What is NOT a literature review?

- A literature review is NOT a review of all data sources

- A literature review is NOT a collection of short book reports

- A literature review is NOT a compendium of background information

What IS a literature review, then?

Before you begin to research primary* sources (databases, government documents, etc.), you must know who has contributed knowledge on your research topic and what knowledge they have contributed.

Consult secondary* sources: Books, journal articles, newspaper articles, think-tank reports, blogs, etc.

Who else has attempted to answer your research question or a similar question?

How did they answer (what methodologies did they use) and what was their answer (their thesis/argument)?

*the difference between primary and secondary sources is that primary sources deliver raw data, whereas secondary sources deliver interpretations and analyses of data

What is the PURPOSE of a literature review?

Recognize what other scholars have contributed effectively and convincingly on the topic

Avoid "reinventing the wheel"

Identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge related to your topic/question

Build hypotheses to fill those gaps with your primary-source research

Typically, what types of writing assignments…

Require literature reviews?

- Theses

- Joint Applied Projects

- Capstone Reports

- Research papers (built on your own outside research)

Do not require literature reviews?

- Prompt response essays (built primarily on course readings)

- Reading summaries

- Memos and policy papers

Critical thinking and literature reviews

➢ Organization

➢ Structure

➢ Themes/topics

▪ Since literature reviews present the existing body of knowledge related to a research question/topic, the best way to deliver that information is by grouping literature by themes (not by author or by title)

   – You must think critically about how to group disparate pieces of literature

      ▪ Is there consensus? Disagreement?

      ▪ Do different authors prioritize different arguments?

   – You determine how and where the different arguments fit

The cocktail party

Imagine you are a reporter at a cocktail party filled with the scholars and experts who have contributed knowledge to your research topic

- What groups would form?

- Who would throw a drink at whom (metaphorically speaking, of course)?

- Who would be standing alone in a corner?