Soc. 540. Institutional Analysis

Tuesdays, 1:30-4:20, Fall 2013
Paul Starr

This is a mini-seminar, open to graduate students only. It meets for six times in the first half of the fall semester. Each week there is a short list of common readings. In addition, students are expected to make three presentations on optional readings (books or articles) over the course of the seminar and to write up their reviews/critiques (adding up to roughly 15-18 pages), handing them in after the semester break (by October 29). The optional readings listed here, beginning in the second week, are not the only possibilities; students with interests in specific institutional areas or approaches may propose alternatives at the beginning of the term.

Most common readings will be available in e-Reserves, while a few will be under “Course Materials.” Scott’s Institutions and Organizations and Acemoglu and Robinson’s Why Nations Fail are the only common readings not available electronically. Students may want to purchase copies of those two books, though they have also been ordered for the sociology reading room in Firestone Library.

September 17. Institutions and institutionalisms

This session introduces different types of institutional analysis and explores the meaning and variety of institutions, with examples draw from each of three categories: (1) state-created institutions (citizenship), (2) private ordering within a legal framework (debt), and (3) institutions whose rules and practices are not generally established through law, though they may have the state’s patronage and protection (science).


David Graeber, Debt: The First 5000 Years (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011), 326-335; and

**September 24. Political institutions: the rise of the nation-state and citizenship**

This session takes up a classic case in institutional analysis—the rise of the nation-state—and examines recent work from varying perspectives. (Prof. Wimmer will stop by for the first hour.)

**Common readings**


**Suggested books for individual presentations**
Rogers Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany (Harvard University Press, 1992) [full book]

**October 1. Explaining institutions and institutional change**

This session focuses on institutional formation, historical institutionalism, and path-dependent development.
Common reading


Suggested articles for individual presentation
Three articles tracing the intellectual lineage of increasing returns and path dependency:


October 8. Institutional processes

This session focuses on institutional processes and the institutional orientation in organizational analysis. (Prof. DiMaggio will stop by for the first hour.)

Common reading


Scott, Institutions and Organizations, Ch. 6-9.

Not required, but interesting as background:


Suggested articles for individual presentation

Two studies of institutionalism in post-secondary education:


Two studies of institutionalism and industrial structure:


Two accounts of stability and change:

A rational-choice account of policy stability:

October 15. Economic institutions and the sources of economic development
This session considers the contributions of rational-choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism to understanding the nature of capitalism and the sources of economic growth.

Common reading


Suggested books and articles for individual presentation
Two studies of credible commitment:

Supplementary debate:

October 22. Explaining contemporary institutional change

Here we turn to efforts to explain changes in contemporary institutions, including the shift toward market-oriented (or “neoliberal”) institutions and policies and the spread of constitutions, judicial review, and the “new public management.”

Common reading


Suggested books and articles for individual presentation

