Legal Information Resources

INF 382H

UTA 1.504

Fall 2024

Wed 6:00-9:00 pm

(Due to significant asynchronous content, we will only meet from 6:00-8:00 pm)

Course description:

Identification of relevant legal information resources, efficient retrieval of legal information, and the role of technology in legal information access.

Instructor: Stephanie Swenson Towery

[Stephanie.swenson@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:Stephanie.swenson@austin.utexas.edu) (official and recommended for student privacy)

[shastac@gmail.com](mailto:shastac@gmail.com) (personal) or [sst25@txstate.edu](mailto:sst25@txstate.edu) (day job work)

Cell: 512-633-2790 (personal)

Office Hours: By appointment, available via Zoom, phone, or in person; feel free to contact me at any time.

TA: None

This is an in-person class. We will meet in person each week from 6:00-8:00 pm at the iSchool.

**Land Acknowledgment**

**We would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on Indigenous land. Moreover, we would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Lipan Apache, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, Tigua Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas, here on Turtle Island.**

**Title IX reminder**

**Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas**[**Senate Bill 212**](https://titleix.utexas.edu/sb212) **requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the**[**Title IX**](https://titleix.utexas.edu/)[**Office**](https://titleix.utexas.edu/)**regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email**[**advocate@austin.utexas.edu**](mailto:advocate@austin.utexas.edu)**. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit**[**http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/,**](http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/)**contact the Title IX Office via email at**[**titleix@austin.utexas.edu**](mailto:titleix@austin.utexas.edu)**, or call 512-471-0419.**

**Accessibility**

**Please note that students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities,**[**512-471-6259**](tel:512-471-6259)**,**[**http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/**](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__diversity.utexas.edu_disability_&d=BQMCaQ&c=OrYO-caJHQE1g_AJU3az1awi55It-bjDIQrtRiZ6WBk&r=42DLM5zQhT_XiSnFwSBXggl1JVIbmMfrgEYt4XvFcgg&m=e4f8ZC86aUc1z7XJ27q6HbApvaKzy1Yd3EOXCc9Nwa8&s=tZ2G5x4Q9_WPCiwNb3a9F0TQuqd6ON27G0yo2VMpNFM&e=)**.**

Course Materials: Textbook is Steenken and Brooks, Sources of American Law, available for free download (open access) at <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/sources-of-american-law-an-introduction-to-legal-research>

All other reading materials are available via the course site in Canvas.

Final Exam: There is no final exam.

Goals: The goal of this course is to provide future librarians with a foundation in practical legal research. This basis will help them to assist their patrons in the variety of legal research questions that arise in all types of libraries.

Course Objectives: After this class concludes, students will be able to

* Conduct efficient and effective legal research on a wide range of topics using primary and secondary legal materials in print and electronic formats
* Explain to patrons which resources you should use for each research situation and why those resources are the most appropriate
* Discuss important policy issues in the creation, distribution, and use of legal information

Grading Policy: Grades will be based on the following:

In person (synchronous) discussion 14 percent

Reference questions 45 percent

Discussions (in Canvas, asynchronous) 11 percent

Book reviews 15 percent

Final presentation 15 percent

In person (synchronous discussion)

We will have a synchronous discussion every week at 6. You can ask questions about any of the readings or the video lectures at that time. We will also go over the reference questions and answers. Everyone will take turns presenting their answers to questions first and then we will go around the room. We will do the same with the Discussion questions. This weekly meeting will not last longer than 2 hours.

If you cannot make a class, this is okay. Do not feel like you need to disclose why you cannot make it. There is no need to let me know in advance. There is no dress code for the class, and feel free to eat, drink, step away, take a phone call, etc. It is acceptable, so do not feel the need to apologize or ask permission to leave.

Discussions

In the Discussions section of the course on Canvas, follow the instructions for each Discussion. These are graded on completion only.

Book reviews:

Each book review will be a two-page written review of a legal resource (no footnotes or endnotes needed). I suggest getting prior approval of the title. Submit two titles you are interested in reviewing. You may choose anything used in the legal profession. The book reviews are each worth 7.5 percent of the total grade.

The book reviews will be assessed on the following factors:

* Clear statement of the positives and negatives of the resource
* Clear identification of the target audience for the resource (for example, is this resource best used by pro se patrons, law librarians, new attorneys, or senior attorneys in a specialized practice area)
* Brief recommendation (i.e., would you recommend I buy this resource for my collection)

Reference questions:

Each week for nine weeks you will have a set of five reference questions to answer. Your grade is based on completion. Use Canvas to enter your answers online. Bring a copy to class to take part in the discussion (you can bring a device or a print copy). I will ask you to describe how you answered each question.

Please answer the questions, a brief description of the sources and/or methods use to find the answers, and estimate the time spent on each question.

Please spend no more than 15 minutes total (including documentation) on each question, or a total of an hour to an hour and 15 minutes on each set of questions. If you have not completed your research or found an answer to the question in 15 minutes, stop, note it, and move on.

Reminder: you will not be graded on accuracy of answers.

You can write your answers in whatever style you like. You can respond as if you are answering the patron directly, or you can outline your response.

Presentation:

You will present to the class a 20-minute lecture on any topic of your interest that has some connection to legal information resources. You may use any teaching aids that you wish for your presentation – PowerPoint, etc.

The Presentation will be assessed on the following factors:

* Clarity of explanation
* Overall understanding of the material (with adjustment for difficulty and level of class ability)
* Poise, humor, and creativity

Typical in person (synchronous) discussion:

Review of video lectures with Q&A – 10 minutes

Break 10 minutes

Review and discuss Reference Questions – 60 minutes

Break 10 minutes

Review and discuss Discussions – 30 minutes

Course Schedule:

All readings are in Course Materials on Canvas or in Steenken and Brooks.

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| Date | Main Topic(s) | Work to do at home  Readings – to be completed before class | Evaluation |
| 8/28 | Class overview; Milieu: law firm organization; library department duties; librarian roles – traditional, emerging (business development, conflicts, competitive intelligence); Academic law libraries; Public law libraries | Sign on to Canvas; review course; read syllabus. Watch the videos in the intro module. | Email me your list of three things you would like to get out of this course OR complete ungraded list on same in Canvas. |
| 9/4 | Legal research in practice; the reference interview. The patron (attorneys, non-attorney legal staff, law students, public – pro se litigants); | Watch the videos in the first module. Read Cadmus (The Quintessential Law Library and Librarian in a Digital Era) | Reference questions #1 due. Discussion #1 due. |
| 9/11 | Civics review: basics of how laws are made – court systems and legislatures; Internet research: search engines; Unauthorized practice of law | Watch the videos in the second module. Read the complaint by Moore against Jones Day. | Reference questions #2 due. Discussion #2 due. |
| 9/18 | Judiciary: PACER; Lexis Courtlink; federal state and local court websites | Watch the videos in the third module. Read Steenken & Brooks, The United States Legal System | Top two choices for Book Reviews due (send me an email). Reference questions #3 due. Discussion #3 due. |
| 9/25 | Finding cases – opinions and common law | Watch the videos in the fourth module. Read Steenken & Brooks, Judicial Opinions & Common Law | Topic for Presentation due (send me an email). Reference questions #4 due. Discussion #4 due. |

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| 10/2 | Westlaw and other online resources | Watch the videos in the fifth module. Read Sloan. | First Book Review due. Reference questions #5 due. Discussion #5 due. |
| 10/9 | Legislature: Statutes; Legislative History: Texas Legislature Online, Thomas | Watch the videos in the sixth module. Read Steenken & Brooks, Constitutions & Statutes | Ref questions #6 due. Discussion  #6 due. |
| 10/16 | Secondary Sources: Dictionaries; Encyclopedias; Periodicals; ALRs; Restatements; Model Codes & Uniform Acts | Watch the videos in the sixth module. Read Steenken & Brooks, Secondary Sources | Reference questions #7 due. Discussion #7 due. |
| 10/23 | Administrative Materials; Rules of Procedure, Rules of Ethics; Rules of Evidence | Watch the videos in the eighth module. Read Steenken & Brooks, Administrative Regulations. | Ref questions #8 due. Discussion #8 due. |
| 10/30 | Lexis and Westlaw | Watch the videos in the ninth module. Read Steenken & Brooks, Electronic Research; Read Margolis & Murray | Reference questions #9 due. Discussion #9 due. |
| 11/6 | Legal research | Watch the videos in the 10th module. Read Steenken & Brooks, The Research Process | 2nd Book Review due. Discussion #10 due. |
| 11/13 | Legislative history | TBD | Discussion #11 due. |
| 11/20 | TBD | TBD | TBD |
| 11/27 | Thanksgiving – NO CLASS | Thanksgiving – NO CLASS | Thanksgiving – NO CLASS |
| 12/5 | Presentation | Presentation | Presentation and Wrap Up |