Tips for Conducting the Literature Search

1) **Concentrate your efforts on the scientific literature.** Try to determine what the most credible journals are in your topical area and start with those. In general, peer-reviewed journals are preferred. Such journals submit their articles (without author identification) to expert reviewers who offer comments to the authors and assess if the article is ready for publication. Articles in journals with this blind review process have a high level of credibility and are considered authoritative. In criminal justice and criminology, top peer-reviewed journals include: Criminology, Criminology and Public Policy, Justice Quarterly, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, Journal of Quantitative Criminology, among others.

2) **Do the review early in the research process.** An early review will reveal the major gaps in the research and may suggest whether a certain research question deserves more attention than others. Finally, the literature review will help you anticipate the common problems in your research context. You can use the prior experiences of others to avoid common pitfalls.

3) **Use a source document to start the review.** Take a comprehensive book or a well-cited article that examines your topic and examine the bibliography. This will help you identify other relevant sources to consult next (including classical studies in the area).

4) **Identify appropriate bibliographic databases to search.** There are several bibliographical databases available to you through the library, including “Criminal Justice Abstracts” and many others. If your topic extends beyond the criminal justice field, consider searching under a different topical area, such as in psychological abstracts, or sociology databases. Take notes during the discussion about databases provided in library training session with Professor Moll.

5) **Create a tentative list of search terms.** List the parts and subparts of your research question and any related issues that you think are important. For example, if your question is “Does community policing reduce crime rates?” a search phrase you may use is “community policing”. If your search yields too many citations, try specifying the terms more precisely, in this case by typing “evaluation of community policing”.

6) **Check the results.** Read the titles and abstracts you have found to identify the articles that are most relevant. Check the reference list of these articles and see if they cite new potentially relevant articles that you missed when searching with the database.