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Paul Jerome McLaughlin Jr.

Florida A&M University College of Law, paul.mclaughlin@fam.u.edu

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Paul Jerome
McLaughlin, Jr.

Instruction and Reference
Librarian

Florida Agricultural and
Mechanical College of Law
Library
407-254-3262
paul.mclaughlin@famu.edu

Using Problem-Enhanced Library Tours Rather than Scavenger Hunts to Teach Incoming 1Ls about Legal Sources and the Research Process

Learning about the legal research process is a daunting task for incoming law students who are not familiar with legal terminology, the sources they will need, or how to locate information through West's digest and key number system. When trying to help students learn the legal research process, law librarians are presented with a variation of "the chicken or the egg" conundrum. To conduct research, students must know enough of the law to navigate digests, browse indexes, or plan searches. However, to find the information that would give them such knowledge the students have to know how to conduct legal research.

A traditional method that has been used to solve this conundrum is scavenger hunt exercises that task students with looking up various cases and statutes in their library's collection. Often these exercises have little more than a list of questions asking the students to provide the citation to a case or statute and minimal instruction for students about how or where to look for answers. While scavenger hunt exercises introduce students to legal research, their use is akin to taking a class to the middle of the Amazon rainforest, giving each of them a compass, telling them to make their way to the nearest town, and then having their instructors air lifted from the forest by helicopter, leaving the students behind to fend for themselves. Scavenger hunt exercises teach students to be flexible and self-reliant in looking for information, but they do not instruct students about the process of legal research or the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the variety of legal sources.

The librarians of the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University College of Law have experimented with a different kind of exercise to teach the basics of legal research to incoming students, rather than scavenger hunts, and have received positive feedback about the exercise from faculty and students. As part of the college's incoming students program, the librarians meet with students for two hour-long sessions to introduce them to the library's collection and the basics of legal research. To provide a framework for the sessions, the librarians give the students an exercise that mimics the research process involved in drafting a basic research memo. The exercise uses a series of questions designed to lead the students through the library's collection in a pattern that allows them to gather the background information and case law needed to answer a legal question associated with the exercise's central fact pattern.

The most recent fact pattern used by the college's librarians involved a high school student being removed from her class and taken to the principal's office where she was interrogated by the principle and a police officer about an incident

that happened off campus. The student finally provided a false confession to get out of the high-pressure situation. The preliminary questions of the exercise required students to use secondary sources, including law review articles and the American Law Reports, to learn the basics of Miranda Rights, what considerations are examined to determine whether a person is in custody for Miranda purposes, and when a confession by a juvenile is considered proper. The overarching question that students were to answer for the exercise was whether the high school student's confession was valid under Florida law in consideration of the circumstances given. For each source to which the exercise's questions directed students, they were asked to provide one-sentence summaries of the legal explanations given and citations to cases they would use to form their legal analysis.

During their first session with the students, the college's librarians divided the incoming students into small groups and guided them through the library's collection. They explained the purpose of each source, how it could be used, and showed students an entry or section of the source that contained the answers students were looking for. During the second session, the librarians met with the whole of the incoming student group in a classroom. Using a PowerPoint presentation, the librarians reviewed the activities from the previous session and then discussed how the information in the answers the students gathered could be used to create a research memo. The librarians then introduced the students to the



I.R.A.C. writing scheme and showed examples of how to create an issue statement, how to identify the rules of law that govern a legal situation, how to connect the law to the facts of a legal issue, and how to conclude a memo about the issue. They then presented the students with a completed memo so they could see how the snippets of legal reasoning and citations they found could be crafted into a research memo. For the rest of the session, the librarians introduced the students to the various electronic resources available to them.

While the librarians' guided library tours and exercise sessions have proven successful, they required careful coordination with the other

parties involved in the students' orientation activities. The sessions also required significant preparation to create the issue to be presented, to conduct the research to form the example memo, to find relevant secondary sources, to develop the questions and answer sheets provided to the students, and to prepare the PowerPoint presentation. Creating an exercise that can be completed in two hours, while providing the corresponding research instruction, was also a challenge due to the need to balance choosing a topic with enough information available to introduce students to the various sources while not being so complex it would take too long to complete.

Entering law school is often an intimidating trek through rough and unknown territory. Having librarians guide law students through the first legs of their legal research travels allows them to focus on learning the process of legal research and the sources available to them rather than worrying about wandering off the path. Guided library tours and research projects presented by law librarians, during orientation or early in the law student's time in law school, can help ease students into learning the legal research process, introduce them to the sources they need, and give them a foundation to build on for their legal research and writing courses. Guided library tours and exercises also help librarians meet the ABA's requirements that more practical lawyering skills be taught to law students while helping students avoid becoming frustrated with the research process and forming unstructured research habits.

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