

## **Project 2**

### **Literature Review: A Synthesis**

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#### **THE ASSIGNMENT**

**OVERVIEW:** For the second half of the course, your assignments will focus on one major writing project: a literature review that synthesizes a body of research on a specific question in neurolaw. This project is a collaborative one. You and a partner will work together to synthesize the literature by comparing and contrasting, critically evaluating, and interpreting research findings so that you can articulate your own position about a research topic.

**WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?** A literature review is an assessment of scholarly works that addresses a research question. It is also an argument or set of arguments made in response to previous research.

As you read and evaluate the “literature,” the collection of interconnected scholarly writings on a topic, you will begin to understand how the articles are connected to a research question. Your goal is to synthesize the literature, formulating your own response to that question. Your literature review should help the reader determine where to go next by pointing out what has been accomplished in previous studies, or what is missing in previous studies, or what might be a useful or innovative way of addressing a phenomenon. Remember, a literature review is NOT a paper that simply overviews, summarizes, or describes previous studies, although these things must take place as you prepare your paper. Instead, the aim of your review is to contribute to the conversation - you will become the expert!

(Adapted from Annette Markham)

**WHAT IS A RESEARCH QUESTION?** A research question defines the scope of an area of inquiry. It asks about the relationship between two or more variables. It is founded on a deep understanding of works in the relevant area(s) of study and informed by both what is known and not yet known in that area.

(Adapted from Harvard University’s Gutman Library)

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#### **THE PROCESS**

**AUDIENCE:** Assume that your audience is generally knowledgeable in the field of neurolaw, but does not necessarily have in-depth knowledge about your research topic. Therefore, your project should be accessible and engaging to a non-expert reader. You must convince the reader that your project represents a significant contribution to the field.

**COLLABORATION:** Science is a collaborative effort. Multiple researchers are involved in study design, data collection and analysis, and writing articles. You will experience the collaborative nature of science by researching your topic, developing your ideas, and writing the literature review with a partner. You and your partner must write the literature review *together*, with each individual contributing *equally* to all aspects of the project (from research to drafting to revision). Your paper must reflect *one voice* that represents the team.

**WRITING PROCESS:** You will develop your literature review over several assignments that will sequentially build upon each other. Specifically, you will complete the following steps:

1. **DEVELOP A RESEARCH QUESTION:** You will brainstorm topics and refine your top choice, which you will present to the class in a **2 minute speech**. After hearing the ideas of your peers, you will select a partner based on your shared interests.
2. **MAKE A PLAN:** You and your collaborator will develop a research question. You will detail your plan in a Proposal that succinctly describes your **research question** and an explanation of its relevance to the field. The Proposal will also include an **annotated bibliography** that summarizes scholarly articles and a **synthesis matrix** that synthesizes across those works.
3. **DRAFT & REVISE:** The **Literature Review** should stem organically from your annotations and Proposal. The direction of your project may change following feedback from me and your peers.

**A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT:** I ask that you meet this challenging project with enthusiasm, creativity, and perseverance. Given that we have finite time and resources, I understand that you cannot feasibly write a fully exhaustive literature review. Despite this limitation, I expect you to create a cohesive, compelling literature review that contextualizes your research question and integrates sources into a conversation. With your central claim, you join the conversation!

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## KEY DETAILS

**IMPORTANT DATES:** *(Subject to change)*

### **\*Assignments**

Topic Ideas	Feb 22
Mini Speech	Feb 27
Annotations	Mar 6, 8, 20
Proposal	Mar 22
Draft 1	Apr 2 (8:00 AM)
Draft 2 + Revision Letter	Apr 10
Final + Revision Letter	Apr 24

### **\*Events**

Small Group Conferences      Week of Apr 2  
(\*\*\*Draft due 24 hours before conference\*\*\*)

**SOURCES:** You should use a minimum of 10 sources. Because this assignment is targeted to an academic audience, all of your references should be from academic sources (e.g., peer-reviewed journals).

**FORMATTING:** The paper should be 8-10 double-spaced pages in length with 1 inch margins and 12 point Times New Roman font (or equivalent). Remember to use APA-style to cite your references.

**EVALUATION:** This project is worth 60% of your course grade (10% Proposal; 10% Draft 1; 40% Final draft). A successful literature review will synthesize new ideas that are organized around a central claim. The authors will have chosen the best possible evidence to support their claims and will make strong interpretive use of that evidence. The paper will demonstrate a high degree of organizational control, such that the form contributes to the authors' purpose and the reader is able to freely enjoy the clear, logical unfolding of the authors' claim. A successful paper will exhibit very few sentence-level language errors and often demonstrates an academic writing style that is particularly engaging. Last, but not least, the paper will fairly attribute all sources in proper APA format. For further details on grading criteria, see the General Grading Rubric handout on Sakai (under the Resources folder).