Literature Reviews
The basics
UCSB McNair Scholars Program – Summer 2013
Definition(s)

A literature review is:

- Literally a “re-view” or look again at the scholarship on a particular topic
- Discussion of published scholarly work on a topic/in a research area
- Organized way to summarize, synthesize, make connections between and present literature on a topic
Dr. E’s Definition

- A bibliographic conversation between/among scholarly work on a topic
- With the added benefit of helping you situate yourself in the conversation
Some of the questions the review of the literature can answer

Source: The Learning Centre UNSW http://lc.unsw.edu.au
Benefits of a Lit Review

- Provides guide to the literature on a topic
- Offers overview of previous work on a topic
- Enlarges your scope of knowledge about a topic
- Let’s you demonstrate command of the literature in your field
- Offers opportunity to conduct critical appraisal
- Challenges your critical and analytical skills (how carefully have you selected sources)
Some of what it is not

- Final reference list/bibliography for your paper
- A descriptive list of materials on your topic
- A synopsis
- A new contribution to scholarship/research
A successful literature review should

- Be organized around and directly related to your research question
- Synthesize results into what is/what is not known about the topic
- Identify areas of controversy/disagreement in the literature
- Help you identify/formulate questions that need further investigation
Before you begin:

- Review the assignment carefully
- Refine/narrow your topic
- Determine whether you want or need to include historic as well as current research
- Be selective
- Don’t ignore methodology
- Think about organization and how you want to present the sources, especially how best to make connections between/among sources
Not Everyone/Every Discipline...

- One size does not fit all
- But...one concept might

- Different disciplines, different needs – but all scholarship owes some debt to what came before
So…

- It might have a different look
- It might have a different “label”
- It might not be called out “as such” in your dissertation
- It might feel weird to do

But…(repeating myself):
- All scholarship owes some debt to what came before
- Literature reviews are one way to repay that debt
Literature Review Tutorial (interactive)

- Libraries of Adelphi University. Conducting a Literature Review in Education and the Social Sciences
  - http://libraries.adelphi.edu/research/tutorials/EdLitReview/content/
Where I got my information (truth in advertising)

- University of California, Santa Cruz Library. Write a Literature Review
- The Writing Center. University of Wisconsin, Madison