Maryland Legal Research I, II and III

By Catherine McGuire and Mary Jo Lazun

These three classes are designed to give a basic overview of materials available for researching Maryland law, specifically, for employees of the Maryland Judiciary. This includes the Clerks' Offices, Family Administration, Commissioners' Offices, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and others.

Part I is designed to teach the basics of legal research using print materials. The class begins by providing a foundation of basic civics and government structure. The class continues with a focus on Maryland primary materials. The Powerpoint is structured not just as a class aid, but also as an abbreviated reference for office use. Exercises are structured to give hands-on experience and to build confidence in the use of legal materials. The class is held at the Maryland State Law library.

Part II is designed to teach research using free Internet sources, including sites of the Maryland Judiciary, the Maryland General Assembly and the Maryland Division of State Documents. A significant portion of the class centers on case searching using the Google Scholar interface. Many of the attendees have regular face-to-face interactions with the public, and welcome learning about tools to which they can refer the public. The class does not have a Powerpoint, but uses a detailed agenda, live online examples, and intensive hands-on exercises. The class is held off-site in a computer classroom, with each student having an individual terminal.

Part III is designed to teach the use of commercial legal databases, with a focus on Lexis, which currently is the Maryland Judiciary's online legal services provider. Like Part II, the class does not have a Powerpoint presentation, but uses live online examples, interactions, and exercises. The class is held off-site in a computer classroom, with each student having an individual terminal. Each student is given temporary, 30-day access to Lexis.

The classes are limited to 15 pupils, and are sometimes taught by two instructors to maximize teacher-student interactions. Materials for Parts II and III, including answer keys and further exercises, are posted on the Judiciary's intranet for attendees interested in exploring the resources further.

The classes have been offered at least twice per year since 2007, although the format occasionally changes. We collect comments and suggestions after every session, and continually update materials as needed.