Teaching Legal Research.

By Barbara Bintliff & Duncan Alford. (2011), 316 pages, ISBN: 978-9-415-58087-1. $46.74.

Subject: Teaching legal research; Subject-specific legal research; How to be a better teacher.

Useful for: Useful for those who wish to understand the role that academic librarians can play in providing thorough, effective legal research instruction in United States law schools.

Format: Chapters with index.

Reviewer's Comments:

Teaching Legal Research is an edited volume comprised of essays featured in a special issue of the journal Legal Reference Services Quarterly. Each essay discusses some aspect of research instruction in U.S. law schools, with varying focus on theory, best practices, and assessment. The editors provide a foundation by opening the volume with an essay that reprints, and comments upon, Frederick Hicks's 1918 article "Teaching Legal Bibliography," wherein the authors note that the challenges identified by Hicks over a century ago with respect to both research instruction, and legal education more broadly, remain relevant today. The essays that follow in the "theory" section ask would-be instructors to consider what they are teaching and why, and how to frame their content and approach, considering course goals and structure.

The next set of essays, "best practices," describes a variety of research curricula including the first-year program, Advanced Legal Research Course, and subject-specific courses, including courses covering state law, and foreign and international research. "Assessment and technique" essays describe the nature of assessment tools that teachers may utilize in their course, provides advice on how to construct an appropriate research question or problem, and describes online tools that teachers tasked with distance learning frequently employ. The volume concludes with essays regarding assessment tools beyond the classroom, considering whether law schools should offer research certifications, or whether a research module should appear in some format within the bar examination.

Though the volume is not a teacher's manual and as such, does not provide a section containing teaching materials, certain essays do include, as addenda or within their narrative, sample syllabi, research problems, student assessments, and recommended course plans with topics. The authors are unanimous in advocating that law librarians are best suited to teach research courses in law schools, and though the volume is largely written by and for law librarians, it also provides a valuable overview of curricular choices and opportunities that may be valuable to law administrators or others tasked with teaching legal research, such as legal writing faculty. Given its focus on both theory and practice, and coverage of a variety of course topics and approaches, it provides an excellent overview for the novice research instructor, introducing a range of considerations and ideas that that may wish to incorporate into their teaching.

Reviewed by: Meredith Capps, Vanderbilt University Law School, in 2020.