PSCI 245: POLITICAL VIOLENCE

PAPER #3: RESEARCH PAPER – LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to explore a particular subject connected to large-scale political violence in more depth, students will also write a brief critical review of the academic literature on that subject. This review should be an integrated review of three or four major and related works, possibly including relevant articles, book chapters from different volumes, or books. There should be some evidence of the existence of a major debate within the literature in your review – that is, at least one of the pieces reviewed should offer a different explanation of the phenomenon of interest than the others.

A literature review proposal must be submitted for approval by the instructor no later than March 1. This proposal should provide a full citation for the books, book chapters or academic articles, a one-paragraph description of each scholarly work, and a photocopy of the book's table of contents or the first page of the articles with the abstract (i.e. you must have the material in hand). Failure to turn in a proposal on time will lead to an automatic one-letter grade deduction from the final paper.

The literature review paper itself is due on April 10. It should be a minimum of 5 pages in length (not counting bibliography). Be sure to address the following:

• What are the main argument(s) presented? What theoretical assumptions are they derived from?

• Critically evaluate the scholarly work; issues that you might address include:
  o Are the different approaches and arguments well presented and properly supported?
  o Are you convinced by the author(s) arguments? Why?
  o What are the strengths of the scholarly work?
  o What are the shortcomings of the scholarly work?

• Discuss the implications of this body of literature.
  o Does this literature make a contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon or process under examination?
  o What are the implications of this literature for theory or future research in this area?

• Building out of your critique, in your opinion what should further literature in this subject area address in order to build our understanding in this area?

Please note that any and all citations and bibliographic references should follow the style guidelines laid out in the American Political Science Review Style Manual.

Reminder: plagiarism or any other type of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and will result in automatic failure for the course!
What is a Literature Review & Theory Paper?
- identifies dimensions of current work in your field/provides comprehensive, up to date review of topic
- seeks to describe, summarize, evaluate, clarify and/or integrate the theories used to understand the phenomenon of interest, and the empirical research done on that question or topic.
- is nearly always a standard chapter (or multiple chapters) of an Independent Study thesis.
- places your project into the context of established work in the field.

Why write a Literature Review & Theory Paper?
- To increase your breadth of knowledge and understanding in your subject area
- To assess the current state of research in your field and identify trends
- To identify seminal works and authors in your area
- To identify possible gaps in the literature or the research or theories
- To demonstrate your command and understanding of your field and your phenomena
- To provide the background to and justification for the research undertaken
- To give your research a conceptual framework

How do I start?
- Define your topic or research question.
- Keep in mind that during and after your review of the literature, you will very likely be forced to redefine and revise your original topic and research questions.
- Become familiar with the resources available at your library:
  - Become familiar with reference material in your field.
  - Learn how to effectively perform a search in a research database to retrieve resources.
  - Spend time with a reference librarian learning to use a research database, building effective search strategies, request materials and other time savers.
- Gather resources and organize them.
- Evaluate the information you gather:
  - When possible, read the abstracts before requesting or thoroughly reading through materials. Abstracts may tell you enough to make a decision on a document’s value and relevance.
  - Use critical thinking skills to evaluate an academic article’s or a book’s objectives, accuracy, argument, and methodology.
  - Understand that you will likely collect a lot more information than you will actually include in the review; concentrate on relevancy and quality over quantity.

Tips
1. Survey multiple sources! A variety of authors in a range of studies have examined these questions. If not, similar questions have been addressed, and they might be able to provide insight into your question.
2. Don’t summarize articles or books – discuss relevant arguments or findings.
3. Use topic or section headings to help organize your ideas or the ideas of others.
4. Be organized, set deadlines and try to meet them.
5. Give yourself time to read the material.
6. Cite authors appropriately, using the APSA Style Manual as your guide.
7. Here are some links that might help you locate the articles for review:
   - OhioLink Electronic Journal Center: http://journals.ohiolink.edu/
   - J-Stor: http://www.jstor.org/
   - Summon: http://www.wooster.edu/academics/libraries/
   - Google Scholar: http://scholar.google.com/