Identifying Gaps in the Related Literature

CREATe PhD Development Workshop

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Glasgow
Motivation

• Posing the right question is sometimes more important than offering the right answer.

• Time is limited, so focusing on the right topic is key.

• Today we focus on how to ask interesting questions but also how to present them.

Main Question:

⇒ How to identify an interesting gap in the literature and how to fill it with appropriate research.
Structure

• Motivation

• Research Methods

• Examples

• Conclusion
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• Motivation

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• Examples

• Conclusion
Learn how to search

Main sources of expertise:

1. Literature/Review Journals and Handbooks: e.g. JELit, JEPers, Annual Reviews, Handbook of Cultural Economics.
2. Ask your PhD Supervisor (but prepare well before the meeting) and your fellow PhD researchers / co-authors.
3. Ask others at your school, other schools/universities/ outside academia (extra benefits: co-authorships & links).
4. Teaching Resources: some PhD courses are available online at MIT, at experts webpages, Coursera, etc.
5. Attend events on the topic, methods training (like this one), academic writing events, read *The Elements of Style*.
6. Web: Google Scholar (also check who cited related papers recently), Online Resources (e.g. AEA, SSRN, NBER, Wiki).
7. Develop a proper method to approach the literature, then apply it to different problems.
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1. Review Studies by Experts

Review Journals & Handbooks:

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Typical Mistakes

• “Nobody does what I do, so it is hard to find appropriate readings and proceed”
  - this cannot be the case, most likely you either do not know what is your main research question or you have not read the literature properly.

• “Somebody has done exactly the same thing I am doing”
  - most likely this means that either you have not read the literature before writing your own research or you have not developed enough your ideas.
Structure is key

• Offer structure to your idea, put it in context, connect it to a big theory, a key puzzle, a policy challenge...

• Have a narrative or an example, something that most people can associate with.

• Structure studies by discipline / research method: you can offer empirical evidence to an important theory or you can provide theoretical foundations to an empirical regularity.

• Have one central idea for each paper. Avoid doing too many things in one paper. You can say: “my paper does this but it is consistent with several other facts”. Instead of saying: “my paper does 5 different things”.
Structure

• Motivation

• Research Methods

• Examples

• Conclusion
Example 1:
The Copyright Evidence Wiki
The Copyright Evidence Wiki: Empirical Evidence for Copyright Policy
Kris Erickson, Theodore Koutmeridis and Martin Kretschmer

1. MOTIVATION
There is a gap in the field:
- There is a growing interest in copyright data and evidence driven by changes in technology, the industry, the legal framework and human behaviour.
- More & better data both in size & depth over the past decade.
- Recent methodological improvements in empirical social science affect both research and policy.

CREATe focuses on collecting all empirical studies in a Wiki to form a dynamic literature review with:
- key theoretical propositions and
- evidence-based policy interventions.

2. MAIN WIKI WEBPAGE

3. COVERAGE OF STUDY BY FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE & POLICY FIELD

4. STUDIES BY POLICY FIELD

5. STUDIES BY YEAR (2000 ONWARDS)

6. CONCLUSIONS
- Some evidence for enforcement and music, mainly for the US and the EU: but we lack rigorous evidence related to copyright.
- The results are particularly heterogeneous.
- Open Wiki → have your say → shape your field.
625 studies
all Wiki entries

Creative Industries

Theoretical Propositions <-> Policy Issues

Data <-> Research Methods
Distribution of studies by Year (2000 onwards)
Distribution of studies by Industry

- Sound recording and music publishing: 256
- Creative, arts and entertainment: 168
- Software publishing (including video games): 144
- Film and motion pictures: 130
- Publishing of books, periodicals and other publishing: 66
- Television programmes: 62
- Cultural education: 57
- Programming and broadcasting: 44
- Computer programming: 30
- Photographic activities: 24
- Specialised design: 17
- Computer consultancy: 10
- Translation and interpretation: 8
- Advertising: 6
- PR and communication: 6

Total: 1000
290 Enforcement studies
Quantitative:
Descriptive stats
Correlations
Regressions

Qualitative:
Meta analysis
Textual content
Legal analysis
Example 2:
Wage Inequality
Literature - Education, Experience and Wages

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<tr>
<th>Informational Return</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
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<td>Human Capital</td>
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<td>Employee Learning (LBD)</td>
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- **Human Capital vs Signaling:**
  Becker (1964) vs Spence (1973); Bedard (2001); Lange (2007).

- **Employer Learning:**
  Jovanovic (1979); Farber and Gibbons (1996); Arcidiacono et al. (2010); Kahn (2014).

- **Skill (Education) Premium:**
  SBTC: Katz and Murphy (1992); Berman et al. (1998); Machin and Van Reenen (1998); Acemoglu (1998); Caselli (1999); Galor and Moav (2000); Card and Lemieux (2001).

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- **Credit Market Imperfections:**
  Galor and Zeira (1993); Carneiro and Heckman (2002); Hendel et al. (2005); Lochner and Monge-Naranjo (2011).
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# Literature - Education, Experience and Wages

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Key elements:
(i) Signaling, (ii) Credit Constraints, (iii) Private Employer Learning.

Signaling & Credit Constraints: Firms cannot distinguish the low from the credit constrained high type. Explains Education Premium

Signaling, Credit Constraints & Private Employer Learning:
Now firms learn the type of their workers.
Explains Experience Premium & the Within Group Inequality

Key papers: 
(i) Signaling ⇒ Spence (1973)
(ii) Credit Constraints ⇒ Galor & Zeira (1993)
(iii) Public Employer Learning ⇒ Jovanovic (1979)
My Paper - The Mechanism

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(iii) *Private* Employer Learning ⇔ Kahn (2014)

(i), (ii) & (iii) ⇔ THIS PAPER
Example 3:
The Economics of Crime
The economic theory of crime

**Theory:** Consider the basic model of the criminal decision following Becker (1968), Ehrlich (1973) or Freeman (1999):

\[
\text{SuccessProb} \times \text{IllegalGains} - \text{CaughtProb} \times \text{Sanctions} > \text{LegalGains} \\
(1 - \pi) \times U(W_C) - \pi \times U(S) > U(W_L)
\]

**Topics:** Key Determinants of Crime

- \( U(W_L) \): labor markets (wages, unemployment)
- \( U(S) \): punishment, sanctions, sentences
- \( \pi \): policing, detection/protection technology
- \( U(W_C) \): returns from crime, illegal gains
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Conclusion

• Knowledge of the related literature is essential read reviews and resources, discuss with others, present and get feedback.

• Some of the issues that you consider less important are really important, such as presenting what motivated you.

• Offer appropriate structure to your PhD research, connect it to big ideas.

• Be aware of the tradeoff between:
  - focusing on an important topic in a dense literature which limits the possibility of having a meaningful contribution;
  - and focusing on a less important topic in a sparse literature which offers the possibility to have meaningful contributions.

  Having a diversified research portfolio may be a solution.

• Keep in mind what my teacher Prof. Andrew Oswald says: “if everyone likes your work then you can be sure you haven’t done anything important”.
Thank you!

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