

2013

Legal Research Book Camp: Bridging the 1L Knowledge Gap

Mari Cheney, *Lewis & Clark College*

Legal Research Boot Camp: Bridging the 1L Knowledge Gap

Mari Cheney, Reference Librarian

Boley Law Library, Lewis & Clark Law School

What do you remember about your first semester of law school? Did you recall learning about the three branches of government in high school? That there were different levels of court? Could you have identified primary source documents and legal citation? Were you comfortable looking for information on a library website (i.e. using the library catalog, searching for articles in a legal database)?

The reference librarians at Lewis & Clark Law School knew that entering 1Ls had a knowledge gap that needed to be filled. Second and third year law students told us stories about being embarrassed in first-year doctrinal classes because they did not know the definition of "appellate," understand how a case made its way to the Supreme Court, or why a regulation mattered as much as a statute. And worst of all, they did not know who to ask for help. As librarians, we felt it was our job to not only inform, but also to reach out to incoming law students so they knew librarians were available from day one to help.

At Lewis & Clark Law School, 1Ls do not enroll in a formal Legal Research class until their second semester. It was not until the 2012-2013 school year that there was any formal legal research instruction to 1Ls at the beginning of their law school career. This took the form of a Legal Research Boot Camp course. The Assistant Director for Reference and Research Services and myself developed Boot Camp content, in consultation and cooperation with a Legal Writing faculty member. Attendance at these sessions was mandatory and included a three hour introductory workshop, two in-class labs, and one online lab with a required written assignment due one week later.

My initial research to see if other law schools had developed anything similar to our Boot Camp showed that many schools have short legal research sessions that are voluntary, or a reference librarian visits Legal Writing to discuss legal research strategies. Or more likely, Legal Research is taught the first semester of law school so their 1Ls were not experiencing a similar knowledge gap.

Additionally, some law schools offer Legal Research Boot Camps for 2L or 3Ls, but these focus on already learned skills as these students get ready for their summer or associate jobs. (See, for example, University of California Irvine Law Library, Legal Research Boot Camp; University of Washington's Bridge the Legal Research Gap; and University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law Legal Research Boot Camp.)

It was important for us to introduce basic legal research skills and law library information literacy early on since these students would not enroll in Legal Research until their second semester of law school. These skills would serve them well in their doctrinal classes as well as their Legal Writing class. Our goal was to also flip the classroom, so students would view CALI lessons or in-house online tutorials, as well as read a few short legal research articles before coming to class. (See "Get Real about Research

and Writing,” Mark Cooney, *Student Lawyer*, May 2004, 18-24; “Becoming a Better Online Researcher,” Shawn Nevers, *Student Lawyer*, Feb. 2012, 17-18.) The majority of class time would be spent on in-class exercises.

Three-hour Boot Camp

The purpose of the initial three-hour Boot Camp was to familiarize students with the main concepts of legal research as well as introduce them to a reference librarian. Each reference librarian taught between 20-80 students, based on classroom size availability. During the first hour, we discussed primary and secondary sources, and read a short newspaper article. The students were to identify all the primary sources mentioned in the article. As the article was about a Voting Rights case, it gave us the opportunity to talk about the interconnectedness of the law, the litigation process and legal publishing. We also discussed dockets and Bloomberg Law.

During the second hour, we looked at the three branches of government and its relationship to legal publishing. We also talked about legal citation, and sources for legal citation assistance. Class time was also spent on a library catalog and library website familiarization exercise.

The third hour focused on research strategy. The students were given a torts hypothetical and in groups of two or three, discussed the hypothetical and generated research terms. The end of the hour was spent on the concept of updating with KeyCite, Shepard's, pocket parts and supplements.

The torts hypothetical was also used in the remaining Boot Camps labs.

In-class Lab: Secondary Sources

Before the second class, students were asked to view two CALI lessons: “Introduction to Secondary Resources” and “American Law Reports”. In class, we discussed Oregon BarBooks, a very helpful secondary source for legal research in this state. After an in-class exercise reviewing BarBooks, we discussed CJS, AmJur and ALR. Students completed another exercise using WestlawNext and these additional secondary sources.

In-class Lab: Case Law

Before the third class, students were asked to view one CALI lesson: “How to Find Case Law Using the Digests” and were to focus on the section about headnotes, topics and key numbers. In class, we discussed six methods for searching for case law, as well as why headnotes, topics and key numbers were useful in online legal research. In the exercise, we also talked about parts of a case, including the synopsis and star pagination. Finally, we discussed KeyCite, citing references, and the difference between published and unpublished decisions.

Online Lab: Statutory Research

For the fourth and final class, students watched an online tutorial I made using ScreenFlow and were then asked to complete an exercise that was due a week later. The tutorial covered how to find Oregon Revised Statutes on WestlawNext, as well as on a free online resource called OregonLaws. Students learned how to find statutes by citation, how to use the statutes' index and table of contents, and how to check for currency information. They also learned about the history line, notes of decisions and citing references.

The exercise required students to closely read certain sections of the Oregon statutes for currency, to find the year of last amendment, and to find effective dates. The exercise also required them to use Citing References to locate case law. In addition, students used the free online resource OregonLaws.org to find a section of the Oregon Revised Statutes, find the history line to look for amendments, and find annotations. Students were also asked to compare the advantages and disadvantages to doing legal research on WestlawNext and a free online database.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

We faced a few challenges when implementing Boot Camp. First, our three-hour introductory session and subsequent in-class labs were held on Friday mornings, a day 1L students are not normally required to be on campus. Some students could not attend due to prior commitments. Next year, we will notify students of the required dates much sooner; ideally it will be printed on their initial Legal Writing Syllabus.

Because we required students to be on campus on Fridays, we heard from a few students that they would have preferred online tutorials to required in-class attendance. We eventually did an online tutorial and accepted online submissions for their final exercise. However, the first Boot Camp session will always be in person as one of the primary goals of this class is to introduce students to a librarian and this face-to-face interaction cannot be substituted.

Our introductory session lasted three hours, with two 10-minute breaks. We did not provide food or snacks. This was a marathon. Ideally we would find a way to break it down to two hours. Even better, however, would be to incorporate our Legal Research Boot Camp with the already required Legal Elements course all 1L students take for two weeks at the beginning of law school. Law students would immediately meet their librarians in person begin to learn about library resources, research strategy and legal information literacy.

This experience was a learning experience for us all and we are grateful to the Legal Writing faculty for working with us to incorporate important legal research principles into 1L curriculum to bridge the 1L knowledge gap.