

## Boot Camps

The purpose of the SNaPP Lab Boot Camps are to expose you to the kinds of research we do in the lab, as well as train you with the basic techniques you'll need to successfully design and execute your individual and group research projects. Students receive two credits of GOVT 394 credit for completing all the requirements of the boot camp each semester.

### Picking a Research Question (September-October)

#### **Session 1: Finding the Stuff (September 10<sup>th</sup>)**

The purpose of this session is to teach you the best practices in how and where to find research materials related to the work we do in the lab. You will be assigned a topic/question based on your internship position. Before the meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup>, you must:

1. Find three articles that are extremely relevant to your research question
2. Find three scholars who have written a lot about this topic
3. Write one paragraph about the strategy you used to answer questions #1 and #2

On the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup>, we will compare your strategies and talk about best practices, including PDF management and note organization.

You will have two portfolio assignments due before our next sessions on September 24<sup>th</sup>:

1. ***Networked literature search diagram.*** Instead of focusing on finding isolated articles and books on a topic, you always aim to find the conversation that scholars have with one another about the topic through their work. The best way to do this is to find one key article that speaks directly to your question, and then to find the older articles that are cited within the key article, as well as those newer articles that cite the key article. We will talk more about the specifics of the diagram assignment, but you will be assigned one key article. You then need to find at least six articles or books that are connected to one another and annotate how the articles speak to each other.

2. ***Journal Report:*** You will be assigned a set of journals or repositories to explore, examining the homepage for the source, the publisher's page, as well as skimming some of the articles within it. You need to answer the following questions for each source:

- What kind of research does this source publish?
- Who is the target audience? Is this a good source for the research we are interested in? Why or why not?
- What are the advantages of using this source? Disadvantages?
- What is the journal's impact factor? Ranking? What do these metrics mean and why do they matter?

Your report must be emailed to me ahead of time so I can compile everyone's materials together before our meeting.

## Session 2: Finding the Point (September 24<sup>th</sup>)

In addition to the portfolio assignments outlined above, you will need to bring one printed copy of an article from your networked literature search, published in 2012 or earlier.

The focus of the evening will be learning how to read an academic article. We will all read the same article and take notes on it, and then we will compare our markings. As you are reading, you should find the answers to these questions and mark up the paper accordingly:

- In plain English (no academic-ese), what is key contribution of the article? What is the takeaway point that the author is trying to make?
- What question is the article trying to address? Sometimes, authors state this clearly and sometimes they don't, but you should make sure you understand the research question.
- What is the argument being advanced? Does the author apply any well-known theory? What are the hypotheses?
- What data is the author using? How does he/she operationalize the research question into measurable constructs? Be clear on what are the independent and dependent variables.
- How does the author collect and analyze the data? What sorts of approaches are used?
- What are the main findings of the paper? What conclusions do the authors draw?

After this, we will discuss how to write effective critical summaries based on the answers to these important questions. This is not easy, but you will get better at this the more you learn about your topic and the more methods you learn.

Your assignment for the next session (October 8<sup>th</sup>) is to write *two article summaries* based on the templates we discuss.

## Session 3: Finding the Missing Piece (October 8<sup>th</sup>)

In this session, we will focus on how to move from writing analytical summaries to writing literature reviews. Many of the papers you write for class may ask you simply to summarize and analyze articles you read. The key distinction in a literature review is that you are identifying a hole in the existing scholarship that you persuasively argue you can address with your own research. In other words, you are trying to identify and address the missing piece in our understanding of your research topic.

For now, we will put some bounds on the literature review, and your assignment will focus on selected works of a single author or a single method. Your assignment (due on October 22<sup>nd</sup>) is one of these two reports:

**Scholar Report:** You will be assigned a scholar whose work has important implications for the research we do in the lab. Your job is to assess one part of his or her research agenda and provide a constructive assessment of his or her work.

**Method Report:** Alternatively, you may be assigned to a particular research method and you will need to summarize what findings have been uncovered using that technique.

You can use anything you've read or produced so far as the basis for a *short presentation* to the lab about your research interests, either in the form of a two-slide presentation as part of the Five Minute Fiesta on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, or as a slightly longer proposal presentation on November 12<sup>th</sup>.

These three sessions should provide a foundation for you to explore what we already know about your research interests, and these skills will be essential for you as you prepare proposals for independent research or help me with laying the foundation for new research projects. At this point, we'll turn to another foundational set of skills: using the software program R to analyze quantitative data.

### **The Fundamentals of R (October-November)**

The focus of this three session series is to learn how to manipulate and manage datasets in the open software R. Ideally, you will be able to replicate the things you learn in GOVT 301 or another statistics course on the dataset you will be assigned to explore.

See <http://snapp-lab.wm.edu/tutorial/index.html> for more information.

You will need to complete a Canned Data Report. More details about this can be found on a separate handout.