

## Exercise Set 1

# Power in the University

**Due date:** Monday, October 1. Beginning of class.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this exercise is for you to begin thinking about research design issues and what constitutes good research. It is meant to stimulate your initial thoughts on the basic methodological issues. No additional reading beyond the information provided is necessary. Simply read and critique the proposed study.

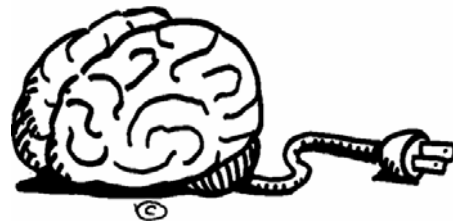
**Assignment:**

Congratulations, you have been appointed a member of the University Research Review Committee. As part of your duties, you have been asked to review and comment on the following proposal – “Power in the University.”

Please provide a written evaluation of the proposal, pointing out three (3) major weaknesses. Discuss the three weaknesses you select, indicating for each one the reasons for concern.

In thinking about the weaknesses, do not concern yourself with questions about the cost of the study, related logistical matters (e.g., the timing of the research), or the study’s broader significance (or lack thereof). Instead, you should concern yourself with the “soundness” of the proposal. Are the likely results what the author claims they will be? Can the inferences the author proposes be made using this research design?

Your report should be no longer than 2-3 typed, double-spaced pages. Brevity is a virtue in academia.



# **Power in the University A Proposed Study**

**Prof. Dee Sine**

## **BACKGROUND.**

Universities are collections of organizations – departments, institutes, and programs – that vie for resources. The proposed study addresses one aspect of this bureaucratic competition in assessing the power of various units within a large university. Power is a central ingredient of any theory of bureaucratic competition since differing amounts of power define the relationships between units. For example, powerful units have immediate access to central decision-makers, while less powerful units struggle to obtain such access.

Power is not static. Units can gain or lose abilities to obtain resources for a variety of reasons. Changing demographics and economic conditions may change the attractiveness of units to students, thereby shifting the base of support for such units. Or, internal factors, such as changes in central administrators, may lead to shifts in personal relationships, which in turn affect organizational relationships. Thus, over time the relationships among organizations change as a result of shifting bases of power.

## **PROPOSED STUDY.**

As a prelude to the development of a theory of bureaucratic competition within universities, this study intends to measure the power of units within the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington. A specific measure of power is developed. Using that measure, the power of various units is assessed for two different time periods. The end product is a profile of the power of units at the two different time periods. And, reflecting the different profiles, an assessment can be made of the changes in relationships among units.

*Units Under Study.* There are 52 units in the UW College of Arts and Sciences. These range in faculty size, number of undergraduate majors, and degree granting status (e.g., B.A. only, M.A., Ph.D., no degree, etc.). The largest degree granting unit, in terms of faculty size, is the English department with approximately 65 faculty members. Biology has the largest number of undergraduate majors at nearly 800. Non-degree granting units include the Center for Social Science Computation and Research and eleven other units. A list of all units within the College is attached.

**Measures.** Power is assessed in this study using reputational methods. Each department chair or unit director within the College will be interviewed. As part of that interview, each individual will be handed two cards that list each unit in the College. Next to each unit will be a five-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very powerful). The first card will be used to assess perceptions of current levels of influence, while the second will be used to assess perceptions of the level of influence that each unit had five years ago.

**Analysis.** In all, 52 sets of ratings will be obtained for each time period. An overall rating for each unit will be derived for each time period by averaging the individual ratings. If an individual does not supply a rating for a given unit, a score of 3 (neutral) will be entered.

Changes in power will be evaluated in a variety of ways. For each unit, a “change score” will be created by subtracting the average score for the level of current power from the average score for the level of power five years ago. Positive scores will indicate increasing power, while negative scores will indicate decreased power. An overall profile of change will be created ranking the units according to the change score.

Additional assessments of change will be undertaken for key contrasts among subgroups: 1) social sciences vs. natural sciences vs. humanities; 2) degree granting vs. non-degree granting units; and 3) large vs. small units in terms of faculty size. These analyses will be based upon comparisons of the average change scores for the units that fall within the subcategory.

***Sample Rating Scale.***

	<u>Very Weak</u>	<u>Somewhat Weak</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Somewhat Powerful</u>	<u>Very Powerful</u>
Anthropology	1	2	3	4	5
Biology	1	2	3	4	5

Directory of Departments and Programs  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of Washington

*Degree Granting Units*

American Ethnic Studies

Anthropology

Applied Mathematics

Art

Asian Languages and Literature

Astronomy

Atmospheric Sciences

Biology

Botany

Chemistry

Classics

Communications

Comparative Literature

Dance

Drama

Economics

English

Genetics

Geography

Geological Sciences

Geophysics

Germanics

History

International Studies

Linguistics

Mathematics

Music

Near Eastern Languages

Philosophy

Physics

Political Science

Psychology

Romance Languages

Scandinavian Languages

Slavic Languages

Society and Justice

Sociology

Speech Communications

Speech and Hearing Sciences

Statistics

Women Studies

Zoology

*Non-Degree Granting Units*

Burke Museum

Center for Labor Studies

Center for Social Science Computation

Curriculum Transformation Project

Henry Art Gallery

Institute for Nuclear Theory

Language Learning Center

Math Science Computing Center

Meany Hall for the Performing Arts

Simpson Center for the Humanities