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Don't Reinvent the Wheel: Legal Research Guides and Bibliographies Will Save You Valuable Time and Effort

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by Matthew S. Novak

Confronting an unfamiliar area of law can be challenging even for the most experienced researcher. Before analyzing the substantive issues, there are a host of background questions that must be answered. What are the primary sources of law in the area? What cases, statutes or regulations are involved? Do any treatises or law journal articles address the subject? Do Westlaw or LexisNexis include any relevant resources? Identifying, finding, and using primary and secondary sources of law are essential legal research skills. Unfortunately, this process is often time consuming and frustrating, especially when dealing with an unfamiliar area of law. Thankfully, you do not need to reinvent the wheel every time you accept a case outside your area of expertise. Research experts, such as law librarians, have already invented a number of legal research wheels that do much of the background work for you. These "wheels" are

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carefully constructed bibliographies and research guides that introduce users to a specific area of law and direct them to helpful resources.

A bibliography is a list of relevant resources. Some bibliographies are annotated, meaning they include a description of each resource. Research guides are more in-depth than bibliographies, often identifying leading cases, statutes and regulations. Many research guides also list relevant secondary resources, including databases and Web sites. When researching an unfamiliar area of law, spending a few minutes to locate a relevant research guide or bibliography, can relieve much of the work and stress and is time well spent.

Research guides and bibliographies are found on the Web, in books, and in periodicals. If you are like most modern day researchers, you begin all of your research projects online. Instead of wandering around the Web haphazardly looking for research guides and bibliographies, you can use some simple research techniques that will greatly increase your efficiency and effectiveness at finding these resources.

This article will present a number of research tools you can use to quickly locate quality legal research guides and bibliographies. In other words, this article is a research guide on how to find research guides and bibliographies. In addition to being a research guide, this article also contains a short bibliography of resources that contain bibliographies and research guides addressing a wide variety of legal topics and jurisdictions.

Finding Online Research Guides and Bibliographies

Academic law librarians have created many legal research guides and bibliographies that are freely available on the Web.

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These materials are generally located on law library Web sites. Harvard Law Library,[1] Yale Law Library,[2] and Georgetown Law Library[3] include an extensive array of research guides on their Web sites. Other non-academic Web sites also include legal research guides. While you can find much of this information using general Web search engines, there are several specialized tools and techniques you can use to improve the efficiency of your research.

Specialized Search Engines

Perusing each of the 200 plus academic law library Web sites to see what types of research guides are available is time consuming. Fortunately, there is a better way to find research guides on these sites. The librarians at the Cornell Law Library have created a "legal research engine"[4] that speeds up the search for research guides. This research engine allows for three distinct types of searches: "Find Legal Research Guides," "Search the Legal Internet," and "Search Academic Blawgs." The "Find Legal Research Guides" tool searches approximately 20 Web sites, both academic and general, that publish or link to a wide array of online legal research guides and bibliographies. By focusing on a limited number of high-quality Web sites, this search tool often yields more precise and relevant resultants than are produced by a general search engine.

If this search does not produce sufficient results, you can expand the search by using Cornell's "Search the Legal Internet" option or the LexisWeb[5] research tool. While including many more sites than the research guides option, these tools are still more focused than using a general search engine. When using either of these tools, you can increase the relevancy of the search results by incorporating the suggestions for searching with general search engines discussed below.

General Search Engines

Sometimes you will need to use a tool that searches more Web sites than what is included in Cornell's Legal Research Engine or through LexisWeb. In those situations, you can try a general search engine such as Google or Bing. One of the problems with general search engines, however, is that they often produce a large number of irrelevant results. There are a couple crucial steps you can take to help focus your search results. First, make sure to include the keywords with quotes, "research guide" and/or "pathfinder" (another name for a research guide), and/or "bibliography" along with other keywords in the search. Another useful technique is to limit the search to Web sites within a specific Web domain (i.e. .com, .gov, .edu, etc.). Most major search engines' advanced search options will include this valuable feature. Since most pathfinders are on law school library Web sites, limiting your search to the .edu domain will make it quicker and easier to find these resources. Of course, there are a number of excellent Web sites that contain pathfinders that are not within the .edu domain. Several of these sites are included in the bibliography at the end of the article.

Finding Research Guides and Bibliographies in Print

Despite a common misconception, especially among "digital natives," not all information is available on the Web. At least, not yet. Many valuable research guides and bibliographies are published in books and periodicals. Online tools can be used to help find these print items. Once you have found a relevant guide, you can check out the item from your local library. If your library does not own the particular resource, it can generally borrow the item from another library using a service known as interlibrary loan.

Library Catalogs and WorldCat

When searching for books that include legal research guides and bibliographies, one of the first places to start is with an online library catalog. Libraries usually have online catalogs that are freely searchable. However, each library catalog only contains information about books at that particular library or library system. Instead of searching for books using one library's online catalog, it is quicker and easier to use a catalog that combines the holdings of many libraries. The WorldCat tool[6] allows you to search the holdings of most major libraries in the world all at once. WorldCat contains information on over 1.5 billion items including which institutions own specific items.

WorldCat and most academic libraries use Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) to organize the material in their collections. The LCSH that are most useful for finding works on legal research guides and bibliographies include: "law -- bibliography"; "legal research;" "Law -- United States -- States -- Bibliography;" "Legal research -- United States -- States." To use these LCSH, select "search by subject" in WorldCat or a library catalog and then enter one or more of these subject headings. While these LCSH are most relevant, there are many derivatives that can also be useful. Unfortunately, learning all of the potentially relevant LCSH can be time consuming and difficult. If you are not finding the resources that you need using the general LCSH listed above, you may combine keyword searching with LCSH searching. Try using a keyword search until you locate a relevant resource. Once you have found a relevant resource, identify the LCSH that are used for that item and then repeat your search with those LCSH to find other related materials.

Digital Libraries

Using keywords and LCSH to search a library catalog are efficient means of locating research guides and bibliographies. However, searching in an online library catalog will generally only find items that have specifically been catalogued with

the relevant LCSH. Research guides and bibliographies are frequently hidden within books that are not labeled with the LCSH suggested above. Searching the full-text of books can help locate additional material. There are a number of online digital libraries that allow free, full-text searching. Three such resources include: *Google Books,*[7] *Hathi Trust,*[8] and the *Internet Archive's* Ebook and Texts Archive.[9] Each of these resources allow for full-text searching of a number of digitized books. As with general Internet search engines, incorporating terms such as "research guide," "pathfinder," and "bibliography" into your search string will help pinpoint works that contain this type of information. While some of the content is available online, much is not. Therefore, after locating the title of a relevant resource, you will have to find the print resource at a library to access the information. Google Books has a direct link to the WorldCat Web site using the "Find in a Library" link available from an individual book's information page. This feature helps you quickly find a library that has the item in question.

Periodicals and Magazines

Periodicals and magazines are another good resource for research guides and bibliographies. For example, *Legal Reference Services Quarterly* and *Law Library Journal* often include research guides and bibliographies on a variety of legal topics. State Bar Association publications are another good source for research guides and bibliographies. The most effective way to locate relevant research guides and bibliographies in periodicals is to use a periodical index tool such as *Index to Legal Periodicals* or *LegalTrac* or a periodical database such as *HeinOnline*. Some Westlaw and Lexis subscriptions include access to periodicals and periodical indexes, so this would be the first place for you to check, if you have a subscription to one of those services. If you do not have a subscription to one of these services or your subscription does not include these indexes, you could visit an academic law library. Most academic law libraries subscribe to a number of different periodical indexes that patrons can use while visiting the library.

A third option is to use the Google Scholar[10] search tool. While Google Scholar searches more than just periodicals, if you select the advanced search option, you can limit the search parameters to "search all legal journals and opinions." The phrase "search all" does not mean that Google Scholar searches all legal journals in existence. Rather, by selecting this option you are searching all periodicals that Google has available. Remember, using the terms "research guide," "pathfinder," and "bibliography" in your search query will help you locate articles that contain these resources. While Google Scholar allows you to search the full-text of a number of periodicals, as with Google Books, not all of the content that it searches is freely available online. If you find a relevant article but the full content is unavailable, you can generally obtain the article from a library. If you cannot visit the specific library that owns that

title, many libraries will locate and deliver the article to you, at a reasonable cost.

You now have the skills and ability to efficiently track down bibliographies and research guides, whether they are hiding on the Web, in books, or periodicals. However, to save you even more time, the following annotated bibliography includes some highly recommended sources of legal research guides and bibliographies. Each of the items in the bibliography contains a broad range of research guides and bibliographies and do not focus on any one legal topic.

Bibliography
BOOKS:

• Frank S. Bae et al., *Searching the Law*. (3rd ed., Transnational Publishers 2005).

Searching the Law includes a series of concise bibliographies covering an extensive array of broad legal topics. The non-annotated bibliographies include references to major texts, journals, and treatises.

• Francis R. Doyle, *Searching the Law, the States: A Selective Bibliography of State Practice Materials in the 50 States* (4th ed., Transnational Publishers 2003).

This two-volume work includes a non-annotated bibliography for each state. Each state bibliography is divided into a number of major legal subjects and provides a concise list of relevant material.

• *Legal Looseleafs in Print*, 2010. (Arlene L. Eis, ed., InfoSources Publishing 2010).

This extensive bibliography covers over 3,600 looseleaf titles that address a wide variety of legal subjects. Consult the subject index to locate relevant titles. While the bibliography is not annotated, it does indicate whether a given title is available on line. This work is updated annually.

• *Legal Newsletters in Print, 2010: Including Electronic and Fax Newsletters*. (Arlene L. Eis, ed., InfoSources Publishing 2010).

This bibliography's format is similar to the one above, and covers over 2,200 legal newsletters. Consult the subject index to locate relevant titles. While the bibliography is not annotated, it does indicate whether a given title is available on line. This work is updated annually.

• Cheryl Rae Nyberg, *Subject Compilations of State Laws: An Annotated Bibliography* (2010).

This important work is a bibliography of state law surveys covering the period from 1960 to the present. The annotated entries are arranged according to broad legal subjects. References to surveys that have been published in books,

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article, and online are included. A new volume of this work is published annually.

• *Specialized Legal Research* (Penny A. Hazelton, ed., Aspen 2009).

This looseleaf, which is updated yearly, includes in-depth research guides for 13 specialized legal topics. Some of the topics covered include securities regulation, admiralty and maritime law, and federal government contracts.

• Kendall F. Svengalis, *Legal Information Buyer's Guide and Reference Manual.* (Rhode Island LawPress 2009).

This monograph includes bibliographies covering just about every type of legal publication. Chapter 27 is an annotated bibliography of legal treatises on approximately 61 different legal subjects. Chapter 28 provides a short bibliography of state legal publications for each of the states. This resource is updated annually.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

• FindLaw (available at http://www.findlaw.com/01topics/index.html)

FindLaw has a practice area section that covers 44 broad legal subject areas. Within each subject, there is a "Web Guide by Resource Type" section that lists a number of relevant resources such as: blogs and podcasts, databases and statistics, directories, government agencies, primary materials, publications, Supreme Court cases, Web sites, and Westlaw Databases.[11]

• GlobaLex (available at http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/)

GlobaLex focuses on international, foreign, and comparative legal information. Available guides address how to approach researching the law of various countries as well as specific legal issues within other countries.

• Harvard Law School Library – Legal Treatises by Subject (available at http://law.harvard.libguides.com/legaltreatises)/

• Georgetown Law Library Treatise Finder (available at http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/guides/treatisefinder.cfm)/

• Virginia Law Treatises and Services by Subject (available at http://www.law.virginia.edu/main/Treatises+by+Subject)

These three Web sites include bibliographies for legal treatises covering a wide range of legal topics.

• Law Library of Congress Guide to Law Online (available at http://www.loc.gov/law/help/guide.php) and WashLaw (available at http://www.washlaw.edu/)

These two portal Web sites provide quick access to online legal resources for states, countries, and international organizations around the world. WashLaw's Legal Resources by Subject (http://www.washlaw.edu/subject/index.html) section provides access to online information resources pertaining to a number of major legal subjects.

• LLRX.com (available at http://www.llrx.com/)

This Web site has been publishing legal research guides, as well as other legally relevant material, since 1996. The research guides are organized into three broad categories: federal legislative research, foreign and comparative law, and United States law. Legal practitioners and law librarians generally author the research guides.

• Zimmerman's Research Guide (available at http://law.lexisnexis.com/infopro/zimmermans/)

This Web site includes an A to Z list of legal topics and issues. The entries include a brief overview of the topic and provide a short list of relevant works including primary and secondary material. ▲▲

Endnotes

1 http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/research/guides/index.html
2 http://www.law.yale.edu/library/research.asp
3 http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/research/
4 http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/WhatWeDo/ResearchGuides/Legal-Research-Engine.cfm
5 http://www.lexisweb.com/
6 http://www.worldcat.org/
7 http://books.google.com/bkshp
8 http://catalog.hathitrust.org/
9 http://www.archive.org/details/texts
10 http://scholar.google.com/schhp?hl=en&tab=ws
11 Findlaw.com is provided by Thomson Reuters.