

## *The Practicalities of Completing a Degree in HSD*

Kathy Teghtsoonian - 24 October 2003

\* “*the literature*” being reviewed consists of the published and unpublished research that others have conducted in a number of areas that are relevant to your own research question: will likely include articles in journals, books or chapters in edited books, conference papers, documents published on the web

\* in your review of the literature, you present a summary of, and commentary on, the these materials; your discussion may include an account of the positive contributions that existing work has made to your thinking as you have pursued your own research questions, as well as the absences or shortcomings in existing research that your own work is designed to address

\* the literature review, then, is a context within which you locate your own work in relation to other peoples’ research; it may be helpful to think of it as your contribution to an *ongoing conversation* with other researchers and their work

\*there are both *empirical* and *theoretical* literatures: a review of the literature will often draw on both

\* for example, one student in the Multidisciplinary Masters Program wanted to



\* you will also see literature reviews of varying lengths and degrees of complexity at the beginning of articles in journals and chapters in edited books. In some cases, these are explicitly labeled as the “literature review”; in others they may be in a sections with titles such as “theoretical framework” or “context of the research”; in others still, the literature review is not set off as a separate section. You will also come across reviews of the literature in books written by a single author, usually in the first or second chapter.

\* you may not have discovered everything there is to know about the literature(s) relevant to your research by the time you submit your thesis proposal. Your initial review of the literature will assist you in shaping your research questions, but you may also discover that your research findings prompt you to explore additional literatures in order to assist you in making sense out of your data. Your research and writing process, and your movement between “the literature” and “the data” will most likely be much “messier” in the doing than the orderly, chapter-by-chapter presentation of your analysis in your thesis or dissertation would suggest. Don’t forget that a similar journey from chaos to order lies behind the well-organized, smoothly flowing discussion in the completed articles, theses and books that you read while completing your courses and thesis research !

\* resources for identifying and tracking down relevant literatures include: members of your committee; other students doing research in related areas; the literature review sections in the literature you are reading (reference lists and footnotes can be very helpful in this regard); library databases and indexes; librarians

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