groups to which you belong. Your final project should reflect the richness of group life and abstract the patterns of group behavior. The theme for the project should be about fundamental group dynamics. The dynamics of groups are rarely simple and do not unfold in a straightforward, one-dimensional sequence over time. This theme will be introduced in the beginning and carried throughout the course. Theme such as this is easier to consider with a particular case in mind. Consequently, a case study of a group is essential to all the goals of the course, including the project.