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Literature Review

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Literature Review
Assignment 1

Getting Started

As discussed in class, a literature review tells the reader two very important things; what is the state of knowledge and what is the theoretical framework you are using to make your argument. In other words, a literature review says based on this theoretical framework, this is what we know on the topic. For example, say you are interested in exploring the reasons for the recent war between Russia and Georgia; your first step would be to choose a theoretical approach. In order to find a theoretical approach you first need to take a step back and ask a more general question, why do countries go to war? A very quick glance of the scholarship on the causes of conflict will show that two approaches stand out; *realism* and *liberalism*. Here is where you as a scholar-in-training need to make a judgment call based on which of these two approaches makes the best argument. At a very basic level, each theoretical approach is going to explain the causal mechanism underlying the phenomena. In this case, realist theory will make the argument that war is the product of insecurity felt by opposing countries, while liberalism will make the argument that lack of cooperation sets the stage for war. Again, this is realism and liberalism at their most rudimentary.

Let's say you settled for a realist approach, now your job is to find the most relevant research published on the topic. Where do you start? Well, lucky for you all research builds on previous knowledge, and thus is referenced. Therefore, any journal database is a perfectly fine place to begin. For the purpose of this exercise we will start at Jstor (www.jstor.org). Using the "advance search" tab enter a few key words relevant to your search, then move down the "Disciplines" list and check the box for "political science" then hit "search." Make sure that you sort by "Relevance." Your first impression might be that you have too many results to ever be able to read through. No worries, let's go back to the search page and adjust our search parameters.

Now that you have managed to focus your search, how do you know which articles are more important than others? Well, one way to tell is by looking for the most cited articles. Think of how social networking sites rank interesting videos or news stories, the more something is "dug," "liked" or "viewed" the more popular it is, right? Spoiler alert, academics do the same thing and we have been doing it for a long time. So as you search through the articles you found on Jstor make a note of the most cited.

Make a list of the top ten cited articles you found and cross-list their reference lists. Note all articles that are cited more than once and rank them from most cited to least. Email me the list before next class. Remember to use APSA citation style to make the reference list of the most cited works.