THREE: ENGAGING WITH LITERATURE

A literature review is an analytical summary of the past work relevant to your topic. An analytical summary is more than just writing a paragraph summarizing the main point of each article you read. In an analytical summary, you should link together the readings to build a story about what has been done and what needs to be done. This means you should summarize the work, but you should also critically assess the state of the literature. Your final thesis is required to have at least 20 scholarly sources. The literature review is completed during fall semester and is the bulk of your grade for fall. We aim for the literature review to be 10-12 pages, double-spaced.

Thinking Critically about Literature

There are a variety of different ways to approach a literature review. Generally, you should think of the literature review as a thematic approach to how scholars have addressed your topic. You should link the readings together under several key categories that you have worked to identify in the literature. Which scholars agree with which scholars? What are the explanations for their differences (theoretical, methodological, etc.)? Think about your literature review as the background information to your question and argument.

Ways to structure your literature review include…

- Areas of consensus in the literature
- Areas of disagreement in the literature
- Definition and measurement of key concepts
- Data sources other researchers have used
- Comparison of research designs of previous studies
- Identification of gaps in the literature
- Longstanding questions in the literature
- Identification of theoretical versus theoretical approaches

As you search for sources, you should keep a Word document of every source you are potentially interested in investigating. There are software programs that will do this for you (e.g., EasyBib, EndNote, etc.) But at the very least, as you find articles or books that look somewhat relevant, you should start aggregating them into a preliminary bibliography. You should keep brief notes on each source that you read. This will help in terms of identifying how you will structure your literature review in the ways we discuss above.

You should also begin reading as soon as you have your question and argument. Your list of sources will grow and shrink as you read and discover what is and is not relevant to your topic. It

is critical to point out that the literature in political science is *extensive*. There are thousands and thousands of articles and books written by thousands of scholars in our discipline. You are not responsible for reading every single line of anything that is relevant to your study. You need to be selective and you need to skim. But you should also not procrastinate.

The Annotated Bibliography

The annotated bibliography is one of the required assignments in the course. It is the Word document where you keep your working list of sources. An annotated bibliography does not look much different than a works cited section you would write for any other paper. A crucial difference, however, are the annotations. 'Annotations' are another word for 'notes'. As stated prior, you should take notes on each individual source you read. In its most basic form, the notes are to help you remember why each source is critical to your study. But here are a few pointers about what kind of notes you might want to take:

- What question is the author trying to answer?
- What theories inform the author?
- What data or methods does the author use?
- What are the author's key findings?
- What limitations or further research does the author suggest?
- How does this author differ from other scholars who have written on similar topics?
- How does your question and argument fit in?

As you read, you may start to worry that your question has already been answered. Do not panic! There is always a new twist or perspective that you can bring to the conversation or a new subtopic to explore. Think about whether your topic can *revise* previous work with new data or methods, *confirm* or update general trends or theoretical suggestions, *complicate* or question a generally agreed upon finding with new data or methodology, or *adjudicate* between key debates by testing theories.

Searching for Sources

Only *scholarly* sources count toward your required 20 sources in the literature review. First and foremost, scholarly sources *are* research. Essentially, each individual scholarly source is a study done by a researcher or professor, much like you are doing for senior thesis. More specifically, scholarly sources have undergone a peer review process, meaning that the publisher has submitted the work for review by other scholars in the discipline. At first, it is difficult to ascertain what is scholarly and what is not scholarly. Individual works are almost never labeled "peer reviewed". However, there are specific ways to access scholarly sources using the resources from our campus library. Even then, you have to learn how to have a discerning eye as to whether or not the source is scholarly or not. If you are really concerned about the nature of your potential source, academic journals will often have information about how the peer

reviewed process was conducted on its website. If you are unable to find this information, it is more than likely that your source is not peer reviewed.

There are a few key examples of popular sources that may be helpful to read, but are not ultimately considered scholarly: newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times)*, magazines (e.g., *The Atlantic, The Economist, Mother Jones, National Review),* websites (e.g., *The Hill*, *Slate*, *Vox*), and even government resources (e.g., Census Bureau, Department of Defense, policy reports). These sources may have their own internal review processes and editorial boards, but scholars in the discipline do not review these sources. Although you can include this material in your literature review, it should not have a central focus nor will it count toward your 20 required sources.

How to access library resources:

- The Cal Poly Pomona Library main page (http://www.cpp.edu/~library/) has access to OneSearch, online databases, and other resources helpful in finding scholarly sources.
- OneSearch is found as the 'Library Catalog' on the main page of the library website. OneSearch will lead you to the physical resources contained inside the Cal Poly Pomona library. Physical resources refer to books and printed journals contained within the walls of the library. OneSearch also allows you to check holdings of other campuses that will send the library book to Cal Poly for you, free of charge.
- The online databases can be found by clicking 'Databases' on the main page of the library website. The online databases are a compendium of external services that we subscribe and pay for; these databases carry online copies of journal articles (see next section). **There are three main databases that everyone should check**: Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, ProQuest. However, we have access to hundreds and hundreds of databases, some of which are not even remotely related to political science. Please note these databases do not exclusively carry scholarly sources. Just because you find your source here does not automatically mean that it is acceptable to include in your thesis.
- The Department of Political Science has its own librarian assigned to us in order to help faculty and students with their research. Our contact is Donald Page and he can be reached at djpage@cpp.edu. If you email Mr. Page, remember that he is responsible for multiple departments, thus remain patient and respectful in your correspondence with our librarian.

Political Science Journals

Scholarly journals are discipline-specific publications that are reviewed, printed, and published by scholars around the country. The aim of these journals is to publish political science research. If you are not using books, most of your sources should come from these journals. Scholars publish what we call 'articles', which are individual studies done by scholars in the discipline. You will find these journal articles in your search of the databases on the library website. Alternatively, you can search for these titles individually (if you know what journal you are after) on OneSearch.

Journals of note:

- **The American Political Science Review** is a great journal to begin with, as these articles are published literature reviews by top scholars in our discipline. Be aware though, that these literature reviews are often on broad topics. If you find a literature review pertinent to your topic, it can be a fantastic resource to find many scholarly articles for your own literature review.
- **Top-tier journals that cross-cut subfields.** There are a few journals that cover all subfields in political science, but are also considered to be reputable amongst the discipline. These include *Annual Review of Political Science, American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, Perspectives on Politics, PGI (Politics, Groups, & Identities), PS: Political Science & Politics.*
- **American Politics Journals.** There are many journals that publish American Politics research, but there are a few to note: *British Journal of Political Science, Legislative Studies Quarterly, Political Behavior, Political Research Quarterly, Presidential Studies Quarterly, Public Opinion Quarterly.*
- **Public Administration Journals.** There are many journals that publish Public Administration research, but there are a few to note: *Public Administration Review, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, Administration and Society, Public Budgeting and Finance, Public Administration and Development, Public Money and Management, Local Government Studies.* Please note that although Public Administration is a subfield, it is also considered a standalone department in many universities across the country. Thus, some consider Public Administration its own discipline.
- **Public Law Journals.** There are many journals that publish Public Law research, but there are a few to note: *Journal of Law and Economics, Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization, Judicature, American Journal of International Law, Law and Society Review.* You can also search law review journals. Law schools around the country publish law review journals (e.g., *Chapman Law Review, Duke Law Journal, Harvard Law Review, Hastings Law Journal*).
- **Political Theory.** There are many journals that publish Political Theory research, but there are a few to note: *Political Theory, History of Political Thought, Review of Politics, British Review of Political Science, Journal of Theoretical Politics, Signs.*
- **And many, many others.** There are literally hundreds and hundreds of political science journals. There are even those that do not belong in one of our traditional six subfields (e.g., *Gender and Politics, Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics, Political Communication*). The sky is the limit.

Please note, our Library negotiates the subscription and access to many of these journal articles. If Cal Poly does not have a subscription for the title or article you are searching for, the Library offers a service called '**Document Delivery**'. The Library has negotiated agreements with other campuses to share PDFs of journal manuscripts they do not have access to. Free of charge, the Library will electronically send you PDFs of specific journal articles that we do not have access

to. Document Delivery can be found on the 'Books & Articles' link on the main page of the Library website.

Citing Your Sources

Senior thesis is a 'master class' in proper citations. You are expected to give credit to scholars that whose work you utilize to support your research. **Citations** are helpful to others who may want to follow up on your sources and combats plagiarism. Typically, a citation can include the author's name, date, publisher, and journal title. A **citation style** dictates the information necessary for a citation and how the information is ordered. Citation styles govern both a) how you address the scholarly work in the text and b) how you will structure your works cited at the end of the paper. There are many different citation styles in the world. The citation style sometimes depends on the academic discipline involved. The Department of Political Science currently has no official style of citation, but MLA is strongly encouraged.

For purposes of explanation, this guide will briefly review MLA (Modern Language Association) style of citation. But feel free to check out others like APA (American Psychological Association), Chicago, and even the APSA (American Political Science Association) style of citations:

- **Works Cited.** At the end of the paper, you should have a list of your sources titled 'Works Cited'. The works cited should be double-spaced. For citations longer than one line, indent the second line and any subsequent lines one-half inch from the margin. Citations should be put in alphabetical order by the author's last name. If there are two works by the same author, alphabetize by the last name of the second author. If there is only one single author, alphabetize by the title of the work. If there are two works by the same person, it is not necessary to type out their full name for each citation. Type out the full name in the first citation that appears. For all subsequent citations, in place of the name, type three hyphens with a period at the end.
- **Citing books.** When you cite a book, it should come in the following format. Please note punctuation, spacing, and italics.

  Last, First M. *Book Title*. City of Publication: Publisher, Year Published. Print.

  Here is an example:

  Rodriguez, Alexandra. *The Ambassadors*. Rockville: Serenity, 2009. Print.

  Although MLA provides a way to cite databases where you found the book, I would avoid doing this for thesis.
- **Citing journal articles.** When you cite a journal article, it should come in the following format. Please note punctuation, spacing, and italics.

Last, First M. "Article Title." *Journal Title* Series Volume.Issue (Year Published): Page(s).

Here is an example:

Perez, Brianna. "YouTube, 'Drug Videos' and Drugs Education." *Drugs: Education, Prevention & Policy* 20.2 (2013): 120-30.

Again, although MLA provides a way to cite databases where you found the journal article, I would avoid doing this for thesis.

- **Other sources.** Since you will be using books and journal articles mostly, I will only include these two here. If you are citing sources such as newspapers, webpages, magazines, interviews, documentaries, etc., please search through Internet style guides to see how those sources are cited. Keep in mind these other types will not count toward your 20 required sources in the thesis.

- **In-text citations.** Finally, in-text citations are an important, often overlooked element of citing properly. Each time you discuss a source, you want to place brief parenthetical descriptions to acknowledge the source. You do not need to place parenthetical citations after each sentence where you discuss a source. If you use multiple sequential sentences to describe one source, it is the practice to place a parenthetical citation at the end of the last sentence that described that source. There are two ways to do parenthetical citations. If you use the author's name in your prose, it should come in the following format:

Olmos argues this point (213-214).

If you do not use the author's name in your prose, it should come in the following format:

The point is argued in the literature (Olmos 213-214).

Please do not recite entire article titles and full author names in your paper. Rely heavily on these parenthetical citations to do the work for you. If you have sources with multiple authors, use up to three in the parenthetical citation: (Boseman, Roberts, and Ross 45). If there are more than three authors, write the first author followed by "et al.": (Boseman et al. 45).

You can use "Citation Generators" which are online tools that will automatically generate a citation for you once you fill out a form for each source you use. Remember, there are downloadable software packages like EndNote and EasyBib that will store all of your sources on your computer and will generate citations for you. If you choose to utilize one of these, please make sure to proofread and edit your end product. Often times, these generators will yield messy, incomplete, and incorrect citations. Do not automatically trust the software to generate an error-free works cited for your paper.

Common Pitfalls in the Literature Review

Students fall into similar traps year after year while writing the literature review. In addition to good research skills, writing the literature review is an intense process that demands attention to detail and good note-taking skills. Here is a brief list of things to watch out for while you work through the literature review:

- **Balance.** You should strike a balance between summarizing and analyzing. Make sure that you are not resorting to describing your sources. A common pitfall is to summarize the main point of each article you read. You should carefully assess the contribution that each article or book brings to your own study, but analyze how your sources should be view together thematically.
- **Clarity.** Grammar, sentence structure, and spelling figure considerably into the grade. Clarity is key. Your literature review should go through multiple drafts. It should be proofread multiple times. It should be a process that really isn't finished until we turn in the thesis in March. This demands that you not wait until the last minute to construct your literature review.
- **Organization.** The literature review is basically a mini-paper within the thesis itself. Somewhere in the opening lines of the literature review, you should outline your thematic perspective of the literature. Give the reader a roadmap before you jump into identifying your sources. Subheadings are a great way to give your literature review organization and structure as well. You should have transitions between major ideas and sections in the literature review.

Although the literature review might be difficult to write, it is ultimately an enriching, satisfying process. Flexibility is key to remember in this process as well. Your search for literature will help you update the ideas contained in your research question and argument. Do not let this discourage you as it is a common occurrence to update your work based on the literature.