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LIS:626 Online Databases: Law
Course Syllabus
Semester: Spring 2012

Class hours: Wednesday: 6:30-8:50 PM
Room: 510
Office hours: by prior appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

1. DESCRIPTION

This course provides in-depth coverage of legal research sources and methods for future law librarians. My experience has been that the best way to teach research sources and methods is to give students hands-on assignments, assist them in finding their way through the appropriate sources, and then give prompt and thorough feedback on their work. Accordingly the format of this seminar has been designed to permit copious interaction of instructor, student, and material during class time. It is imperative (see the grading policy below!) that you complete all assigned work by the due date so that the assistance you will be getting from the instructor builds on a common foundation of familiarity with the relevant category of research materials.

The Class: Whenever possible, each class meeting will be divided into two parts. A topic will be presented in the first half and the second half will be devoted to students working on a research problem (demonstration problem) pertinent to the topic presented during the first half of the class.

2. COURSE GOALS

By the end of the course the students will have solid knowledge of online research tools. They will become familiar with

- conducting legal research for their own academic needs,
- mapping out a coherent plan of legal research when asked to help a patron (student, a faculty member, a firm's attorney, or a member of the public) and

- directing patrons interested in conducting legal research to thoroughly research a legal topic previously unfamiliar to them.

3. STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The students enrolled in this course should come away from the course with solid knowledge of online research tools and with a frame of reference that enables them to function independently and competently in the world of digital legal information. They will learn

- the best strategies to pursue legal research;
- the best methodological ways to teach patrons how to use such strategies; and
- the difference between patrons' needs in an academic and law firm environment and how to effectively satisfy both.

II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. TEXTBOOKS, READINGS, AND MATERIALS

Most of the required readings (see the course calendar) will be made available both electronically through the course web site (see my web page) and in print, in the Library, in the reserve collection under the course number

1. Armstrong and Knott's *WHERE THE LAW IS. AN INTRODUCTION TO ADVANCED LEGAL RESEARCH*, 3rd edition (West, 2009)
2. Dana Neacsu, *INTRODUCTION TO U.S. LAW AND LEGAL RESEARCH* (digital edition available to the students)
3. [THE BLUEBOOK](#). *A UNIFORM SYSTEM OF CITATION*. (19th edition) (the required style manual when citing secondary and primary sources) (the necessary handout has been posted to theprattlawlibrarian)

2. ASSIGNMENTS

The work you will be called upon to complete for this course is as follows:

1) Reading:

Consult the course calendar for the readings assigned for most classes.

2) Preliminary exercises: Prior to most class meetings you will be given (by e-mail, usually) a brief written exercise or exercises to complete. These assignments must be completed by noon the day prior to our regular class meeting, thus, for our normal Saturday classes, by Friday at noon and emailed to me at dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu. They will be graded Pass-Fail.

3) [Weekly assignments](#): During the course of this seminar you will work on two independent assignments: an annotated bibliography on a topic of your choice or on one assigned by the instructor, and a legal **research memo** on a similar topic.

Each week you will incorporate the methods and sources presented in that week's class and thus develop your projects. For the first four weeks you will work your way through finalizing the annotated bibliography. The following nine weeks you will work your way through finalizing your **research memo**. You will email these weekly installments to your instructor (dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu) by midnight, the Thursday following that week's class.

Each assignment will be graded on the quality of your weekly research logs. Factors that will be considered in assigning the grade will include not only the appropriateness of your research choices but also how clearly you articulate the choices you perceived and how you made them at each step of the process.

You will need to keep extremely detailed notes as you do the research in order to prepare the logs. Nevertheless, in the submitted logs themselves, concision counts! It might be interesting for you to include some notation of time spent on different stages of the research process.

4) Independent Projects: During the course of this class you will finalize two independent projects: an annotated bibliography on a topic of your choice or on one assigned by the instructor, and a legal **research memo** on a similar topic. You will have the opportunity to publicly present both your projects!

5) Final exam: The final exam will be a short multiple choice exercise.

3. ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| a. | Weekly research logs | 60% |
| b. | Satisfactory completion of the projects (the annotated bibliography and the final research memo) which includes their public presentation to the class (10% for the annotated bibliography and 20% for the path finder) | 30% |
| c. | Final exam | 10% |

These additional factors will raise or lower the grade:

Timeliness of submission of preliminary exercises (one half a grade for lateness)

Regular attendance and active participation (see details below under POLICIES)

III. COURSE CALENDAR/SCHEDULE

Class #1:

Wednesday, January 18th: How Do We Do Legal Research?

1. Reference Librarian vs. Law Student vs. Attorney:
 - Finding the correct and reliable repositories of legal information.
 - How to find the correct repositories
 - How to explain to patrons how to find the law on their own
2. Legal information: Domestic -- International -- Foreign Law.
 - Secondary Sources.
 - Primary Sources
3. Introduction to Westlaw/Lexis/and Bloomberg

Pre-Class assignment to be completed before the first class:

Required Reading:

a. Armstrong's WHERE THE LAW IS, Ch. 1

Optional reading

a. Neacsu: Introduction & Chapter 1

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon)

A. Go to

http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/law_librarian_blog/legal_research/index.html and then to <http://www.geeklawblog.com/2010/01/10-projections-for-2010-year-of-we-all.html> and answer the following questions:

1. Why would you use a blog as a legal researcher?
 2. Let me know if you found any useful information on that blog and explain why you could not find it (or why you did not find it) anywhere else.
- B. Define domestic, international and foreign and comparative law based on your present understanding of these concepts.

Class #2:

Wednesday, January 25th: Legal Information Taxonomy: How a Law Library Catalog Reflects the Library's Collection

Field Trip: We will meet at 116th and Amsterdam -- north-east corner --at 6 PM instead of 6:30 PM at Pratt.

Pre-Class assignment to be completed before the second class:

Optional reading:

 Armstrong Ch.1

In-class assignment: Self-guided tour of the library: focus on secondary sources.

Class #3

Wednesday, February 1st : Creating an annotated bibliography in three steps. Step I: Identifying and Using Finding Aid Tools.

Finding Aid Tools (catalogs).

- Library Catalogs: Free Portals to limited-access full-text databases (e.g., <http://www.scriptorium.columbia.edu/>)
 - Morris: <http://morris.law.yale.edu/>
 - Pegasus: <http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/>
- Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com/>)
- The library catalog and indexes to legal periodicals: Columbia Law School Library and

Pre-Class assignment to be completed before the third class:

Read:

[. The Evolution of Providing Access to Information: The Fall of the Online Catalog 27 L.R.S.Q \(2007\)](#)

Class #4:

Wednesday, February 8th Creating an annotated bibliography in three steps. Step II: Finding Aids and Research Tools – Is There a Meaningful Distinction

Finding Aid Tools (periodical indexes and more).

- Westlaw & Lexis:
- Wilson’s Web Index to legal periodicals from Pratt’s library
- Westlaw: Index to Foreign Legal periodicals (not available under our license)
- Research guides

Pre-class assignment to be completed before the fourth class:

Armstrong. Ch. 4

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon):

Read the AALL Spectrum article on web collaborative tools, available at www.aallnet.org/products/pub_sp0812/pub_sp0812_PLL.pdf, then go to <http://www.zotero.org/> and in 100-300 words explain how you envisage these resources to help develop your research projects.

Class #5:

Wednesday, February 15th - Creating an annotated bibliography in three steps. Step III: Identifying and Using the Appropriate Secondary Sources.

- Digital Legal Scholarship (free full-text databases).
 - SSRN (<http://www.ssrn.com/>) free trial

- LawGuru (www.lawguru.com) (legal dictionary)
- Google print (<http://books.google.com/googlebooks/partners.html>)
- Digital Legal Scholarship (fee-based full-text databases).
 - Berkeley Electronic Press (e-journals).
 - Lexis.
 - Westlaw
 - Bloomberg
 - PLC.

Pre-class optional reading assignment to be completed before the fifth class:

Skim:

a. [Neacsu, "Legal Scholarship and Digital Publishing: Has Anything Changed in the Way We Do Legal Research?" 21 LEGAL REFERENCE SERVICES QUARTERLY 105 \(2002\).](#)

b. Neacsu, INTRODUCTION TO US LAW AND LEGAL RESEARCH. Ch. 1-2

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon):

Go to the SSRN (<http://www.ssrn.com/>) and sign up for a free trial. Try to find an article on your research topic. Explain the research strategy you used and the results of your search within 100-300 words.

Class #6:

Wednesday , February 22nd Student Presentations of Annotated Bibliographies (5-10 sources).

Explaining the process of choosing and using the finding aid tools and the full-text resources (5-10 min).

Required assignment to be completed before class:

Skim:

- a. Dana Neacsu, "Gender based Prosecution as a Basis for Asylum. An Annotated Bibliography, 1993-2002" 95 LAW LIBR. J. 191 (2002) (DO follow the format) and
- b. Frank Houdek. "From the Reference Desk to River City: A Bibliography of the Writings of Robert C. Berring" 99 LAW LIBR. J. 413 (2007) (do NOT follow the format)

Class #7:

Wednesday- February 29th - Creating a [research memo](#). Domestic Law. Primary Sources. Federal and State Statutes.

- Session laws v. statutory codifications.
- Free-of-charge databases.
 - FindLaw.com.
 - Thomas.loc.gov.
 - GpoAccess.gov.

- Individual State statutory databases.
- LawMoose (www.lawmoose.com) and
- University web pages: Yale Law School: The Avalon Project (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm>)
- Fee-based databases.
 - Westlaw.
 - Lexis
 - Bloomberg.
- Lower-cost alternatives to LexisNexis and Westlaw
 - VersusLaw (www.versuslaw.com) and
 - LoisLaw (www.loislaw.com)

Required pre-class assignment to be completed before class:

Read:

a. Armstrong. Ch. 2

Optional pre-class assignment Skim:

- ✚ Peter A. Hook, "Creating an Online Tutorial and a Pathfinder" 94 LAW LIBR. J. 243 (2002).

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon):

Go to FDsys. What type of statutory law research is best answered by using this site? Then go to Thomas.loc.gov: What type of statutory law research is best answered by using this site? Both answers should be within 100-300 words all together.

Class #8:

Wednesday March 7th -- Creating a research memo. Domestic Law. Primary Sources. Federal and State Case law.

- Web pages vs. case reporters.
- Free-of-charge databases.
 - Lexis.ONE.com
 - FindLaw.com.
 - Individual courts' databases.
 - US Supreme Court (<http://www.supremecourtus.gov/>)
 - University web pages: Yale Law School: The Curiae Project: <http://curiae.law.yale.edu/>
 - Cornell Law School: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/index.html>
 - LawMoose (www.lawmoose.com) and
- Fee-based databases.
 - Westlaw. The West Digest System
 - Lexis CourtLink
 - Pacer

Required pre-class assignment to be completed before class:

 Read: Armstrong. Ch.5

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon)

Go to lexisONE.com. Register and create a free account. Perform a search on your topic. Did you find any relevant cases? Can you cite these cases? Can you pin-cite them? Then go to Findlaw.com: What type of case law research is best answered by using this site? Perform a search on your topic. Did you find any relevant cases? Explain your research experience with both sites within 100-300 words.

Class # 9: SPRING VACATION

Class #10,

Wednesday, March 21st -- Creating a research memo. Domestic Law. Primary Sources. Statutory and Case law research: Introducing Legislative History

Required assignment to be completed before class:

Read Armstrong Ch. 3

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon)

Use Westlaw, Lexis and Bloomberg and research the issue of "flag burning" or "flag desecration".

Find the statute in its original and amended version

Explain how you will find the legislative history of the statute (find it for the amendment)

Explain how you found the statute

Find case law material using both databases and explain your research experience with both databases.

Class #11:

Wednesday, March 28th -- Creating a research memo. Domestic Law. Primary Sources. Federal and State Administrative law.

- Administrative Rules and Regulations.
- Chronological vs. codified publications.
- Free-of-charge databases.
 - GpoACCESS.com
 - FindLaw.com.
 - Individual agencies' databases
 - LawMoose (www.lawmoose.com) and

- Fee-based databases.
- Westlaw. The CFR Index
- Lexis.
- Bloomberg

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon)

Go to the US Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/>). What types of documents are available on this site? Primary or secondary sources? Please give an example of each. What types of primary sources are available? Statutes? Cases? Administrative rules? Please give an example of each primary source you have located.

Required assignment to be completed before class:
Read Armstrong. Ch 8

Class #12:

Wednesday, April 4th -- Creating a research memo. Domestic Law. Primary Sources. Federal and State Administrative law.

- Administrative Decisions.
- Web pages vs. Looseleaf services
 - BNA
 - CCH.
 - Free-of-charge databases.
 - GpoACCESS.com
 - FindLaw.com.
 - Individual agencies' databases.
 - Regulations.gov:
<http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main>
 - Fee-based databases.
 - Westlaw. The CFR Index
 - Lexis.
 - Bloomberg

Required assignment to be completed before class:
✚ Read Armstrong , Ch. 9.

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon)

Go to the US Securities and Exchange Commission at <http://www.sec.gov/>. What type of decision-making (litigation) is the Commission authorized to perform? Locate the Commission's 2009 decisions and orders. Are they indexed? Can you search for decisions on a particular topic?

Class # 13:

Wednesday, April 11th -- Creating a research memo. Domestic Law. Primary Sources. Federal and State law. Putting it all together.

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon)

Use Westlaw, Lexis and Bloomberg and research the issue of "unfair labor practice" and "section 8 of the NLRA". Explain how you found the statutory, case law and administrative material using both databases and explain your research experience with both databases. I am more interested in your thought process than in the results of your research.

Class #14:

Saturday, April 18th - Creating a research memo. Domestic Law. Primary Sources. Municipal law.

- Free-of-charge databases.
 - Individual municipalities -- databases.
 - NYC (<http://www.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/>)
- LawMoose (www.lawmoose.com) and
- Fee-based databases.
 - Westlaw
 - Lexis.

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu the previous day by noon)

Go to the E-Code Library (Municipal Codes on the Internet) at <http://www.generalcode.com/webcode2.html>. What type of municipal law is available on that site (ordinances, municipal court cases, administrative rules, etc)? Give a concrete example for each answer (if multiple).

Read: Armstrong, Ch 14

Class # 15:

Wednesday, April 25th -- Creating a research memo. International Law. The United Nations

- International treaties where US is a party
 - [Thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)
- The UN, UN Bodies and their documents (<http://www.un.org/english/>).
- University Web pages:
 - Fletcher Tufts (<http://fletcher.tufts.edu/multi/secretariatslinks.html>)
 - Yale Human Rights: Project DIANA (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diana/index.html>)
- Finding Aid Tools.

- Unbisnet (<http://unbisnet.un.org/>)
- Full-text databases.
 - ODS. (<http://www.ods.un.org/>)

Required assignment to be completed before class:

Read:

Read: Armstrong, Ch 14

b. Neacșu, THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE. RESEARCH GUIDE. http://library.law.columbia.edu/ICJ/ICJ_Guide.htm (January, 2007).

Preliminary Exercise: (to be sent to dana.neacsu@law.columbia.edu previous day by noon)

Go to http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/Human_rights.

What types of documents are available on the Cornell's site? Go to Minnesota University's Human Rights Library at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/>. What types of documents are available on this site? Compare the two sites. Explain which types of questions are more appropriate to each site. Do so in 100-300 words.

Class # 16:

Wednesday, May 2nd . Student presentations. Research memo.

- Brief presentation.
 - Explaining the audience of the **research memo** (own research, faculty member, student patron, attorney)
 - Explaining the process of choosing and using the finding aid tools and the full-text resources.

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Exam (multiple questions)

End of Semester (individual folders with your graded work and the final grade will be made available to you within one week)

IV. POLICIES

Regular attendance and active participation.

This course meets only two and a half hours a week. Arriving on time and staying for the duration are essential. Students may miss one class during the semester, no questions asked. Students who miss more than one class—or substantial parts of more than one class—will be penalized one half of a letter grade for each class missed, even if they inform the professor in advance. (A student on track to receive an A will instead receive

an A-, etc.) In case of severe illness or other extraordinary events that necessitate a second absence, students must provide documentation.

One purpose of a seminar like this is to teach students to become expert legal researchers. The very work of the course consists of engaging in Q& A and hands-on research. Students who abstain from discussion and research are missing the course's whole purpose. A class in which a student doesn't contribute to discussion is equivalent to a missed class.

Additional Rules and Information.

* Cell phones must be turned off upon entering the classroom and may not be used in the classroom or during class time.

* Computers may be used for note-taking and research only. No emailing or Web-surfing during class.

* Students must show up on time and stay for the duration of the class. During class, students should not engage in personal conversations, read newspapers, do crossword puzzles, or undertake other personal diversions unrelated to class activity.

* I will return all emails. Do not assume that I have received your email. If I don't reply w/n 24 hours, follow up with a phone call (212-854-1345).

All applicable school and departmental policies will further compliment the course policies detailed in this syllabus.