Legal Research Methods, 2nd Edition

By Michael D. Murray & Christy H. DeSanctis (2015). 230 pages, ISBN: 9781609302429. $109

Subject: Legal research textbook

Useful for: Useful for those who teach legal research, especially in the first year curriculum.

Format: Eight chapters with a table of contents and an index.

Reviewer's Comments:
In their preface, the authors of <u>Legal Research Methods</u> state that they wrote the text understanding that many students reading it will be in their "first semester of law school or in their first semester of [their] LL.M. or certificate program." They wrote it focusing "carefully on practical, time-efficient, and cost-efficient research skills to meet the demands of the new legal market and the requirements for practice-ready training in legal research and analysis."

<u>Legal Research Methods</u> is a text that first-year students, and their instructor, could use to cover the major topics associated with an introductory legal research course. The first chapter introduces legal research. Chapters two through seven cover traditional topics, i.e., statutes, case law, administrative regulations, secondary sources, legislative history, and court rules. Chapter eight details research strategies to tie everything together.

In addition to covering major topics, another thing this book does well is break up the text with images, including screengrabs, and boxes of text with labels such as FYI, Food for Thought, Apply It, and Practice Pointer. These nuggets of information are among my favorite pieces. The authors use these to speak to readers plainly, and I have several highlighted for my own future reference. For example, one box is titled "Flags that Cry Wolf," and it briefly reminds readers not to be too quick to dismiss cases simply because of a citator flag. I often show students the yellow flag above Marbury v. Madison on Westlaw to demonstrate this idea.

While <u>Legal Research Methods</u> would work well for an introductory text, there are a few shortcomings. First, there are no practice problems or exercises. The book uses a common fact pattern for illustrative purposes throughout the text, but including exercises would increase opportunities to tie reading to practice.

Second, I appreciate the authors' goal to teach practical and efficient research, but at times, I found these attempts confusing. For example, in the chapter discussing secondary sources, the authors often gauge the practicality of a resource on how citable it is in a legal document. However, for first year students who are often instructed to simply avoid citing secondary sources, this fixation on citability may be confusing. Similarly, in the final chapter summarizing the research process, the authors suggest five different research plans based on available time and topic familiarity, but I wonder if this complicates the process.

As this review is being written in late 2018, and this is a 2015 text, one can imagine that <u>Legal Research Methods</u> is already becoming outdated - websites have changed and links and screengrabs are in need of updating. This is not a criticism but an illustration of the short shelf-life for a legal research text. Lastly, the text is a bit pricey, which could result in disgruntled students. Starting class with an inexpensive textbook is a good way to get students on your side.

While there are shortcomings that prevent me from providing a glowing recommendation, <u>Legal Research Methods</u> would work well as an introductory legal research textbook.

Reviewed by: Stewart Caton, University of North Texas Dallas College of Law, in 2018.