RSM 3091. Economic Sociology and Strategy
Winter 2016; Friday, 12-3pm
Rotman 7024
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Course overview

The goal of this course is to expose students to some of the most important theoretical paradigms and empirical findings in the field of economic sociology, a vibrant area of research that applies a distinct sociological perspective to economic phenomena. The course focuses on core themes in economic sociology and also considers their relevance for strategic management research. Some of economic sociology’s insights deeply permeate contemporary strategy scholarship and remain highly influential; other ideas from the field have received less attention from strategy scholars and thus represent important opportunities for enriching strategic management research.

Course requirements and evaluation

Participation (35% of grade): This course is run as a seminar. I expect students to participate actively and contribute to an engaged and constructive discussion. Before each class you must carefully read and think about the assigned readings. Come to class prepared to discuss the core arguments presented in the readings, as well the connections and differences between a particular reading and other readings in the same week and in previous weeks. One student will be randomly selected to lead the discussion of each text. Students leading discussion should provide a brief description of the text (i.e., its research question and core arguments and/or main findings) as well as a balanced critique (i.e., both strengths and limitations). After discussing each text individually, class members will integrate the week’s readings together to identify common themes, critical differences, limitations, and future research opportunities.

Term paper (65% of grade) A term paper is the final requirement for the course. It should be approximately 10-15 pages in length and should take the form of a research proposal that engages with one of the topics covered in the course. It should incorporate ideas from a number of readings in the course but also draw on additional work from pertinent literatures. In essence, it should consist of the front end of a research paper including: a well-motivated and clearly stated research question, a theoretical framework and set of predictions for investigating that question, and a realistic and suitable research design and (if applicable) an appropriate sampling and modeling approach. Please do not hesitate to talk to me at any time about potential ideas and additional relevant literatures for your term paper. This assignment will be structured in the following steps:

Before February 26: Meet with me to discuss possible topics. It is your responsibility to schedule this meeting in advance, and you should come prepared to discuss preliminary ideas and potential topics, as well as any questions you might have.

March 11: A short (2-3 pages) outline of the paper is due by email. This outline should focus on clearly stating your research question and the motivation behind it (i.e., potential contributions) and then provide a brief sketch of what you plan to do in the various sections of your paper.
April 8: You will give a conference-style presentation of your paper in class.

April 15: The final paper (hard copy) is due. No late assignments will be accepted.

Readings

Readings are listed in the order in which it may be most useful to read them.

Readings are available either in the course dropbox (labeled Dropbox) or (if unlabeled) through digital libraries of the U of T library system.

1. January 15: Introduction


2. Gibbons, Robert. 2005. “What is Economic Sociology and Should any Economists Care?” The Journal of Economic Perspectives, 19: 3-7. [Note: This is an introduction to a symposium titled “Sociology and Economics” published in JEP in 2005 (Vol. 19, No. 1); if any of the articles described in the introduction catch your interest, don’t hesitate to find them in the same issue of JEP.]

2. January 22: Institutions


3. January 29: Constructing Customs and Markets


4. February 5: Social Structure


5. February 12: Social Structure (continued)


February 19: Reading Week – No Class

6. February 26: Constructing Contributions

*Note: This week—roughly halfway through the course—we will take a break from reading economic sociology and devote an entire class to scholarly writing, especially the construction and “framing” of contributions. In preparation for this class, instead of the usual weekly memos, you will complete an exercise to help you become a more conscious and effective scholarly writer.*


7. March 4: Power


8. March 11: Power (continued)


9. March 18: Inequality and Stratification


10. March 25: Stigma


**11. April 1: Culture, Complexity, Catastrophe**


**12. April 8: Conclusion and Presentations**

No readings.