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# Crafting Relatable Tales: Teaching Students the Importance of Multidisciplinary Legal Research Using a Story Arc Structure

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## Crafting Relatable Tales: Teaching Students the Importance of Multidisciplinary Legal Research Using a Story Arc Structure

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In response to the law becoming more multidisciplinary, law students must be trained to search for information in any source. To meet the standards of their profession, law librarians must teach students the process of legal research and how legal information and theories interweave with other disciplines. Librarians must also prepare students to conduct research in fields such as forensics, medicine, economics, and many others, to find the materials they will need for their academic writing and in their practice. During law school, students are instructed to frame legal issues as stories to make them more relatable to those unfamiliar with legal arguments and the legal system. Librarians can help their students learn how to conduct legal research by introducing research as a process that helps them gather information from legal and non-legal sources to complete a story arc from its beginning to a desired conclusion. By introducing multidiscipline research to students and encouraging them to think of the research process as gathering the pieces needed to tell the story they would like to share, librarians can help them in both their academic and professional careers.

An opportune time to introduce students to conducting research using non-legal sources is during research sessions connected with their upper-level writing projects. Eugene Volokh, in his book *Academic Legal Writing*, writes that the creation of a solid upper-level paper requires that a student find a legal topic that has a problem that needs to be addressed, that the student research the topic thoroughly and then propose a possible solution to the identified problem that is legally coherent and understandable to readers. Students often come to the library seeking help researching their topics after having found articles on HeinOnline, Lexis, or Westlaw, but without the information they need to structure what they have found into a coherent academic paper.

When introduced to the notion they can look outside of case law, statutes, regulations, and legal secondary sources to bolster their papers, law students often ask, “Can I use that even though it’s not a legal source?” After being assured they can use sources from outside the legal realm, students tend to ask the follow-up question, “When do I know when I’ve found enough information to write my paper?” Introducing students to the idea that they are using the information they find to tell their readers the story of their topic from its beginning to a resolution gives students a flexible structure to work from that can support research on a variety of topics and help them determine when they have enough information for their papers.

Librarians must instruct students in how to establish a systematic approach to the research process rather than trying to establish a set research plan dependent on

select sources. By teaching students to create and use a research process that can be applied to any field of knowledge, librarians can help students avoid the pitfalls of relying on too narrow of a range of resources and encourage them to be flexible in their use of a wide variety of electronic and print sources. Students should be taught to approach their research by examining the who, what, where, when, why, and how of their topic to determine the search terms they will need and how to combine their terms with Boolean operators to get the most efficient results within the systems they are using. Librarians should stress that initial searches can provide the foundations of a paper, but that several searches in a variety of disciplines might be needed to find adequate information that allows understanding of a topic from its beginning to its current state, and to formulate workable solutions for problems.

When introducing students to multidisciplinary research, librarians can describe using information from outside the legal realm as utilizing supporting materials to set the scene of their story and for the structure of their story arcs. Story arcs can be described as having three acts: the setup, the conflict, and the resolution. In legal research and writing, the setup act consists of providing the reader the background information they need to understand a legal topic and how it has affected the legal field in the past and up to its current state. The conflict act of legal story telling describes how the current state of the topic of interest is causing an injustice or societal issue that must be addressed. The resolution act consists of the student putting forward a solution for the problem that they have identified that would eliminate or reduce negative impacts of the topics discussed. Using a story arc approach provides students flexible guidelines to follow that can be adapted for research projects with scopes varying in breath from focused case comments to wider social justice issues such as providing access to legal information and help to citizens, with little or no need to alter the overall structure of their research plan unless specifically needed for the topic they are researching and writing on.

Librarians can emphasize the need for using information outside the legal field in scholarly legal writing by explaining that providing information from legal sources alone would make for an unrelatable story. By adding information from other disciplines, topics considered to be dry to some readers can be made more interesting and understandable by putting concepts into a relatable context for readers. As an example, using a multidisciplinary research approach for legal topics can better explore the difficulties faced by governments when establishing an age threshold for marriage due to cultural influences, family economic pressures, and the lack of education and outreach services that could break the cycle of child marriage in a region. Students looking for solutions to legal conundrums can use multidisciplinary research to find problems in other fields that have similar elements to those they are researching and adapt solutions that have been used to address such problems into a legal format. Using solutions from other disciplines allows students to be flexible in their search for answers to problems, while giving them the security of working from established problem solving plans and citing to connected scholarly works.

While not filled with fantastic creatures or tales of advanced space travels, legal writing is a form of storytelling. Librarians can help students hone their skills by introducing them to the three-act story arc and explaining how such a writing structure can be used for their legal research and writing. By making the legal research and writing processes more understandable, and encouraging them to use sources from a variety of disciplines, librarians can not only enhance their students' skill, but also help them in their quests to vanquish injustice and social inequity in all their forms.



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