Reviewed by: Margaret (Meg) Butler, Associate Director for Public Services, Georgia State University College of Law Library

Intended Audience: Law students, lawyers, other legal researchers

Accompanying materials: Companion website including live links to all the web resources included in the text.

Illustrations: Screen captures, tables, charts. All illustrations are black and white.

Gaps in coverage: Covers basic material necessary to support a novice international law researcher beginning a research project. Some foreign law research tips are included.

Unique appendices: In addition to a listing of abbreviations and acronyms, appendices include a comprehensive list of resources cited in the Nutshell, a list of web treaty collections, and a list of websites containing translated national law.

Major strengths: The Nutshell is accessibly written and well-organized. Context is provided, helping the researcher to understand the relationship between various entities and the relative authority of the various legal materials produced by the entities.

Major weaknesses: The Nutshell’s largest liability is its age. Although there is a companion website that includes links to those resources listed in the Nutshell, not all links are current as of June 17, 2013.

Comments: International Legal Research in a Nutshell was a very valuable resource at the time of its release in 2008. In the past, I planned to use it as a textbook in an international legal research course I was slated to teach. It is well-organized, information is thoughtfully conveyed, and it presents a very useful overview of material a beginning researcher would find helpful in attacking an international law research question.

Time has flown since 2008, however, and the biggest weakness of the Nutshell is its age. The resources used in conducting international legal research have changed, updating their online interfaces (European Union resources including EUR-Lex), changing publishers and editors (Foreign Law Guide), and improving search functionality (United Nations Official Documents System). Because the Nutshell includes many screen captures of the resources discussed, researchers must do some extra ‘translation’ of the old screen capture to the current, or new, screen. Unfortunately, not all of the online links on the companion website work. For example, the link to EUR-Lex indicates there is a proxy error, and a Google search suggests that the URL for EUR-Lex should be updated.

The Nutshell’s scope is complete and well-organized. Although the order of topics covered may not make intuitive sense, there is an inherent logic. The Nutshell begins with an introduction to basic international and foreign law concepts; distinguishes international, foreign, and comparative law; and
then goes in depth on various sources of international law. The authors define and describe intergovernmental and supranational organizations. Toward the end of the *Nutshell*, the authors advise on general research strategies, cite checking, and current awareness tools. That chapter may be more accessible to a reader who has a basic understanding of the building blocks discussed in the prior chapters, and thus it makes sense for that to be the last chapter. For those researchers who wish to consult the *Nutshell* to answer a specific question, the outline provides plenty of guidance to help a researcher go directly to the most relevant pages.

Marci B. Hoffman and Robert C. Berring write accessibly, and they present information that a novice researcher would find helpful. They do not make harmful assumptions of prior knowledge. In fact, their ability to provide a researcher with helpful background, such as an overview of the structure of the United Nations, inspires a sense of confidence in the researcher. “It is possible to figure this out.” And for readers who want a little more, they offer suggestions: “To supplement this outline, you should also consult the *United Nations Documentation: Research Guide*” (p.177).

Recommendation: Despite its age, International Legal Research in a Nutshell would be helpful for a novice or infrequent researcher approaching an international law problem. Due to its age, it may not be the best choice for use in the classroom as a required textbook, though it may be useful as a supplemental resource. Hopefully an updated second edition will be released soon.