

Fundamentals of Government Information: Mining, Finding, Evaluating, and Using Government Resources, 2d edition.

By Cassandra J. Hartnett, Andrea L. Svetson & Eric J. Forte. (2016) 428 pages, ISBN: 9780838913956. \$69.99

Subject: Subject-specific legal research (government information)

Useful for: Useful for anyone who needs to research (or show someone how to research) government documents, find statistics compiled by the federal government, and generally locate information produced by the vast array of sources within the federal government.

Format: Chapters, each with exercises applicable to the information discussed in the chapter, plus a full list of sources mentioned in the chapter, and references.

Reviewer's Comments:

I encountered the first edition of this book in library school, when it was a required text in my government documents course.¹ Unlike almost any other textbook I had ever been required to purchase, I kept it; and, I kept referring back to it whenever I got a question that touched on government information. The information contained within it frequently saved me time and pointed me directly to the best resources.

This fully revised and reorganized second edition continues that tradition. The second part of the book, "Government Information in Focus," I've found most useful. Each chapter stands alone, so if you need to find out what MeSH terms are and how to use them, you can go directly to Chapter 11, on Health Information. I didn't know the Federal Reserve has its own database, the Federal Reserve Economic Data (called FRED), but information about it and other related datasets are detailed in Chapter 15 on Business, Economic, and Consumer Information. Plus, there's an entire chapter devoted to the Census; and another chapter on Statistical Information. Additionally (and very necessary for a book like this), the index provides easy access to the specific pages of the book relevant to your search; and even skimming the Table of Contents or the first page of a specific chapter will give you enough information to locate the specific chapter for your needs.

¹ Full disclosure: Cassandra Hartnett, one of the authors of this book, was my professor for that course.

RIPS-SIS Legal Research Text Review

The first part of the book, beyond the first introductory chapters, focuses primarily on legal information: public laws, the USC, regulations, caselaw, and the papers of the president. This part I've found especially useful to give to law students or patrons unfamiliar with the legal system: it provides a clear, concise overview of the each of these sources, plus information on how to access and search them.

Overall, I would have this book handy for the next time you're asked a question about anything related to government information: when I'm familiar with the sources, this book provides a good refresher and efficient tips, and is a lifesaver when I'm unfamiliar with a source (or unsure if it is the type of information the government would even produce!). Skim the Table of Contents and Introduction when you first get it, to familiarize yourself with the type of information in this book. Then, be prepared to make some librarian magic when you use it to help a researcher find an answer to a government information question.

Reviewed by: Taryn Marks, Stanford University, in 2020.