**Guidelines for Organizational Field Study**

*Choice of Site*

A group may choose any organizational site of interest to the members. The site may be formal (a school, public agency, or business firm) or informal (a club, voluntary organization, or hospital waiting room). If you have questions about the appropriateness of a particular site, check with a member of the teaching staff. (Sites within the university are convenient but sometimes present problems in writing the paper because they and the people in them are too close, and the analysis may be distorted by fear of saying the wrong thing.)

*Approach to the Site*

Usually, you will need to negotiate an agreement with the organization, though such an agreement may not be necessary if you are studying a public arena (for example, a restaurant, a retailer, a city council, or a public board). Mutual understanding is important if you are studying "backstage" in a system or if you wish to interview members of the organization.

We ask that you approach the organization in a spirit of caring and respect for the people there. At a minimum, you want to be sure that they do not feel harmed or "ripped off" as a result of your presence. Even better is for members of the organization to feel that your presence was a positive experience for them. For example, some groups in the past have agreed to provide a report of their analysis to members of the client organization (either in person or in writing). Usually, the report that you give to the host organization will not be the same as the one you write for class, since they serve different audiences and purposes. It is important that you be clear about what you will or will not provide.

We do not advise you to promise to provide consulting help (student groups often lack the skills and the experience in working together to undertake such work), but a discussion of your impressions might be very useful if your study site is interested.

*Methods of Study*

There are four major ways to collect data for your study: (1) direct observation of organizational events and behavior; (2) analysis of documents (memos, reports, handbooks, publicity releases, and so one); (3) conversations or interviews with participants in the organization (who might include managers, employees, clients, and so on); (4) "intervention" or field experiment; that is, taking some action to see how the organization responds. (A simple example would be to order an item that is not on the menu at a restaurant.) Intervention is very useful for answering questions of the form "what would happen if . . . ?" But intervention raises ethical issues: DON'T do things that might be damaging or unreasonably disruptive to the system.

You may choose one or a combination of methods. The method that you use should be appropriate to the organization and to what you hope to learn. Whichever method you use, it is important to take good field notes either during or immediately after your visit to document your observations.

*Goals*

Since you are limited to a maximum of one day per person studying the site, you cannot (and are not expected to) do an extensive study. Instead, the purpose is to learn as much as you can about an organization in a relatively brief scouting expedition and to use organization theory to describe and interpret what you learn.

Your group’s product will be a paper (twenty-five pages or less) that uses organization theory to describe and analyze how the organization works and why it is the way it is. You should structure the paper in the way that best communicates your analysis. Your paper should include a brief account of your methodology (observations conducted, individuals interviewed, documents studied, or interventions made). This may be included in the introduction or added as an appendix. In the past, many groups have adopted the following structure.

1. Introduction: description of setting, introduction of the major themes or central arguments of the paper, and description of how the group conducted the study

2. Structural analysis

3. Human resource analysis

4. Political analysis

5. Symbolic analysis

6. Conclusion: discussion of elements in sections 2 through 5, synthesis of findings, and recommendations for organizational change