WRITING THE LITERATURE REVIEW
SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

UCLA Graduate Writing Center

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Preparing for the Lit Review

Searching Strategies

- Start with:
  - Handbooks
  - Literature review journal articles
  - Meta-analysis journal articles

- Search within all sources that quote a seminal study
  - Google Scholar
  - Web of Science
  - Other databases (ask your subject librarian)

- Carefully review references / works cited sections for key articles on your topic; note works that are frequently cited.

Preparing for the Lit Review

BEFORE you begin drafting the Lit Review…

- **Annotate** your sources focusing on relevant/main points
- **Critique** them. What don't you agree with and why?
- **Compare** them to one another. Who is talking to who? What are the "camps"? Where do you stand?
- **Synthesize** them with one another. What are the major issues or questions this set of sources addresses?

Reading Strategically

First Pass

- Read the abstract for a broad overview
- Read the introduction and conclusion/discussion
- Skim the text to see headings and sub-headings in order to understand the "geography of the text"—its structure

Second Pass, More Careful Reading

- **Annotate** your sources for the issues most relevant to you; do not take notes beyond what you need. Maybe the focus is on findings, or methods, etc. Be targeted and efficient.
- **Tools**—use a bibliographic tool like Zotero or Mendeley for capturing the citation and paper. Assign keywords. Use notes fields in these programs or put notes into pdf.

Preparing for Longer Reviews

Export from Zotero to Create Spreadsheet Table

- Zotero lets you add tags (keywords) and notes to the sources in your library.

- You can export a Zotero library or a specific search as a .csv file, which easily converts to Excel.

- For example, decide what topics or keywords you will address in your background section or lit review;
  then do multiple searches on these keywords;
  export each search to its own work book page

- If you have a lot of sources and don't need to cite them all (or they are not all that relevant), have a column where you give a rating for each—must cite, maybe cite, A/B/C

Lit Review Basics

- The literature review should contain a critical summary of the previous work that has been done on your topic

- Doesn't merely summarize previous research on your topic, but tells a story about it and indicates where you will intervene in the field (enter scholarly conversation)

- The lit review should help identify your niche in a given field or topic. Is your work…
  - Addressing a gap in previous research?
  - Building on previous research?
  - Correcting previous research?
  - Replicating previous research with new population?

Social Sciences

- Literature review is usually a designated section towards the beginning of a piece (course paper or journal article)
- It is also usually a separate section or chapter within a dissertation proposal or dissertation
- Follow the conventions of journals in your field, or look at example dissertations to see norms
- Sometimes you might write a stand-alone lit review paper for a course, which could focus on a research gap but might be more of an assessment of current scholarship
- Literature reviews can vary according to the methods and the research design

Qualitative versus Quantitative Research

- Sometimes advice on literature reviews is not explained in the context of methods, which can be confusing

- <u>More quantitative approach</u>: Boote, D. N., & Beile, P. (2005). Scholars before researchers: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. *Educational Researcher, 34*(6), 3-15.

- <u>More qualitative approach</u>: Maxwell, J. A. (2006). Literature reviews of, and for, educational research: A commentary on Boote and Beile's "Scholars before Researchers". *Educational Researcher, 35*(9), 28-31.

- Neither article clearly addresses how methods play a role, which is why I like Creswell's explanation better.

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- Neither article above clearly addresses how methods play a role, which is why I like Creswell's explanation better.
- Inductive versus deductive approaches to existing literature in relationship to research design as explained by John Creswell in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2013)—See chapter 2 on lit review

Humanities, Arts

- Where and how literature is reviewed varies more
- Relevant sources can be integrated throughout rather than reviewed in a specific section
- There may be a designated lit review section in a journal article, but there doesn't have to be, and it is not always towards the beginning; often see more in footnotes
- The most common place to see an extended literature review in the humanities is in a dissertation prospectus
- By the time the literature review is incorporated into the dissertation, some will go in the introduction, and the rest will be integrated into chapters.

3 Rhetorical Moves that Frame Original Research

- Move 1: *Establishing a Research Territory*
  - Show that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way
  - Introduce and review items of previous research in the area

- Move 2: *Creating a Niche*
  - Indicate a gap in the previous research, or extend previous knowledge in some way

- Move 3*: Occupying the Niche*
  - Outline purposes or state the nature of the proposed research
  - List research questions or hypotheses
  - State the value of the proposed research (significance)

Summary of John Swales' "Creating a Research Space" (CARS) approach to introductions

Move 1 Language: Establishing Research Territory

Indicating Centrality, Importance

Recently, there has been growing interest in . . . .

The possibility that . . . has generated interest in the development of . . . .

Knowledge of . . . has a great importance for . . . .

The study of . . . has become an important aspect of . . . .

The . . . has been studied by many investigators.

Many recent studies have addressed . . . .

The relationship between . . . and . . . has received a lot of attention in previous studies.

Examples taken or adapted from John Swales' *Aspects of Article Introductions*

Move 1 Language: Establishing Research Territory

Summarizing Previous Research

Evidence of . . . was first reported in . . . .

The majority of studies have focused on . . . .

Previous studies have suggested that . . . .

Some progress has been made towards understanding the . . . behavior of . . . .

Various investigations have explored the relationship between . . . and . . . .

There is mounting evidence that the use of . . . .

These findings were further supported by later studies that showed . . . .

Examples taken or adapted from John Swales' *Aspects of Article Introductions*

Lit Review - Other Organizational Options

Topical (most common)
- Breaks up lit review into a number of subfields, subject areas, or approaches and discusses each individually

Distant-to-Close
- A kind of topical organization that starts with studies of general relevance to topic and ends with studies most relevant to topic

Chronological
- Reviews studies chronologically from older to most recent

Debate
- Emphasizes opposing positions in field, especially long-term

Seminal Study
- Starts with focused engagement and analysis of 1-2 key studies relevant to your project

Move 2 Language: Establishing the Research Gaps

<u>Negative Openings / Quasi-negative subject</u>

However, little information . . .

little attention . . .

little data . . .

little research . . .

However, few studies . . .

few investigations . . .

few researchers . . .

No studies/data/calculations to date have . . . .

None of these studies/findings/calculations have . . . .

Examples taken or adapted from Swales and Feak's *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*

Move 2 Language: Establishing the Research Gaps

Negative / Quasi-Negative Openings: More Examples

However, very few investigations have considered
the effects of . . . .

Little attempt has been made to explain why . . . .

There have been few published studies that directly
address . . . .

A review of the recent literature yield only two reports
on . . . .

None of the prior studies have established . . . .

Earlier studies were limited to the problem of . . . .

Examples taken or adapted from John Swales' *Aspects of Article Introductions*

Move 2 Language: Establishing the Research Gaps

Contrastive statements

Research has tended to focus on . . , rather than on . . . .

These studies have emphasized . . , as opposed to . . . .

Although considerable research has been devoted to . . , rather less attention has been paid to . . . .

Most studies have been content to . . . . Little attempt has been made to explain why . . . .

Examples taken or adapted from John Swales' *Aspects of Article Introductions* and Swales and Feak's *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*

Move 2 Language: Establishing the Research Gaps

Raise a question, hypothesis, or need for more research

However, it remains unclear whether . . . .

It would thus be of interest to learn how . . . .

If these results could be confirmed, they would provide strong evidence for . . . .

If further research were done, it could lead to effective approaches to . . . .

It would seem, therefore, that further investigations are needed in order to . . . .

Examples taken or adapted from John Swales' *Aspects of Article Introductions*

Move 3 Language: Filling the Research Gap

<u>Indicating what the present study accomplishes</u>

Referring to the type of *text*—"This paper…"

paper, article, thesis, report, research note

Referring to type of *investigation*—"This study…"

experiment, investigation, study, survey

Referring to the text usually in present tense

Referring to the investigation can be in either tense (past as you have already performed the study or present to make it seem new or current)

Examples taken or adapted from Swales and Feak's *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*

Move 3 Language: Filling the Research Gap

Some examples

This paper reports on the results obtained . . . .

The present work is concerned with. . . . .

The primary focus of this paper is on how to maximize . . . .

In the present investigation, . . . have been studied.

We have investigated the effect of . . . .

Therefore, we developed a new . . . as an alternative for . . . .

Examples taken or adapted from Swales and Feak's *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*

Review Examples and Look for Moves

- Move 1: *Establishing a Research Territory*
  - Show that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way
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Adapted from John Swales' "Creating a Research Space" (CARS) approach to introductions

Relating Moves to Components of Academic Writing (Social Sciences)

Creating a Research Space (John Swales)	Relevant Textual Sections	Additional Options & Considerations
Move 1: Establishing a Research Territory	Intro, Background, Lit Review (plus Theoretical Framework, possibly Methods)	• Broad strokes, few citations (intro) • Details, citations (LR)
Move 2: Defining the Research Gap	Problem Statement (Intro/Background, Literature Review)	• Real world (intro) • Research gap (intro but more detail in LR)
Move 3: Filling the Gap	Purpose Statement	• Research goals; advances in field • Significance, real world application

Relating Moves to Components of Academic Writing (Humanities)

Creating a Research Space (John Swales)	Relevant Textual Sections	Additional Options & Considerations
Move 1: Establishing a Research Territory	Intro (or intro adjacent), Possible theory section, More integrated throughout	• Broad strokes, few citations (intro) • Details, citations in lit review or body
Move 2: Defining the Research Gap	Introduction, Lit review in a prospectus	• Statements that signal being first to approach the topic this way
Move 3: Filling the Gap	Statements about what will be analyzed or argued; what knowledge advances study will accomplish	• Significance depends on topic; often more theoretical, less applied

Brainstorm around Existing Knowledge and Gaps

Creating a Research Space	Questions to Ask	Answer Questions Based on Existing Lit
Move 1: Establishing a Research Territory	What do we know? (about this topic, concept, source)	• We know that… • Studies have shown that..
Move 2: Defining the Research Gap	What do we not know? (that we should want to know)	• We do not know… • Scholars have not yet investigated…
Move 3: Filling the Gap	What do we want to find out? Why is that important for the field?	• My study will examine…which is important because…

Mapping the Research Territory

- Scrutinize key studies ("text partners") related to your research interests to understand their location in the field

- Construct a representation of the research territory (as a diagram, map) for a particular study

- Examine how different research topics and sub-topics relate to each other

- Explore these selected studies as models for how research studies build upon previous studies

- Consider how these studies enter the scholarly conversation of the existing body of research

Different Ways of Mapping

- Venn Diagram (Rudestam & Newton, 2007)
- Conceptual Maps/Diagrams (Creswell, 2013)
- Various Types of Maps/Diagrams (Maxwell, 2013)
- Various Types of Maps Diagrams (Hart, 1998)

  Hart, C. (1998). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination*. Sage.

- We will focus on Venn Diagrams for doing simple categorization of previous studies

- <u>Caveat</u>: If you're not fond of mapping/drawing, you can also track similar information (topics, concepts, theories, variables, methods) through key words in either Zotero or a carefully constructed Excel spreadsheet

Venn Diagram of Relevant Literature
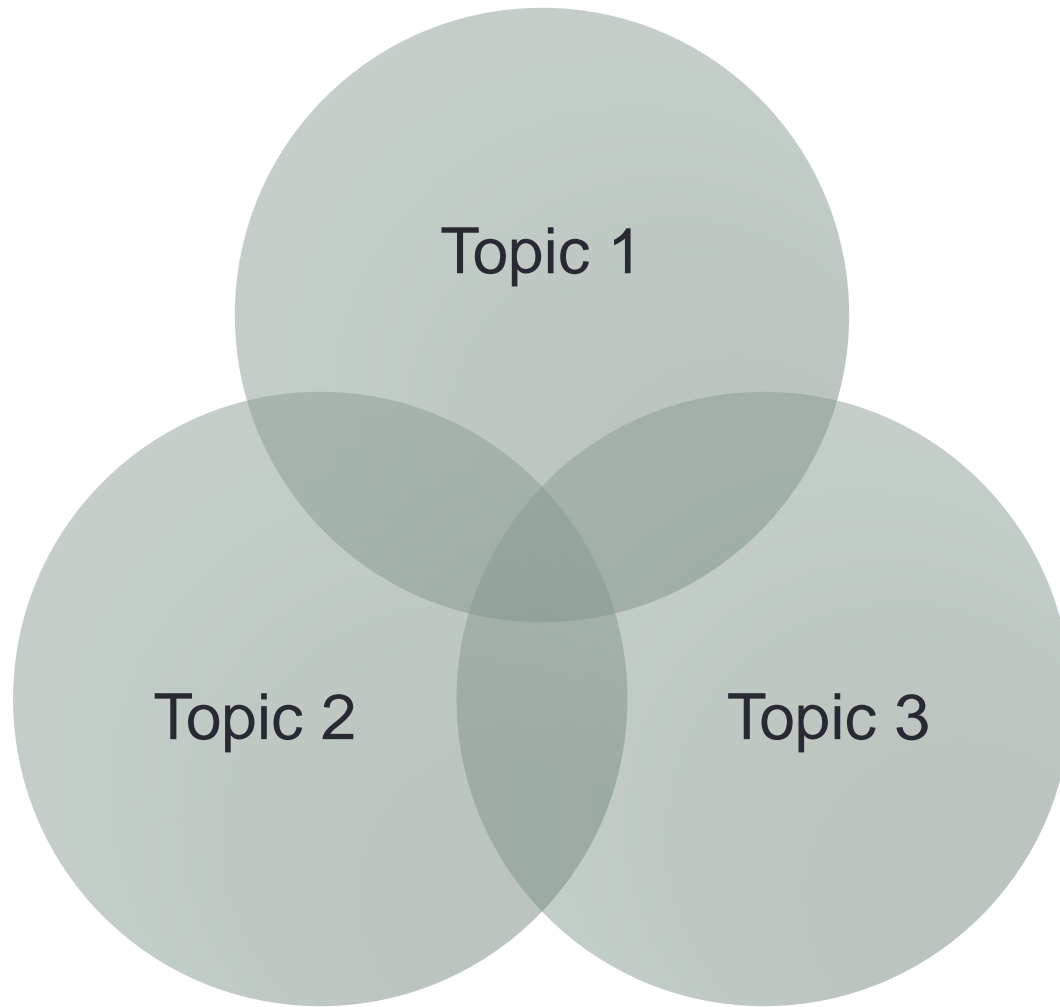
Mind Mapping Relevant Literature
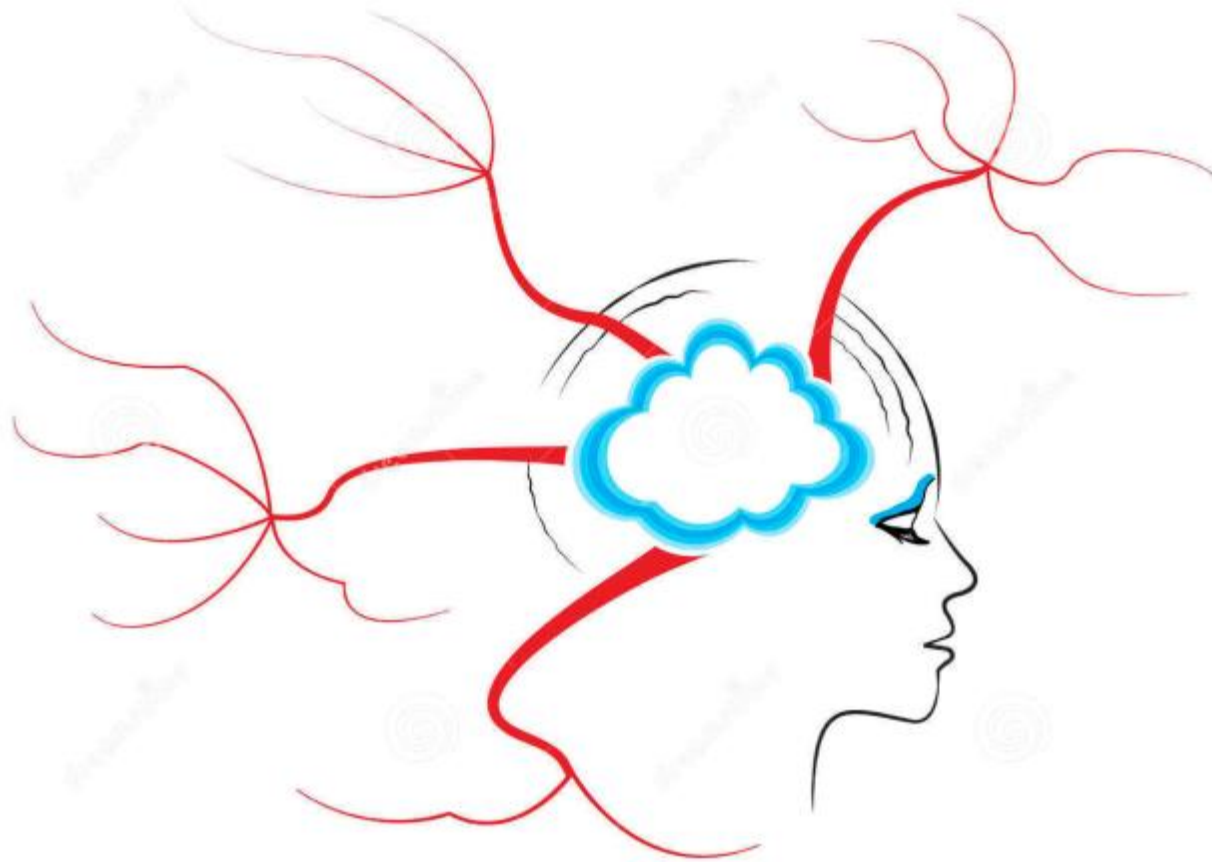
Try a Diagramming Exercise

- If you are in the process of developing a research project, try diagramming your project's literature, or at least the literature you would like to include in the literature review
- (Alternatively, review the intro and lit review from a journal article in your field and try diagramming this literature)
- Create a tentative diagram of key areas of existing research using either a Venn diagram or a mind map
- Map key citations into the diagram
- Does the diagram represent a realistic scope?
- How could further narrow and focus if appropriate?
- How could the diagram inform an outline?

EXAMPLE: Undocumented undergraduates on college campuses: Understanding their challenges and assets and what it takes to make an undocufriendly campus.

- In this article, Carola Suárez-Orozco and colleagues investigate how to improve undocumented undergraduate student experiences across a variety of US campuses. The authors draw on a national survey of diverse undocumented undergraduates attending two- and four-year public and private institutions of higher education. Using an ecological framework that accounts for risk and resilience, Suárez-Orozco and colleagues provide insights into the challenges undocumented undergraduates face and the assets they bring as they navigate their educational contexts. The authors also consider the role of campuses in shaping these experiences and make recommendations, based on quantitative data and the perspectives of students, for creating undocufriendly campuses.

- Suárez-Orozco, C., et al. (2015). Undocumented undergraduates on college campuses: Understanding their challenges and assets and what it takes to make an undocufriendly campus. *Harvard Educational Review*, *85*(3), 427-463.
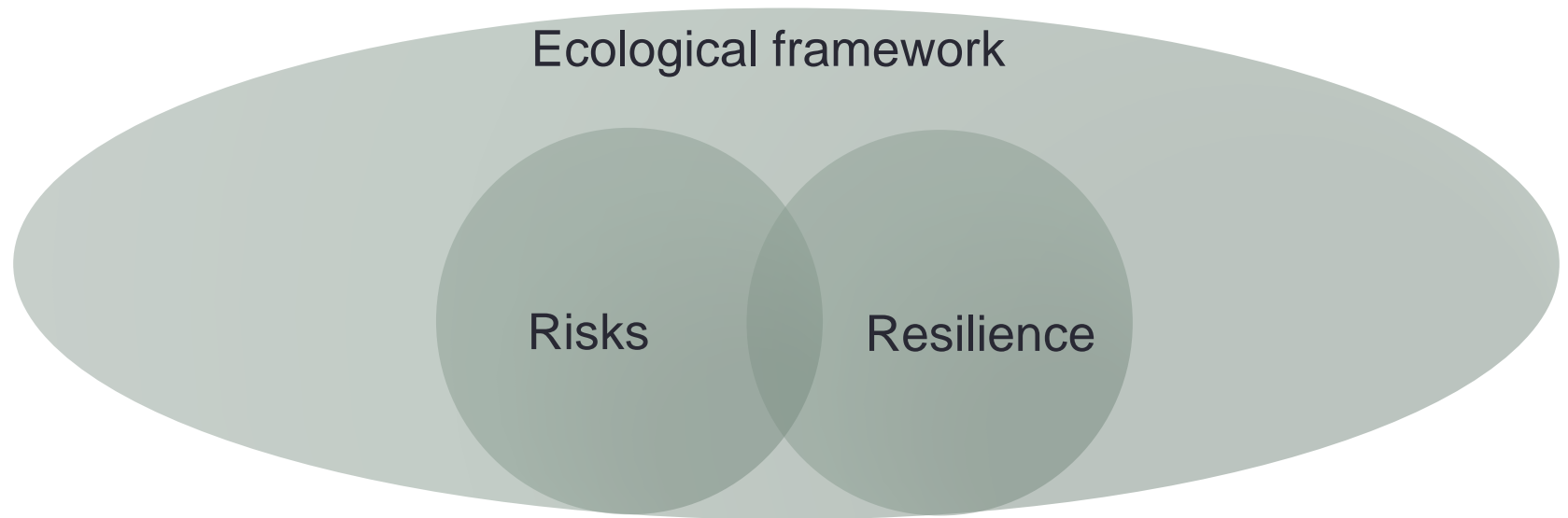
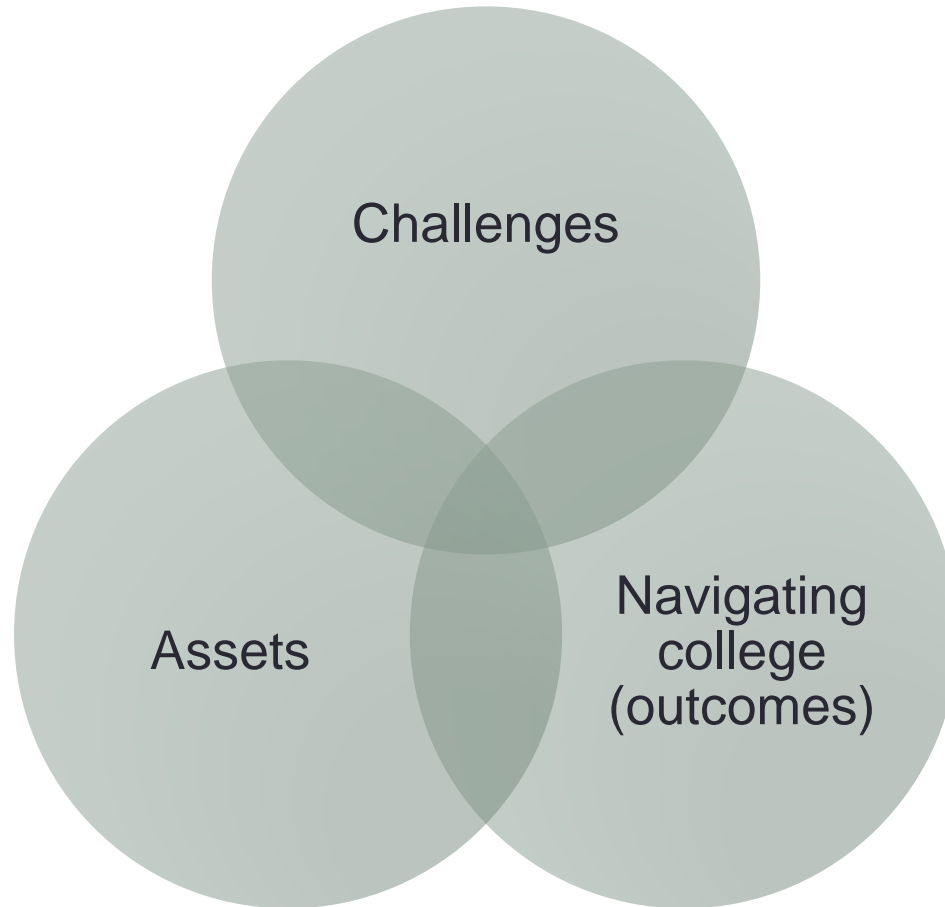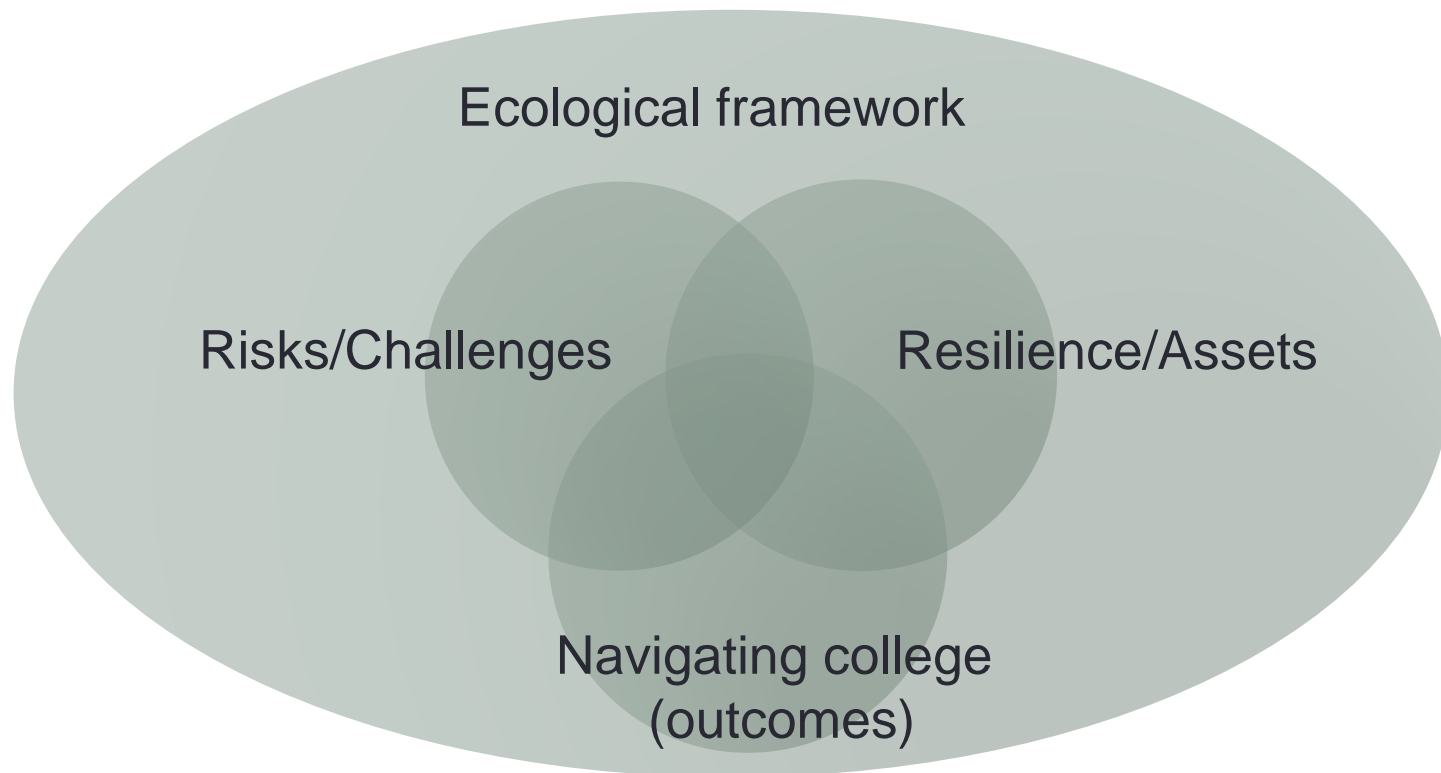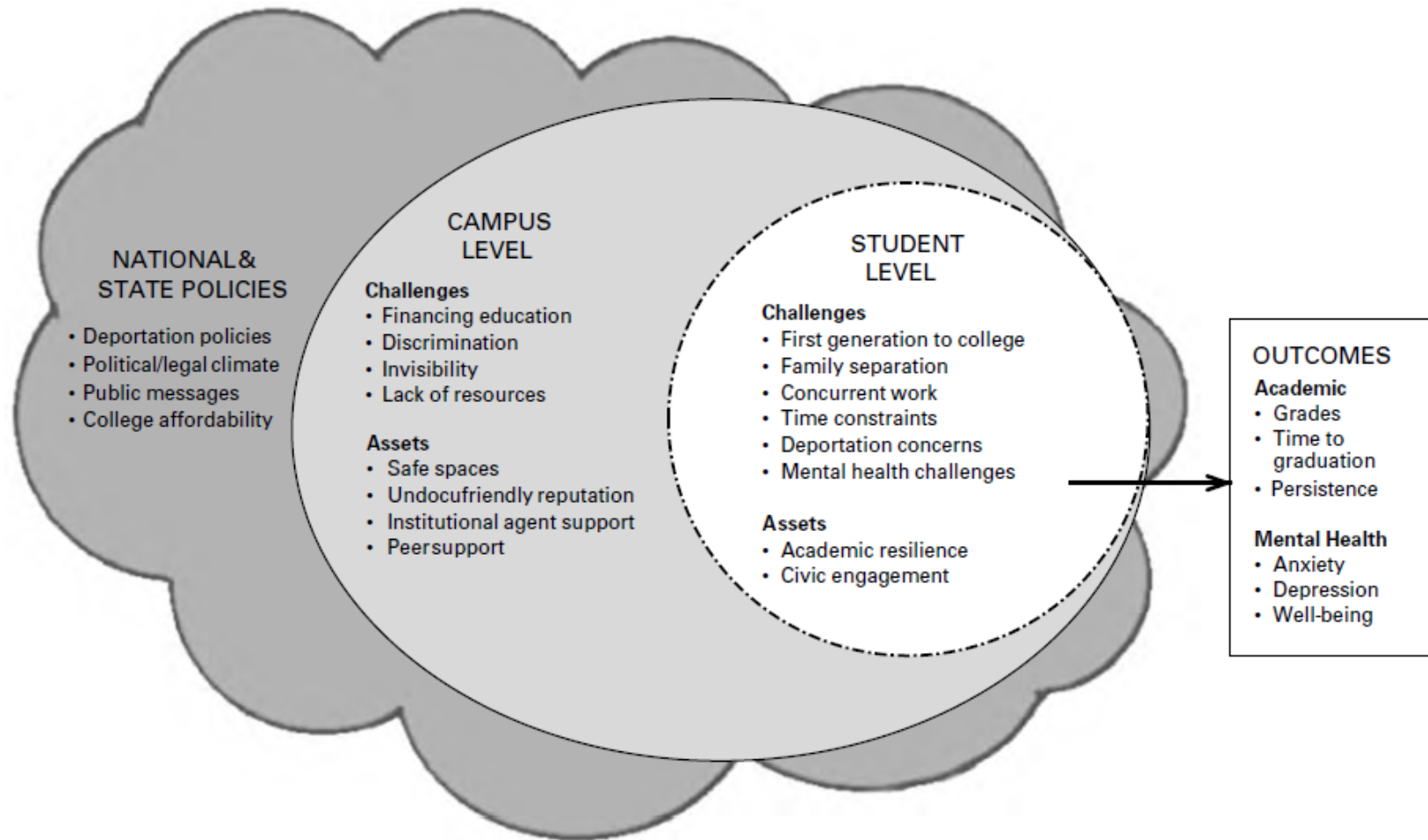# Undocumented College Students
Article by C. Suárez-Orozco et al, 2015
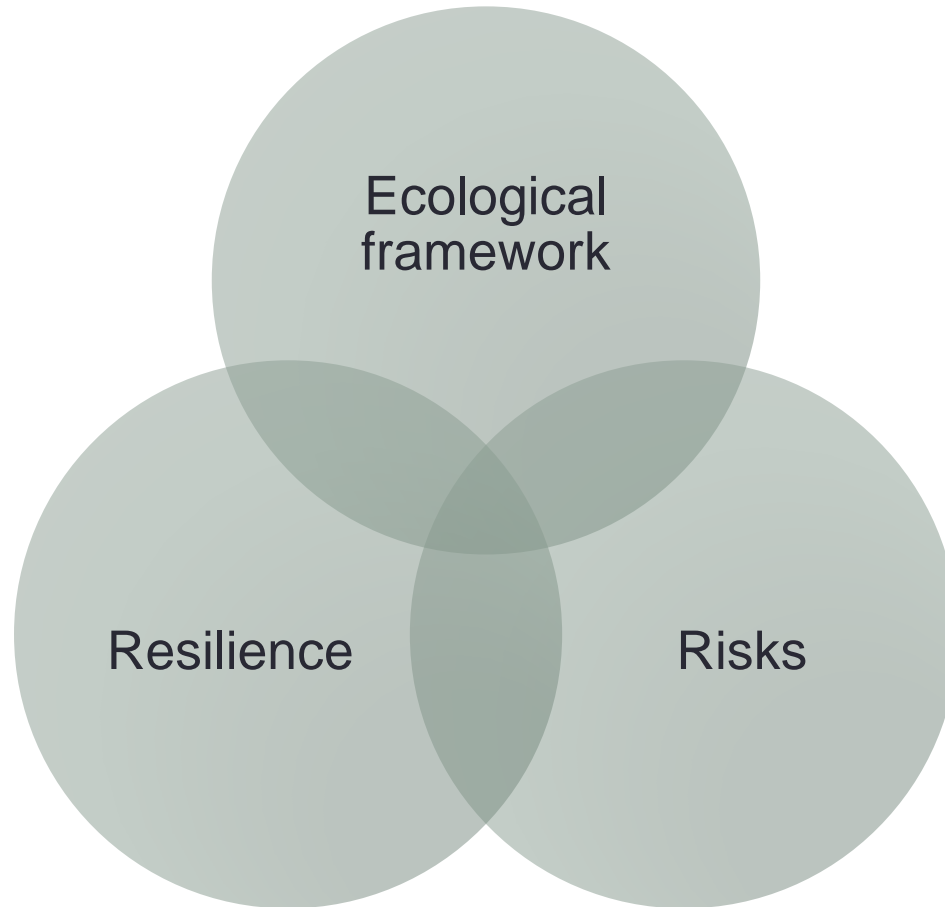
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Ecological framework

Risks/Challenges

Resilience/Assets

Navigating college
(outcomes)

Undocumented College Students
Article by C. Suárez-Orozco et al, 2015

Play Around with Your Own Research Topics

- Sketch a Venn diagram or other map of the topic areas for studies that relate to your research

- Pick a topical area (or concept, variable, etc.)
  - Brainstorm a list of what is known from previous research about this topic (write down statements/assertions)
  - Brainstorm a list of what is not known (write down statements using negative or contrastive language)
  - What needs to be investigated and why is it important?

- Do some reflective/exploratory writing about the research topic you are interested in and what the research territory looks like around this topic.

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