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LIS 617 Legal Research Methods & Law Literature
Course Syllabus
Semester: Fall 2009

All course materials are available on the course web page and in the library

Class hours: Wednesday, 6:30-8:50 PM Room: 609
Office hours: Monday 5:30-6:30 PM (by prior appointment)

COURSE INFORMATION AND CLASS SCHEDULE

1. Course Description, Goals, and Objectives

Course Description

This course will introduce students to the specialized nature of legal bibliography and research. This course offers a systematic approach to finding legal information. It is an introduction to the legal process and the basic principles of American law.

This course offers the foundation upon which the student must continue to build. Both the practice of law and law librarianship are undergoing massive changes because of the explosion of technological developments. As a result legal research is a completely different endeavor than it was just ten years ago.

Goals

The goal of the course is to provide future librarians with a foundation in this unique area of research. This basis will help them to assist their patrons in the variety of legal research questions that arise in all types of libraries – individuals seeking general legal information, scholars and students performing scholarly research, pro se litigants handling their own legal problems, and lawyers needing professional guidance in the course of their professional activities.

Objectives

Among the objectives for this course, which will be developed through class lectures and discussions, research exercises, source evaluations, and a final examination, are:

- to understand the role of legal research in the context of the American legal system
- to learn the bibliographic and research characteristics of the specialized legal research tools and sources
- to develop effective research techniques and strategies for the range of legal questions posed by library patrons

- to identify and compare available media options when performing legal research
- to make appropriate media choices for different research situations
- to understand the role of the librarian in the legal research process
- to understand the current situation of the legal publishing business and its impact on legal bibliography and research
- to understand legal research within the context of the wider world of research

2. Prerequisite Courses

The only prerequisite for this course is the basic "Information Sources" (LIS 602). It is also helpful, but not required, for students to have had both "Online Searching and Services" (LIS 605) and "Government Information Sources" (LIS 613).

3. Course Requirements

The requirements for students include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- **Attendance and participation**

Attendance at all class sessions is required. Each student is expected to participate in the activities scheduled for each session.

If a student is absent from class, it is the student's responsibility to obtain any notes, handouts, exercises, etc. from either another classmate or the professor. It is also the student's responsibility to arrange for delivery of any materials due for submission to the instructor at that class meeting.

- **Preparation**

Each student is expected to be adequately prepared for class. Preparation includes the completion of all assigned readings and any assigned exercises. This will allow for both informed discussion in class and alternative voices and perspectives of the issues at hand. In addition to the required readings, the course schedule may indicate or the instructor may announce supplemental readings which are recommended, but not required. Throughout the semester, additional required readings may also be assigned.

Each student is requested to bring to each class his/her copy of the assigned text, *The Process of Legal Research*.

- **Exercises and Source Evaluations**

Throughout the semester, students will be assigned various exercises that will give them the opportunity to use and evaluate the various legal research tools and resources. The course schedule indicates when each exercise will be distributed and when it is DUE. Students are expected to submit their exercises at the beginning of the class session at which they are due. EXERCISES SUBMITTED LATE (either by date or time) WILL RECEIVE LESSER CREDIT than they would otherwise have done.

The anticipated exercises and schedule are as follows:

Exercise No.	Exercise Focus	Date Distributed	Date Due
1	Case Law Publication	Sept. 9	Sept. 16
2	Case Law Research	Sept. 16	Sept. 30
3	Statutory Law Publication	Sept. 30	Oct. 7
4	Statutory Law Research	Oct. 7	Oct. 14
5	Administrative Law Research	Oct. 14	Oct. 21
6	Secondary Sources Research	Oct. 21	Oct. 28

Source Evaluations

In addition to each exercise, each student will complete and submit a "Source Evaluation Form", according to the elements listed below, for all the sources used in answering the 6 Exercises. The student should attach the evaluation to his/her exercise when it is submitted. A vital part of the legal research process is the ability to evaluate the various resources used so that one can make considered judgments as to which should be used, when, how and why. For each assignment, select only ONE of the sources used to complete the exercise. The "Source Evaluation Form" asks the student to note and to think about the following elements of the research tools used:

- 1. Bibliographic Information:** information that specifically identifies the **source**
- 2. Content Information:** information that describes the organization and content of the source, such as the particular subject or topic covered by it, the breadth and depth of such coverage, the time frame of the included information (is it a current awareness tool, does it cover the current state of the law, is it an historical source), and who the book is intended for (law students, practitioners, professors or scholars, lay persons, general researchers, etc.); how one locates information within the source, such as indexes, tables of contents, hierarchies of information, highlighted segments/fields, etc.; what special features does the source use or provide that assists in the legal research process (such as bibliographies, footnotes, tables, etc.); and how the source is kept up-to-date, so that the information within can be relied upon by the legal researcher.
- 3. Evaluation of source:** this section asks for each student's individual opinion of the source and its value in the legal research process:
 - the ease of use of the source (what kind of learning curve is involved before one can use it effectively);
 - how clear is the information provided; how helpful is the information for this particular research problem and for other situations;
 - how does manual use compare with computerized use of the source (if applicable);
 - how does this source fit into the research process;

- how reliable does the student think the source is (who wrote it, are there lots of mistyped words or incorrect citations, who publishes it, who maintains it, will it exist tomorrow? next month? next year?, etc.);
- in what other formats is this source available (online, microform, etc.)

Generally speaking, these exercises are to be the work of each individual student. It may be a cliché, but this is a course where students learn skills; if each student doesn't make the effort to work with the various tools and publications, he/she will fail to achieve the basic objectives of this course. It is understood by the instructor, though, that students often form study groups and collaborate on assignments. In fact, such interchanges among students can be beneficial for increased understanding of the subjects and processes at hand. Given this, any students who do collaborate on exercises must clearly note this fact on their individually submitted exercises, noting the means and extent of collaboration, and the other students in the group. Each student must do the "Source Evaluation Form" on his/her own, without collaboration since this calls for individual, personal judgment of the publication.

Final Examination

Students will have one, final, examination for this class, which will be a take home exam distributed at the next to last class (Dec. 9) and which is to be submitted to the instructor at the beginning of the last class (Dec. 16).

The final examination MUST BE SOLELY THE WORK OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT. No collaboration is acceptable for the final exam.

4. Evaluation/Assessment

Final grades will take into account the various course requirements described above, in the following proportions*:

Attendance and Participation	10%
Exercises	36%
Source Evaluations	18%
Final Examinations	36%
Total	100%

*** This weighting is tentative, subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Every effort will be made, though, to abide by this plan.**

5. Texts

Required textbook:

Barkan, Steven et al. *Legal research illustrated: an abridgment of Fundamentals of legal research, ninth edition* (Foundation Press, 2009) [referred to in the Class Schedule as "Barkan"]

6. Class Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	Sept. 2	Introduction, American Legal System, Research Process, Citation Format	Barkan, Glossary; 1-13; 527-545
2	Sept. 9	Library Tour (NYU) Case Law Publication; The Digest (Introduction)	Exercise 1 distributed Barkan 32-77
3	Sept. 16	Case Law Research: The Digest (Continuation) Case Law Research: Updating	Exercise 1 due Barkan 78-104 Exercise 2 distributed Barkan 274-316
4	Sept. 23	Statutory Law- Publication	Exercise 2 due Barkan 128-156; 195-204 Exercise 3 distributed
5	Sept. 30	Statutory Research: Codes and Indexes	Exercise 3 due Barkan 155-156; 205-206 Exercise 4 distributed
6	Oct. 7	Statutory Research - Updating Legislative Process Material	Barkan 275-316; 157-194
7	Oct. 14	Administrative Law Publication	Exercise 4 due Barkan 226-273 Exercise 5 distributed
8	Oct. 21	Secondary Sources: Finding Aid Tools	Exercise 5 due Barkan 343-369 Exercise 6 distributed
9	Oct. 28	Secondary Sources: Legal Scholarship	Barkan 343-344; 370-389; 317-343 Exercise 6 due
10	Nov.4	Legal Research as a Process: research plan and research log (intro)	Barkan 14-20; 491-503
11	Nov. 11	Research Strategies (I) print & online	Barkan 14-20; 491-503
12	Nov. 18	Research Strategies (II) print & online	Barkan 14-20; 491-503
14	Dec. 2	Media Issues (Intro); Language of the Law	Barkan, Glossary; 483-490; 527-545 Westlaw rises to legal publishing fame by selling free information. http://www.citypages.com/2009-04-29/news/westlaw-rises-to-legal-publishing-fame-by-selling-free-information
15	Dec. 9	Media Issues; Language of the Law	FINAL EXAM DISTRIBUTED
16	Dec. 16	Review	FINAL EXAM DUE