

## MGMT 7720 — POWER AND POLITICS IN ORGANIZATIONS (FALL Q1 2022)

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**TAs:** [Marissa Sawicki](#) (10:15) & [Camille Trangsrud](#) (12 pm)  
**Power Hour:** Tuesday from 2-3 pm or TBA  
**Emails:** #poweritupMBA as Subject (To: Your TA + Nurmo)



### COURSE OBJECTIVES

“Power is to the organization as oxygen is to breathing” (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006: 3).

“Every social relationship is a power equation” (Hawley, 1963: 422).

“Nothing discloses real character like the use of power” (Ingersoll, 2009: 14).

There are many tensions in holding and exercising power in organizations. Whether you have an appetite or disdain for it, power and politics play an essential role in your career. Power and politics enable people to accomplish and pursue their goals. At the same time, you can exercise power in ways that hurt others directly or indirectly.

This course aims to introduce you to concepts useful for understanding, analyzing, and navigating power dynamics in organizations. But beyond discovering ways to extend your power in organizations, we will also uncover lessons about how it can blind you and how to navigate situations in which you are up against those with authority or influence. We will extract various lessons about power and politics in organizations using a range of scholarly articles, cases, exercises, assessments, and simulations. Topics include diagnosing power and politics in organizations, building coalitions, networks, managing conflict, speaking up for yourself and others, responding to status loss and low expectations, and leading change (e.g., issue selling, change management, and downsizing). Students are expected to engage in field research as part of their coursework, and the course requires that students submit assignments for almost every class session.

I designed this course for students aiming to develop their leadership, general management, and career skills. It also relates to other courses on these topics in the Management department. Thematically, this course highlights how your relationships with organizational stakeholders and understanding the organizational context are crucial to successfully navigating the political terrain of organizations. Organizations are inherently political arenas that require social astuteness and an understanding of the “rules of the game.” Students interested in the topic of influence from a judgment and decision-making lens rather than from a leadership and organizational perspective may wish to consider other courses.

### TEXT AND READINGS

I curated the materials for this course (accessible via Canvas). Some of the readings and exercises are not in the course pack (e.g., I will post them online or distribute them in class). You must complete the assigned material before the date of class (listed at the end of the syllabus) unless otherwise noted. You will get more out of the course by completing the readings before each class. Please note that the readings and preparation questions are subject to change at my discretion.

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATION

### Course Expectations

All classes will be held in person and synchronously unless otherwise noted. A critical component of the success of this course depends on *you*. This class relies on informed engagement for learning, and we reinforce this in several ways:

- You are expected to complete the preassigned work and come prepared for every class.
- This course has a mandatory first-week attendance policy, and another student (e.g., a student on the waitlist) may enroll in your spot if you cannot attend every class. Given that we only have a limited number of sessions, you are expected to attend every class. If you cannot attend every class, I urge you to reconsider whether this course is appropriate for you. **Please do not enroll at the expense of your peers who plan to attend every class.**
- We will be using the MBA program’s attendance app. If you will be absent, late, or need to leave class early, please inform the TA (with me cc’d) via email before class. Also, any unexcused/excused absences should also be reported to the academic office and/or course absence report system. You are welcome to have your academic advisor email us on your behalf if you cannot attend class for an excused reason (please ensure they have received appropriate documentation so that you do not receive a full deduction). You are responsible for getting up to speed with any missed coursework, including assignments.
- Because course engagement is critical to the success of the course, absences, a lack of preparation, or the misuse of an electronic device can seriously affect your grade (i.e., it can result in D/F/LT grades in the course even if you pass other parts of the course), and I reserve the right to drop you from the course.

Lastly, this class also depends on me. You should expect me to deliver high-quality content and class sessions. I will also be holding “Power Hours” throughout the semester so that I answer your questions and gain your insights. I will be disappointed if there is a problem in the classroom—particularly one that could be remedied—but nobody shares it with me. Although I cannot guarantee that I will satisfy all of your suggestions, I will try my best to address them. I have articulated these expectations, rules, and norms because I believe that if we abide by them, we will create a better and more supportive learning environment.

### Course Evaluation

Your overall grade is based on the following components (more detail is provided below):

<u>Components</u>	<u>Grade Value</u>	<u>Due Dates</u>
<b>1) Class Contribution</b>		
A. Preparation Assignments	35%	Throughout the course
B. Participation	15%	Throughout the course
<b>2) Personal Development Plan</b>		
A. Progress Slide Deck	5%	September 13
B. Final Paper	45%	October 11

## 1) Class Contribution

There are two components to your class contribution grade: (A) preparation assignments and (B) participation.

### A) Preparation Assignments

Preparation assignments help you acquire a deeper understanding of course concepts and prepare for classroom discussion using the material assigned for the day. These preparation assignments will usually require you to respond to one of the questions listed on Canvas for each class session before 7 am. Similar to the business world, work must be delivered on time, especially since your responses are often integrated into the session. **Therefore, you will only be eligible to receive credit for a preparation assignment if you submit it by the deadline (i.e., assignments submitted after the deadline will receive zero credit—no exceptions).**

### B) Participation

High-quality class contribution involves knowing when to speak and when to listen so that you can learn from others. In this course, quality is more important than the quantity (i.e., number) of comments. You are expected to attend every class session, having read and thought about the assigned material. A contribution to the class discussion is a comment that features one or more of the following properties:

- i) Uses logic, evidence, and related material (e.g., readings, data) to support conclusions and is more than an expression of an opinion or feeling;
- ii) Shows curiosity, creativity, and the willingness to experiment;
- iii) Takes into consideration the ideas already offered by others and moves the analysis forward to generate new insights; and/or
- iv) Helps others feel safe about participating. I am a proponent of viewpoint diversity, but debates must also be conducted respectfully. I encourage students to visit [www.openmindplatform.org](http://www.openmindplatform.org) to discover ways to cultivate their intellectual humility and openness.

Comments that are vague, repetitive, unrelated, disrespectful of others, or without sufficient foundation are discouraged and will be evaluated negatively. I will undertake “supportive cold calling” to encourage balanced involvement and appropriate preparation to elevate the quality of in-class discussions. We may also use your involvement in-class exercises and activities as a component of your participation grade.

## 2) Personal Development Plan (PDP)

The purpose of the PDP is to help you develop and chart your political strategy as you enter your career. Furthermore, it serves as a mechanism for understanding how people currently working in sectors and organizations you are interested in have built power via concepts related to the course and navigated social/moral dilemmas when exercising power in their careers.

The PDP can be challenging because it forces you to project yourself into the future. However, even if you change your goals or interests over time, creating a PDP enables you to set a range of short

and long-term goals and contemplate how power and politics are likely to impact your career objectives.

As part of your PDP, you must conduct AT LEAST three informational interviews with professionals currently in careers you are interested in pursuing. From these interviews, you will learn about their strategies for dealing with issues pertinent to power and politics and integrate these insights with course concepts, case examples, and class exercises to chart your strategy.

### **A) Progress Slide Deck and Feedback Session**

To help guide your PDP, you will share your progress on the PDP in class. In this class session, I will share some insights from research on power and politics in organizations that may be worth considering as you develop your PDP and give you additional details on how best to develop your PDP.

In preparation for this feedback session, you should create a progress slide deck that conveys your progress on the PDP. Submit your progress slide deck in advance on Canvas and plan to present for a maximum of five minutes in class. Your progress slide deck should include the following information: a brief summary of your short and long-term goals (slide 1), a description of 2-3 topics from the course you are applying to your PDP (slide 2), a rationale for the three people you are interviewing (slide 3), and what you have learned from your interviews thus far (slide 4). For feedback purposes, you should end with an “ask”: what would you like your classmates’ help on/thoughts on/reactions to (slide 5)? You are also welcome to include sample questions you are using for your interviews as an “appendix slide” at the end of your slide deck (I encourage you to complete at least one interview before your session). In addition to us grading your slide deck on Canvas, you will receive in-person feedback from your peers as you continue to develop your PDP.

### **B) Final Paper**

Based on what you have learned in the course and in your informational interviews, you will submit your PDP, which should include the following:

1. Overview of your career goals;
2. Description of the people you interviewed;
3. Exposition of your strategic plan for developing power (e.g., choosing where to start, building networks, etc.) as you start your career (i.e., before taking your job and in your first year on the job) and transition into your future goals. You should develop, detail, and analyze a strategy that fits the political environment in which you will be working. Your goal should be to have a coherent strategy that is supported by topics discussed in the course and what you heard from your interviewees;
4. Ethical and social dilemmas (i.e., 2-3 potential dilemmas) that you might encounter as you implement your strategic plan and the concrete steps you will take to handle these dilemmas; and
5. A “top 10 list” of notes to yourself about power and politics that you want to remember a year from now (on your cover page).
6. Appendix: Semi-structured interview protocol that you used to guide your conversations with each interviewee.

These six areas should be covered in your PDP. Papers must be double-spaced and a maximum of 10 pages (Time New Roman, 12-point font; your cover page and interview protocol do not count towards this limit). Your grade will reflect the quality of your analysis, appropriate use of course concepts, logic, use of interview data, substantiation of conclusions, clarity, and interest. You should draw on material covered in the course to chart your political strategy, and you will want to use data (e.g., quotes) from your interviews to support your analysis throughout your paper.

More details will be provided in class and online, including an annotated outline for your plan and the rubric used for evaluation. Papers must be submitted on Canvas before the deadline (i.e., the start of class). Unless an exception is made, final paper submissions after the deadline will drop your grade by a full letter grade (e.g., a B+ would be converted into a C+). The paper will drop additional letter grades for each subsequent day it is late. If your final paper is late by more than three days, you may receive a zero on the paper.

Please note: for all components of your grade, any grading inquiries must be raised within 5 days of the grade being posted.

## **ETHICS, WELLNESS AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING**

Personal integrity and professionalism are fundamental values of Wharton and the University of Pennsylvania community. To help ensure that these values are upheld and maintain equitability in evaluating your work, this course will be conducted in strict conformity with the Academic Honor Code. Please be aware that a violation of the honor code is serious. You are required to do original work; all assignments in this class must be completed independently unless otherwise specified. If you have any questions about any of the policies listed in this syllabus, please let me know. The University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity can be examined at the following website: [www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai\\_codeofacademicintegrity.html](http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html)

Wharton and the University of Pennsylvania offers numerous services and initiatives for wellness. Any member of the Penn community can use these services. More information can be found by visiting <https://www.wharton.upenn.edu/wharton-wellness/> or by calling 215-898-HELP.

### **Covid-19 and Virtual Contingency Planning**

Our course will aim to abide by the university policies regarding keeping our classroom and campus safe from the spread of Covid-19. We will make necessary arrangements if we are “virtual” at any point during the semester. For virtual class sessions, you are expected to be on time and ready to participate with your camera “on” at all times on your computer (if this is not possible, please get in touch with the academic office and me to make alternative arrangements). You are expected to focus on the class during all virtual sessions (e.g., taking notes, actively participating, off your phone, not toggling between the class and other windows or devices).

*Please note that this syllabus and the course outline are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.*

## COURSE OUTLINE

#	Date & Topics	Materials for Session	Preparation for Class and Assignments
1	August 30 Diagnosing Power: Where to Start?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-class Survey on Canvas</li> <li>- Khazan, “‘Finding Your Passion’ is Awful Advice”</li> <li>- Pfeffer, “Choosing Where to Start”</li> <li>- Case: Martha Rinaldi</li> </ul>	<p>Complete parts a and b for today’s preparation assignment:</p> <p>a) Complete the pre-course survey before the first class. If you register for the course at a later date, it is your responsibility to complete the survey.</p> <p>b) Did Rinaldi make a mistake by choosing Potomac over Deep Dive? Apply principles from the readings to inform what she should have done and/or could have done differently when making her decision.</p>
2	September 1 Power Play(ed): Hierarchies, Alliances, and Coalitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pfeffer, “Power Play”</li> <li>- Stern &amp; Westphal “Flattery Will Get You Everywhere”</li> <li>- Greer, “Four Keys to a Healthy Workplace Hierarchy”</li> <li>- <b>In class:</b> Boardroom Exercise</li> </ul>	<p>Based on what we learned last class and today’s readings, please detail two ways you plan to change your strategies for building power in your future career. Why are these strategies valuable to you?</p>
3	September 6 Power and Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cha &amp; Morgan Roberts, “The Benefits of Bringing Your Whole Identity to Work”</li> <li>- Morrison, “The Downsides of ‘Being Yourself’ at Work”</li> <li>- Nurmohamed, “The Upside of Being an Underdog”</li> <li>- <b>In class:</b> Defining Moments</li> </ul>	<p>Think about a time in which you worried about how others saw you. Why were you worried? Apply the three articles you read to your experience. What would you do differently next time in a situation like this one?</p> <p>In addition, please come to class with an analysis of the Boardroom Exercise you completed in the last session.</p>
4	September 8 Building Power, Losing Power & Finding Yourself Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nurmohamed, “What Behavioral Science Tells Us About Power”</li> <li>- Sezer, “Impression (Mis)management: When What You Say is Not What They Hear”</li> <li>- Bendersky, “How to Get Ideological Opponents to Work with You”</li> <li>- Case: Jeffrey Sonnenfeld</li> </ul>	<p>Complete parts a and b for today’s preparation assignment:</p> <p>a) As previously discussed, we desire to be liked and seen positively by others. To challenge this desire, do something that makes you unlikeable to others (and if that’s too extreme for you, simply do something embarrassing in public). You will want to describe what you did, how it made yourself and others feel, and how you cleaned up the consequences (if at all). Be creative and brave—the possibilities are endless. If this sounds unpleasant, you may benefit the most from this exercise. You’ll probably feel scared initially but surprisingly liberated at the end.</p> <p>b) What did Sonnenfeld do to advance his personal and relational power? With the benefit of hindsight, what would you have done differently if you were him?</p>

5	September 13 PDP Progress Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>In Class:</b> PDP Progress Feedback Session</li> </ul>	Submit your PDP Progress Slide Deck in advance of class and bring it with you on a laptop to class (see syllabus, 2A)
6	September 15 Networks & Change Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cross, Nohria, &amp; Parker, “Six Myths about Informal Networks”</li> <li>- Meyerson, “The Tempered Radicals”</li> <li>- Simulation Overview (to be posted on Canvas)</li> <li>- Bonus (not required): <a href="#">Podcast - How to Strengthen Your Network</a></li> <li>- <b>In class:</b> Change Management Simulation</li> </ul>	Please register for the change management simulation before this session. Using the preparation materials, integrate two lessons on networks from the reading that you will try to implement in the simulation.
7	September 20 With Great Power I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mishra, Mishra &amp; Spreitzer, “Downsizing the Company without Downsizing Morale”</li> <li>- Bonus (not required): <a href="#">Expanding Ethical Standards of HMR</a></li> <li>- <b>In class:</b> OMGW Exercise</li> </ul>	Please write a reflection on your experience in the Change Management Simulation. Use course concepts to discuss what was effective versus ineffective in the simulation. Based on what you learned in the simulation, what would you do differently when leading change in the future in your organization as a “mid-level” manager or director? Note: unlike the other assignments, you should aim to write a full-page reflection that integrates examples from your simulation runs (single-spaced) and the readings/content from the last class.
8	September 22 With Great Power II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maner and Case, “The Essential Tension Between Leadership and Power”</li> <li>- Deresiewicz, “Solitude and Leadership”</li> <li>- <b>In class:</b> Guest Speaker</li> </ul>	How has your understanding of exercising power changed based on the OMGW Exercise we did last class? Describe and provide 2-3 takeaways you want to remember for moving forward.
9	September 27 Life Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Case: Zarina Lalji (Part A-to be distributed prior to the session)</li> </ul>	Imagine you are a trusted friend or family member of Zarina, and she calls you for advice on what to do next. Develop a plan for the next steps that she should take based on the choices she is considering.
10	September 29 #poweritup Capstone I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peterson, “Don’t Take the Wrong Paths to Power”</li> <li>- Case: Glanton (Part A-to be distributed prior to the session)</li> </ul>	Using one (or more) of the frameworks you have learned in this course, please respond to one of the following questions: a) How did Barnes use power to protect his collection? What was effective versus ineffective? What did he overlook? b) Analyze what Glanton did either effectively or ineffectively in building his power.
11	September 29/30 #poweritup Capstone II	Please note that this session will occur outside of the scheduled class time. I will provide more details during the course.	

12	October 4 Words I Never Said & Course Wrap-Up	- Final Course Survey	- Complete the final course survey on Canvas. I recommend you use this time to finalize your Personal Development Plan and have a classmate give you feedback on your paper.
	October 6	FALL BREAK (no class)	
	October 11	<b>DEADLINE:</b> Personal Development Plan (see syllabus, 2B)	

**Note:** My materials are curated from numerous sources (e.g., academic and practitioner journals, books, magazines, blogs, cases) because I want to reflect the breadth and depth of perspectives on power and politics. For students who are interested in reading beyond this course or who are unable to register for this course, you can find additional materials below, as well as on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) by searching for #poweritup:

- Power: Why Some People Have It—and Others Don't (Pfeffer)
- Give and Take (Grant)
- Social Chemistry (King)
- All You Have to Do Is Ask (Baker)
- Power, for All (Battilana & Casciaro)
- Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader (Ibarra)
- You Have More Influence than You Think (Bohns)
- Rebel Talent (Gino)