## LOC/LS 308: Redesigning Everyday Organizations
Winter 2021
Monday 6:00 to 8:50 PM

Professor Kay Ramey          Annenberg Hall
Office hours: By appointment      kay.ramey@northwestern.edu

Teaching Assistant: Wade Berger     Annenberg Hall
Office hours: TBD                wadeberger@u.northwestern.edu

Technical Support: Pauline Kenly     Annenberg Hall
                                        p-wairimu@northwestern.edu

## COURSE OVERVIEW
How do people do things together? In our everyday lives, we learn and work within particular arrangements of people, objects, tools, and information. These designed systems and processes—which we'll call *everyday organizations*—allow us to solve problems, achieve our goals, and generally get things done. Except when they don't.

In this class, you'll learn to identify and analyze everyday organizations, document what's working and what's not, and figure out creative ways to redesign them. You'll conduct ethnographic fieldwork, using concepts and methods drawn from theories of human cognition as it happens in context. These concepts come from distributed cognition and actor-network approaches and stress the inextricability of humans and "non-humans" (i.e. tools, technologies, representations) working together in the conduct of everyday organizations. We'll also look critically and creatively at the values and principles that anchor our designs for change. The broad goal is to equip you with strategies for making organizational change that can be applied across personal, professional, and community contexts.

Course readings are varied and include literature from cognitive science, sociology, anthropology, design, and other disciplines. Podcasts and video relevant to the course ideas may also be assigned. All assigned readings and other media will be available through the course Canvas site. Classes will focus on discussions of the readings, videos, and/or podcasts and our experiences in the field, as well as extended projects or group activities. The majority of lecture material will be prerecorded and posted on Canvas via a series of short videos. Students will be responsible for viewing and commenting on this material prior to class. Assignments include weekly reading responses and discussion board posts, three field studies to tune your observation and writing skills, and a final design project.
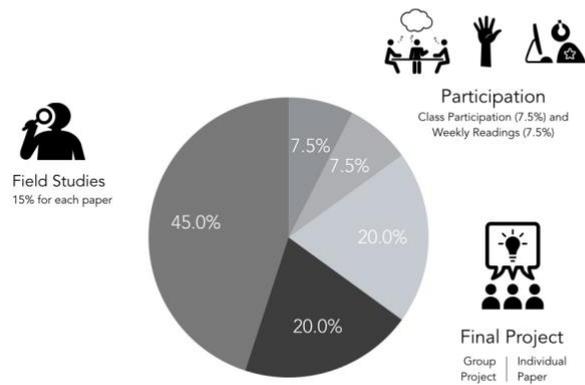
*Learning Objectives*

- Read and discuss research that analyzes thinking and learning in everyday organizations and apply the ideas to your own life and work
- Practice and build systematic skills to observe, document, and understand everyday situations, communities, and organizations
- Identify values and principles that guide your designs for change
- Conduct a theoretically informed design project, working on a team to redesign an everyday organization

*More about the course*

A foundational intellectual premise of Redesigning Everyday Organizations is an ecological, cultural, and pragmatic one—that people learn, think, and act in ways that are adaptive to the specific and recurring situations and contexts in which they find themselves. Thus, our understandings of thinking and learning should reflect this range of situations, cultures, and contexts. Learning, thinking, and collaboration happen everywhere.

A core part of the course experience involves a number of field activities that ask you to explore important concepts and methods that are represented in the readings. You do not need prior fieldwork experience to participate in these activities. Since fieldwork of this kind will be new to most of you, we will equip you with some basic tools and strategies for looking, listening, noticing, and recording events in everyday life. The primary reason the course meets once a week, rather than twice as is the norm for undergraduate courses at Northwestern, is to combine readings with these field activities, to combine reflective and critical discussion with active exploration of the ideas.

## Class Evaluation



Participation
Class Participation (7.5%) and Weekly Readings (7.5%)

Field Studies
15% for each paper

7.5%
7.5%
20.0%
45.0%
20.0%

Final Project
Group Project | Individual Paper

The possible uses for the kinds of discoveries one makes through fieldwork in everyday contexts are many. One is simply to broaden your understanding of how learning, cognition, and culture are organized differently across peoples, times, and places. This is the core goal underlying much of the tradition of liberal arts education. However, your interest may be in making change, in making things better in the world around you.

Our primary goal is to give you some strategies and techniques to approach designing for change. First, you'll learn to recognize, observe and analyze an everyday organization. Then, you'll look for an unmet need or a 'chronic snag' within that organization: something that's a recurring problem for the people involved. Finally, you'll work on a redesign that seeks to meet that need or ameliorate that chronic snag.

Whether you ultimately find yourself in industry or in a nonprofit, you'll be working with people who need deep and continually refreshed understandings of the people they serve. Creating change in the many places you will live and work—at the day-to-day level where things actually happen—depends on the sort of research and concepts explored in this class.

FEEDBACK AND GRADING
To participate fully and successfully in the course, you must read the assigned texts (or watch/listen to assigned videos/podcasts) carefully before each class. We strongly recommend that you annotate the readings with your own questions, reactions, and connections—to other readings, fieldwork, and personal experiences. (Having a 'conversation' with the readings, in this active way, will make a big difference in the depth of your understanding and your ability to use the ideas.) One of the biggest opportunities you have in college is to learn from other people's ideas and to put your ideas into interaction with those of your classmates and your

professors. You sell your experience short if you don't engage substantively with the papers and bring those engagements into the class discussions.

Weekly Reading Snapshots (7.5% of grade): To ensure preparation for in-class discussion, each week, you will be asked to write a response that minimally captures each of the assigned readings from your perspective. These must be uploaded to Canvas by Sunday at 4 pm. If you have read closely and annotated, these should be straightforward and quick to put together. Required elements of these snapshots (1 for each assigned reading, compiled into one document for the week) are:
1. 1-4 sentence summary of the article or chapter
2. List of key concepts (1-3), with either a quoted definition or a definition of the concept in your own words
3. 1-2 sentences on what you found most personally relevant/useful and an explanation of why
4. 1 question the reading raises for you

Class Participation: (7.5% of grade): Attendance in this class is required. Since we only meet once a week, and because the in-class activities are central to your learning experience in the class, you will only be allowed one unexcused absence, before receiving a participation grade of 0. However, we understand that right now, some of you may be facing extenuating circumstances outside of your control. Therefore, if you need to miss class due to an urgent medical or personal situation and you arrange this with Professor Ramey ahead of time or provide documentation after the fact, you will be allowed one additional excused absence, without losing participation points.

In courses you take at NU, the class participation grade is often a throw away category, but in this course, we intend to treat it seriously, because of the ideas of distributed contribution and shared enterprise that are so central to this course. If you never participate and appear unprepared, you should expect to receive a low grade for class participation. If you make a genuine effort and come prepared with the interesting questions and ideas we know you have, you will get full credit. We encourage you to have your video turned on during Zoom class sessions, and when appropriate, to turn on your microphone and contribute verbally to discussions. However, we will also provide opportunities for you to share thoughts and questions in writing, via the chat in Zoom.

You also have two digital opportunities to share your ideas and raise your participation grade. The first is weekly discussion board postings on the readings. Every week, you will be required to copy and paste items 3 and 4 from your reading responses to the class discussion board on Canvas (1-2 sentences on what you found most personally relevant/useful in each reading and why and 1 question each reading raises for you). You are also required to reply to *at least* one of your classmates' posts each week (either answering one of the questions they raised or asking a question about a personal connection they made to the readings). You are also welcome and encouraged to reply to more than one or to get into a multi-turn online discussion. Your initial discussion board posts must be submitted to Canvas at the same your reading snapshot is due (Sunday 4 PM), to give other students sufficient time to read and respond to them before class.

The second digital opportunity to share your ideas and raise your participation grade is commenting on the prerecorded lectures. We ask that you post one comment or question on each of the short videos posted each week. Your comments will be due Sunday at Midnight CST.

Field Activity Narratives (3 @ 15% each): The motivation for the field activities is straightforward: research is best understood by participating in it and then representing it in well-selected media. Each of the field activities should be represented in a short, electronic document (2-5 single-spaced pages). You may choose to use forms of media in addition to words for documentation, and we encourage you to do so. Other media might include photos, videos, audio recordings, diagrams, and maps. However, whatever media you combine for these papers, the core of the paper should be a well-written, coherent narrative. In class, after each of the field activities are due, we will use some of class time to discuss shared lessons and new questions that arose.

Written team project sketches (not graded but with feedback provided): We will assign you to a final project team composed of three or four members by Week 4 (Feb. 1). Your team will submit an initial project sketch by that Thursday (Feb. 4), and we will provide you written feedback on your project sketch before Class 5 (Feb 8). Do not hesitate to make a significant change in direction at this point based on the feedback!

Final Project Presentation (20% of grade; earned by team): In lieu of live project presentations, your team will produce and share a pitch video for your team's design for change (D4C). Successful projects will meet the following criteria: (1) Establishing through the use of data and analysis an unmet need or chronic snag in an everyday organization; (2) a "design for change" that addresses the unmet need or snag, and (3) an argument for why the design for change could be implemented. As a class member, you will have a role in giving feedback on other team's pitch videos, and Wade and I will provide feedback on all of them. These pitch videos will need to be uploaded by midnight, Sunday, March 7th. By noon the next day, they will all be available for comment in Panopto. Your last responsibility for the final presentations will be giving feedback on the other teams' presentations (due by Midnight on Tuesday, March 9).

Final Paper (20% of grade, earned by individual): The final paper is each individual team member's opportunity to write about their perspective on the final project. This is not a paper about your role in the project; it should be writing about the whole project. This paper is your way of putting it all together. This writing needs to be your own; though, of course, it will reflect joint work with your teammates. In addition to the three components described above that should be the basis for your presentation, this paper must also include an engagement with ideas from the course and at least some additional readings that are relevant to your project topic. You should use readings from the course—or other related readings that are appropriate to your project focus—to support your ideas about why the "design for change" you propose will likely be successful. The final paper is due right before the beginning of Finals Week (Sunday, Mar. 14, midnight CST). It should be between 6 and 10 single-spaced pages, references excluded. Please use APA format for references. We will provide further details on the final project, the presentation, and final paper, as these get closer.

ACCESSIBILITY
Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet,

"Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit:
http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html

UNIVERSITY POLICY ON RECORDINGS FOR ON-LINE INSTRUCTION
This class or portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purposes and available to the class during the quarter. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings. Portions of the course that contain images, questions or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact **AccessibleNU**. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited.  Under the University's Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.

CLASS READINGS

Week 1 (January 11): Introduction to Redesigning Everyday Organizations

Week 2 (January 18): The Argument for Fieldwork
*NO CLASS MEETING but readings and reading responses are due*
   • Hughes, E. C. (1960). Introduction: the place of field work in social science. *Field work: An introduction to the social sciences*.
   • Madsbjerg, C., & Rasmussen, M. (2014). "The Human Sciences (Chapter 4)" from *The moment of clarity: using the human sciences to solve your toughest business problems*. Harvard Business Review Press.
   • Suchman, L. (1995). Making work visible. Communications of the ACM, 38(9), 56-64.
   • Wasson, C. (2000). Ethnography in the Field of Design. *Human Organization, 59*(4), 377-378.

Week 3 (January 25): Thinking and Learning 'On the Job', in Everyday Life
   • **Read this one first.** Bransford, J., Vye, N., Stevens, R., Kuhl, P., Schwartz, D., Bell, P., ... & Roschelle, J. (2006). Informal learning section of Learning theories and education: Toward a decade of synergy. Handbook of educational psychology.
   • Becker, H. S. (1972). A school is a lousy place to learn anything in. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, *16*(1), 85-105.
   • Rose, M. (2001). The working life of a waitress.

Week 4 (February 1): Making the Familiar Strange and the Practices of 'Othering'
**First Field Activity Paper Due**

- **Read this one first**: Miner, H. (1956). Body ritual among the Nacirema. *American Anthropologist, 58*(3), 503-507.
- Bell, G., Blythe, M., & Sengers, P. (2005). Making by making strange: Defamiliarization and the design of domestic technologies. *ACM Transactions on Computer Human Interaction (TOCHI), 12*(2), 149-173.
- Bardzell, S. (2010, April). Feminist HCI: Taking stock and outlining an agenda for design. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems (pp.1301-1310). ACM.
- Tomlinson, B., Silberman, M. S., Patterson, D., Pan, Y., & Blevis, E. (2012, May). Collapse informatics: augmenting the sustainability & ICT4D discourse in HCI. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 655-664).
- (optional) Singer, N. (2014). Intel's Sharp-eyed Social Scientist. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/technology/intels-sharp-eyed-social-scientist.html?_r=0#slideshow/

Videos
- Olaf's "That Time of Year" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLGBEETtEPc&feature=youtu.be
- Trevor Noah on Traffic Lights https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mU35XlTkLnA

**Initial Team Project Sketch due on Thursday, Feb. 4 (by midnight CST).**

Week 5 (February 8) Studying Humans and Non-humans Working Together
**Second Field Activity Paper Due**
- **Read this one first:** Hutchins, E. (2000). Distributed cognition. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Elsevier Science.*
- Johnson, J. (aka Bruno Latour) (1988). Mixing humans and nonhumans together: The sociology of a door closer. *Social problems*, 298-310.
- Hutchins, E., & Klausen, T. (1996). Distributed cognition in an airline cockpit. *Cognition and communication at work*, 15-34.
- Martin, B. and Hanington, B. from *Universal Methods of Design* Observational Methods*: 02, 06, 27, 42, 57, 59, 92*
- (Optional) Hutchins, E. (1995). How a cockpit remembers its speeds. Cognitive science, 19(3), 265-288.

Week 6 (February 15) Snags, Breakdowns, and Disruptions as Spurs to Change
**Third Field Activity Paper Due**
- De la Rocha, O. L. (1986), "Conflict and invention: Repairing a chronic snag" from *Problems of sense and problems of scale: An ethnographic study of arithmetic in everyday life* (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Irvine).
- Engestrom, Yrjo. "Activity theory as a framework for analyzing and redesigning work." *Ergonomics* 43.7 (2000): 960-974.
- Alter, S. (2014) "Theory of Workarounds," Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 34(55), pp. 1041-1066.
- Martin, B. and Hanington, B. from *Universal Methods of Design* Interactive Methods*: 04, 20, 30, 62, 64, 76, 89*
- (Optional) Kelley, Ten Faces of Innovation (2005) from, pp. 6-15 on 'learning personas' & Anthropologist, pp. 17-39, Experience architect, pp.166-192

Week 7 (February 22) Designing From What we Learn in the Field
- Norman, D. A. (2013). The Psychopathology of Everyday Things (Chapter 1) and Design Thinking (Chapter 6). in *The design of everyday things: Revised and expanded edition*. Basic books.
- Madsbjerg, C., & Rasmussen, M. (2014). "The Turnaround (Chapter 5)" from *The moment of clarity: using the human sciences to solve your toughest business problems*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Podcasts and Videos
- Sara Cantor Aye, *Designing Everything But the Food (Video)*
- https://www.vox.com/2016/2/26/11120236/bad-doors-human-centered-design (video)
- 99% Invisible: Unpleasant Design & Hostile Urban Architecture (podcast and online article)

Week 8 (March 1): What Promotes or Prevents Organizational Change?
- Berkun, S. (2010). "People Love New Ideas" from *The myths of innovation*. O'Reilly Media, Inc.
- Becker, H. S. (1995). The power of inertia. *Qualitative Sociology, 18*(3), 301-309.
- Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). "Three Surprises About Change" from *Switch: How to change when change is hard*. Broadway Books.

Week 9 (March 8) Final Presentations
NO CLASS MEETING.
- Final presentations must be uploaded by Sunday, March 7 at midnight CST.
- They will be available in Panopto for peer commenting by Monday, March 8 by noon CST.
- Peer comments must be made by Tuesday, March 9 at midnight CST.

Finals Week (no class)
**Final paper due Sunday, March 14, midnight CST.** Both instructors will be available for consultations on final papers during Week 9.