Western University  
Department of Psychology  
Psychology 9650  
**Power and Status in Organizations**  
**Winter 2024**  
See Student Centre for course time and location

**Enrollment Restrictions**
Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Department of Psychology, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student’s home program.

**Instructor Information**
Instructor: Dr. Alex Benson  
Office: SSC 8438/40  
Office Phone: 519-661-2111 x85895  
Office Hours: By appointment  
Email: abenson3@uwo.ca

**Course Description**
This course offers an overview of research on the function and structure of social hierarchies within organizations and groups. In this course, we will examine traditional and contemporary accounts on the nature of social rank, how power and status differences are established and regulated, and the consequences of social hierarchy for individuals and organizations. We will discuss a range of topics, including the bases of social hierarchy, the social neuroendocrinology of status and power, motives and individual differences related to status and power, and how social rank influences a range of outcomes.

**Course Format**
This is a seminar-style course that is organized around weekly readings of theoretical and/or empirical papers. Students are expected to attend and actively participate in the weekly discussions, submit weekly discussion questions, write two brief reflection papers, and prepare a final research proposal.

**Course Learning Outcomes/Objectives**
We will address these topics at multiple levels of analysis to understand the personal, interpersonal, and group implications of social hierarchy. Students will also learn about the methods used to study social hierarchy within group contexts and the challenges of research in this area. Students will learn contemporary theory, concepts, and methods relevant to the nature and consequences of social hierarchy in organizations.
Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Learning Activity</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depth and Breadth of Knowledge.</strong></td>
<td>Weekly reading</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Evaluate and describe contemporary theory and</td>
<td>Conducting independent research for your proposal</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
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<td>and methods relevant to the emergence, maintenance, and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Class participation grades</td>
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<td>implications of social hierarchy in organizations.</td>
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<td>Research proposal and presentation</td>
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<td><strong>Knowledge of Methodologies.</strong></td>
<td>Weekly reading</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
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<td>• Critically evaluate the appropriateness of different</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
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<td>approaches to studying social hierarchy within</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
<td>Class participation grades</td>
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<td>organizations.</td>
<td>Class discussion</td>
<td>Research proposal and presentation</td>
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<td><strong>Application of Knowledge.</strong></td>
<td>Class discussion</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
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<td>• Apply concepts and theories to novel examples of</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>behaviours and situations.</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
<td>Class participation grades</td>
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<td><strong>Communication Skills.</strong></td>
<td>Research proposal</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
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<td>• Conceptualize and summarize findings from the</td>
<td>Class discussion</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
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<td>scholarly literature and communicate these orally and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Class participation grades</td>
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<td>and in writing.</td>
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<td>Research proposal and presentation</td>
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<td><strong>Awareness of Limits of Knowledge.</strong></td>
<td>Weekly reading</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
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<td>• Understand constraints on the generality of</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
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<td>findings based on the research context and target</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
<td>Class participation grades</td>
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<tr>
<td>population.</td>
<td>Class discussion</td>
<td>Research proposal and presentation</td>
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<td>• Understand the gap between theory and practice as</td>
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<td>it pertains to status and power in organizations.</td>
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<td><strong>Autonomy and Professional Capacity.</strong></td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identify a research question that builds upon</td>
<td>Class discussion</td>
<td>Reflection papers</td>
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<td>course material and propose a study to</td>
<td>Leading a class discussion</td>
<td>Class participation grades</td>
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<td>effectively address it.</td>
<td>Conducting independent research for your proposal</td>
<td>Research proposal and presentation</td>
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<td>• Effectively engage in collegial discussions,</td>
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<td>consider alternative viewpoints, and work effectively</td>
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<td>with others.</td>
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**Course Materials**

The readings for this course consist primarily of journal articles and chapters, which will be made accessible via the ‘Course Readings’ tab on OWL. Please see the “Dates, Topics, and Readings” below for the tentative list of weekly readings. The reading list will be finalized at the start of the Winter semester.

**Methods of Evaluation**

1. **Class Participation (20%)** – This is a seminar style course that relies on students to actively participate in class discussions. To facilitate these discussions, students are expected to come to class prepared with comments and questions about the readings that caught their interest and be prepared to respond to other students’ comments and questions. Student participation should reflect deep and critical
engagement with the weekly readings. Class participation will be evaluated based on the quality of contributions to the discussions.

2. Reflection Papers (10%) – Students are required to submit two brief reflection papers based on the weekly readings. Each reflection paper should strive to either pose new questions or perspectives, critique an existing theory or empirical finding, draw connections between the readings, or propose alternative conditions under which a theory may or may not apply. Students will choose which of the two weeks they will write and submit a reflection paper, but the reflection paper must be written in relation to the current week’s assigned readings. Each reflection paper should be two pages (double-spaced; 12-point Times New Roman; 1-inch margins on all sides; worth 5% each) and is to be submitted through OWL under “Assignments” by Wednesday at 7pm. Thought papers will be evaluated based on insightfulness, quality of writing, and demonstrating an accurate understanding of the assigned readings.

3. Weekly Discussion Questions (20%) – Every week, students will be asked to submit two discussion questions to the discussion board located under “Forum” on OWL by Tuesday at 7pm. All students in the class will have access to the weekly submitted discussion questions. In addition, all students are responsible for reviewing the questions posted to OWL prior to Thursday’s class to ensure that there is a collective understanding of the viewpoints and questions elicited by the readings. Excellent questions will demonstrate critical thought in relation to one or more of the assigned readings and should serve to stimulate a thoughtful and productive exchange of ideas.

4. Student-led Discussion (20%) – You and a partner will be responsible for leading and guiding the class discussion on the weekly readings on two separate occasions during the semester. Discussion leaders may start off the discussion period by very briefly summarizing the key points of the readings. To assist with this, it will be helpful to prepare PowerPoint slides to convey key points or highlight specific questions in relation to the assigned readings. Students are also welcome to incorporate additional research to offer complementary or distinct perspectives. Most of the class time should be spent exchanging ideas about the week’s material. All students are expected to read the assigned articles, submit questions based on the readings beforehand, and actively engage in the discussion (see above). Though we may not have time to cover every specific question, it is the responsibility of the discussion leaders to pace the discussion and ensure a range of ideas, topics, and perspectives are covered during the class. We will develop a schedule for the student-led discussions during the organizational meeting on January 11, 2024.

5. Research proposal and presentation (20% written component + 10% verbal component) – The final research proposal will involve formulating a novel research idea and proposing a study to address it. The research question may relate to your main area of interest, but it must be sufficiently distinct from your thesis or dissertation topic. The final paper should (a) provide a brief literature review to establish the background and rationale for the proposed study, (b) outline the hypothesis (or hypotheses), (c) specify a method to examine the proposed research question, and (d) discuss implications and plausible alternative accounts of what the research may yield. The final paper should be 10-20 pages in length (a
maximum of 5000 words), not including references (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman; 1-inch margins on all sides; written in accordance with APA 7 guidelines) and is due April 10 by 11:55pm. There will be a 10% per day penalty for late submission of research proposal papers unless an extension is arranged with me beforehand.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date of Evaluation (if known)</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>(see description above)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Papers</td>
<td>(see description above)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Discussion Questions</td>
<td>(see description above)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student-led Discussion</td>
<td>(see description above)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research presentation</td>
<td>Presentation schedule TBD</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>April 10</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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**Course Timeline**

***Note that readings are subject to change. If necessary, a revised reading list will be provided no later than the first week of class.

**DATES, TOPICS, AND READINGS**

**Week 1 (January 11): Organizational meeting**

No assigned readings

**Week 2 (January 18): An introduction to social hierarchy**


[https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520802211628](https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520802211628)


doi: 10.1126/science.1106477

Optional readings:


Week 3 (January 25): Personal implications of status and power


Optional readings:


Week 4 (February 1): Social rank allocation


Optional readings:


**Week 5 (February 8): Individual differences related to status and power**


Optional readings:


**Week 6 (February 15): The distinct effects of power and status**


Optional readings:


**Week 7 (February 22): Reading week. There will be no class meeting nor any assigned readings.**

**Week 8 (February 29): Gender, Race, and Rank Dynamics**


Optional readings:

Week 9 (March 7): Status and power dynamics


Optional readings:


Week 10 (March 14): Team consequences of social hierarchy


Optional readings:
https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0601

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2010.08.002

**Week 11 (March 21): Research presentations**

**Week 12 (March 28): Research presentations**

**Week 13 (April 4): Research presentations/Writing Day**

**Statement on Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:  
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com).

**Health/Wellness Services**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western  
http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

**Accessible Education Western (AEW)**

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic
accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.