Preliminary Syllabus

**Complexity and Organizational Leadership**

Summer 2016  3 credits  Professor: Chris Francovich, Ed.D.

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Office hours: Please call for an appointment

Tuesday evenings 6-10; June 14, 21, 28; July 1, 5, 12, & 19

Room: (TBD)

**Course Overview**

This course is an inquiry into complexity theory in society, organizations, and the self in relation to leadership phenomena. The course also probes the roots of complexity thinking as it relates to language, rational thought, and human action.

Communications and the consequent physical networks of coordination and movement have increased the complexity and uncertainty of society. The course is (in part) about how it is that we can know what is best for ourselves and others in the context of leading one’s self or others into an uncertain future. Issues of power, privilege, and what is counted as ‘normal’ are central to the interpretation of what it is that we know and how this (what we think we know) is used as a reason to lead or direct people or organizations toward where we think we should or will go.

The course will begin with an overview of complexity perspectives through the lens of Johnson (2009) and will lead us to a critical analysis and review of current applications and interpretations of complexity and systems thinking through the lens of participative and ethical leadership and governance. Woven throughout the first part of the course is the text by Winograd and Flores that challenges modernist thoughts about rational planning and anticipates the discussion of complexity that we are now encountering. Selected readings will help bridge the gap between adaptive, rational, natural law and transformative views of projecting the future. Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey present a complexity leadership theory that will be the focus of the group projects.

Complexity as an object of inquiry requires patience, tolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty, and a willingness to both share and accept your own and others’ incomprehension and confusion.

This course is structured as a dialogic participative inquiry.

**Course Hopes and Aims**

- To develop a sound foundation in the basic vocabulary and concepts of complexity and complexity science
- To understand and apply fundamental concepts of complexity to our own experience, to work situations, and to issues of management and governance in organizations
- To connect the phenomena of complexity to the ethics of leadership.
- To relate ethical, normative, and teleological arguments to complexity and the notion of complex adaptive systems.
- To stimulate and stretch our thinking about leadership, complexity, and the world
Assignments, & Grading

- Please check Blackboard regularly for posted readings and copies of my reading notes. The organization of my class discussions and slides are based on the structure of my reading notes. (note: Blackboard will be available to registered students by June 1)

- Read all materials and attend all classes and participate with all your attention. Please let me know if you intend to miss any classes. (10% of Grade)

- Pre Class assignment – See Course Document on Blackboard for more specifications about this assignment (20% of Grade)

- Group Project – (see Blackboard for specifics) 25%

- Final paper (see Blackboard for specifics) (45% of Grade)

- Late papers or missing 2 or more classes will result in grade reduction and/or an incomplete.

Expectations and Assessment

Assessment of doctoral work in leadership studies is problematic for me. Interdisciplinary work dealing with complex and sometimes contested theories and concepts requires (from my perspective) a tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, and contingency. I am also struck by the need for a high degree of self-directed behavior on the part of doctoral students and candidates. I would like my teaching style, assessment policy, and rubrics to support and facilitate self-direction.

However, behind my questions about assessment and uncertainty in evaluating anyone in an absolute manner there does reside (in my view) a set of skills that serve to hold and shape work with language in a complex world. I believe we need a grammar, syntax, and semantics of clarity, coherence, depth, and breadth. My assumption at the beginning of the term is that all of the students in this class possess the requisite skills, talents, and propensities needed to be clear, cogent, and complete. I admit that the standards I refer to are objectively stated and subjectively enacted. My assessment will be based on the quality and content of expressed thought as exhibited in both written assignments and classroom presentations and participation.

Grading Criteria for Written Work (adapted from the DPLS Academic papers rubric)

Content Criteria:

The content of papers should reflect the level and style of content in readings and discussions. There is an expectation that doctoral students will reach outside of their comfort zone in terms of appropriation of ideas, concepts, and frameworks. The substance of papers and other writings will be weighed against the general level of discourse in class meetings and the style and density of expression of the readings.

Thought and Expression Criteria

Student writing should raise vital questions or issues, formulating them clearly and precisely. I will be looking for evidence of breadth and depth and the insightful, in-depth analysis of complex ideas. Main points should be developed and supported with relevant information and references that are appropriately incorporated.
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The organization and logic of your writing is critical. The expectation is for well focused, well organized, and well reasoned conclusions. The writing should flow with the reader not getting lost or having to work to determine what you are saying.

There is also an expectation that your writing/thinking has an open and inclusive character when exploring alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as appropriate, their assumptions, implications, and/or practical consequences.

Technical Criteria

Your writing should be clear and demonstrate a high level of vocabulary through careful word choice. Sentences should be constructed skillfully and purposefully. Transitions between paragraphs and sections are important and will evaluated for their efficacy in weaving your concepts, themes, and purposes together. Summaries and conclusions are also vital elements of good writing and will be evaluated based on their appropriateness and effectiveness.

Of course grammar, punctuation, and spelling are expected to be flawless. Careful proof reading of your paper is a basic expectation.

Papers, unless otherwise noted are to be completed in APA style. References should be cited properly within the text and a complete reference list must be provided. Appropriate use of headings will also be noted.

Point/Grade correspondence:

95-100% = A
90-94.99% = A-
85-90% = B
80-84.99% = B-

Required Texts


Required Reading (on Blackboard):


Other readings will be announced.
Recommended Reading: