Public Questions

Feel free to add questions here, or mail them to ahci.

Just a few questions about the progress report.

1) How many sources should we include in the lit review?
2) How in-depth should the theoretical rationale be?

Remember that the goal of related work searches is to inform your work and to be able to convince readers that a) you understand how prior work informs yours and b) that your work will make a contribution. So I can’t translate this into a number for you. We’ll look to see that there is enough work around sources to convince us that you’ve spent some time thinking about how your work relates to prior HCI work and how it connects to the large body of theory in the disciplines that you come from and that inform HCI.

As for form, an annotated bibliography is fine. If you go this route, the annotations have to make the connection between the source and your work absolutely clear: how does this source help shape your design, your thinking, your hypotheses? “We can use theory X” is not good enough. “Theory X tells us that we should... because...” is better. “Someone built system Y that does this” is not good enough. “Our system is similar to System Y, but we did... because...” is better. An actual, written analysis of the related work is also fine -- the deeper you think about it, the better you can use it. I expect that you will continue to bump into related work every so often for the next month, so creating a final, polished, ready-to-drop-into-the-paper analysis might be wasted effort. But a good analysis will help you make progress.

I will say the number you need is probably closer to 10-15 rather than closer to 30-40. Social science background folks have probably noticed that a lot of HCI conference papers, especially system papers, don’t have nearly the depth or quantity of references and analysis of the related work as a typical social science journal paper. I think this is changing, both because the amount of research done and known by the field is increasing, and because page limits in the major conferences have increased over the last couple of years. But, once you have enough understanding of related work to show that you know where you fit in, I’d rather you focus your limited time and resources on doing the data collection, interpretation, building, evaluation, and interpretation parts of HCI research rather than an exhaustive search of the literature.

Three extra thoughts.

1. Please don’t use only theories discussed in this class. We talk about example theories that have been found to be useful or interesting to talk about in HCI. You, however, should be aware of other, potentially interesting theoretical frameworks from your field and from other classes you’ve taken (such as COMM/INFO 245). Use the best theories, not the class theories.
2. Chase citations. Once you’ve found a paper that you know is useful/close to what you do -- especially on the systems side -- find the papers that cite it (use ACM digital library or Google scholar), and the papers it cites. Papers that cite both give you evidence that people have found your paper useful and point to novel work; papers it cites are sometimes fairly influential in the field. For example, many recommender systems papers wind up citing Resnick et al. 94, Hill et al. 95, and/or Sharadand and Maes 95, because these are the first people who really did the work. This is a quick way to scarf up a lot of potentially related papers
3. Skim! Evaluate quickly whether the paper is likely to be important to your project. If it’s not, put it on a list of “probably not important” papers and move on.

Remember that the goal of related work searches is to inform your work and to be able to convince readers that a) you understand how prior work informs yours and b) that your work will make a contribution.

3) How many total pages are you looking for the report to be?

As few as possible to tell your story. This is about showing and making progress, not making a report for report’s sake.