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### Meredith Conroy CD Summer 2014

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# COURSE (Re)DESIGN INSTITUTE REPORT

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DATE SUBMITTED: April 3, 2016

Title of Grant Award: Course ReDesign Institute, September 9-11, 2014

Project Goal: To develop a strategy for students to successfully complete a literature review in an upper division political science class.

When Implemented (Quarter the course was taught): Fall 2014

## Brief Description of the Project:

The vast majority of my students have never written a literature review. Literature reviews are an appropriate exercise for undergraduates because they develop writing and analytical skills. Yet in my first attempt to fulfill this assignment (in Spring 2014) I found my students to be underprepared to collect academic sources, analyze those sources, and synthesize those sources to successfully complete the assignment. Thus, my goal at the redesign institute was to come up with a strategy for slowly incorporating individual steps that would build to a final product, which would be the literature review.

The plan was to have intermediary steps put in place throughout the quarter that would help students manage the elements of the literature review. The steps were as follows (and outline as such in the syllabus):

**Step 1:** Select a Topic for your literature review.

**Step 2:** Identify your Academic Sources (at least 8)

We will do this together in the computer lab (SBS 518) November 10, 12, and 14<sup>th</sup>.

Some tips for identifying a suitable literature and narrowing your search:

-Start with a general descriptor or concept from the course such as political knowledge, parties and representation, political parties and mobilization, or issue ownership. You will need to experiment with different searches, as these concepts are broad. You will narrow it down as you search. You will need to search databases of academic scholarship such as Google Scholar, or the many available through our campus library.

-Redefine your topic if needed: as you search you will quickly find out if the topic that you are reviewing is too broad. Try to narrow it to a specific area of interest within the broad area that you have chosen. For example, you may start with political parties and mobilization, and realize there does not appear to be a consistent theme in the articles that show up. But one article about “when” and “who” parties mobilize stands out to you, so you refine your search to articles that theorize about when parties

mobilize voters, and how broadly.

-It may also be a good idea, as part of your literature search, to look for existing literature reviews that have already been written on this topic.

-As part of your search, be sure to identify landmark or classic studies and theorists as these provide you with a framework/context for your study. Maintaining the political parties example, a classic study would be John Aldrich's *Why Parties: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in American*, 1995. This book proposes that parties are necessary for mobilizing blocks of the population. But your lit review may include studies that find parties actually mobilize very strategically, and in fact parties are not serving their purpose, effectively. These kinds of realizations will of course take time, which is why you will need to spend a lot of time reading.

### **Step 3: Analyze your Sources**

-Summarize each article, with explicit focus on the independent analysis in the study (what is the unique question being assessed by the article?); how do the authors answer their question (what is their methodology?); what do the authors find?

-Evaluate your reference list to ensure that it is up to date and has reported the most current work. Typically a review will cover the last five years, but should also refer to any landmark studies prior to this time if they have significance in shaping the direction of the field. If you include studies prior to the past five years that are *not* landmark studies, you should defend why you have chosen these rather than more current ones.

### **Step 4: Revise and Edit**

-Do your summaries make sense? Are you sources cited accurately? Did you use the APSA Style Manual?

**Step 5:** Turn in an annotated bibliography, Monday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**Step 6:** Turn in your final literature review, Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### How the Project was Implemented (including how it differed from original plan)

For the most part, we stuck to the plan, outlined by the steps. Originally I had scheduled 1 day in the library with a reference librarian to introduce students to the library's resources. Unfortunately, our session was canceled, and I was unable to reschedule it with a librarian, in order to stay on course. In the future I will make sure we have this session, because while I am competent enough to explain to students how to collect sources for a literature review, I am not as familiar with how our library works, and what resources may be unique to our students.

### Results of the Project:

Students turned in their literature reviews on time, and mostly complete. I would say that in general students found the appropriate literature, and summarized it well. Synthesis was less satisfactory, but overall I felt like the process was a success.

Additional Comments (Lessons Learned, Insights, Future Plans, etc.)

In the future, I will spend even more time with students, one-on-one collecting sources. I also learned that many students do not understand how to read academic literature, especially the complex studies in academic journals. In the future, I will devote a class session early on in the quarter instructing students how to read academic articles.