

Adult Services Minutes
May 16, 2002 Meeting Notes

Attendees: Richard Naylor (COLN), Sue Gorman (BETH), Judy Felsten (RCSC), Margaret Garrett (GUIL), Mary Coon (APLM), Katie Quinn (APLM), Judie Harren (VOOR), Debbie Shoup (EGRN), Jo-Ann Benedetti (UHLS), notes.

Topic: Legal Resources on the Internet

Speaker: Nancy Lenahan, Documents Librarian, Albany Law School Library

<http://www.als.edu/lib/>

Nancy prepared a PowerPoint presentation, which is detailed below, and a handout on legal resources that covers federal primary law and secondary materials, state primary law and secondary materials, legal sites by topic, collected sites, legal sites for consumers, legal sites for students and children, legal research guides by topics, directories, specialized search engines, and networking. For a copy of the handout, send an email to Jo-Ann Benedetti jo-ann@uhls.lib.ny.us.

Legal Resources on the Internet

Legal materials have been available on the Internet for a long time, mainly because the government found it cheaper to publish there rather than traditional printing.

Legal Research on the Internet

- ◆ Evaluating Internet sites and materials
- ◆ Primary materials (both Federal and State)
- ◆ Secondary materials
- ◆ By topic
- ◆ Materials for specific audiences
- ◆ Using search engines/discussion lists
- ◆ What you may not find on the web

Evaluating Materials on the Web

- ◆ What to look for
- ◆ Authority
- ◆ Accuracy
- ◆ Currency
- ◆ Objectivity
- ◆ Coverage
- ◆ Usability (organization, searching)
- ◆ Intended audience

Authority of Web Page

- ◆ Who (individual/institute/agency) is the author of the material?
- ◆ What are the credentials of the author?
- ◆ What is the domain name of the site/what is the URL of the material (special considerations for commercial and personal sites - watch for specific biases)
- ◆ Legal authority usually refers to the binding nature of the law as embodied in statutes or

established by the courts

Accuracy

- ◆ Is the material free from error?
- ◆ Is there a way to contact a responsible party?
- ◆ Are there corrupted files?
- ◆ Is the material complete in its original form? (check URL for linked documents) Has it been updated?

Currency

- ◆ When was the material loaded?
- ◆ When was the last update?
- ◆ How up-to-date are the links?

Usability

- ◆ Is the page well organized?
- ◆ Is there a search feature?
- ◆ Are there broken links?
- ◆ Are plug-ins required?
- ◆ Does the page load well? Affected by:
 - ◆ Graphics
 - ◆ Size of files
 - ◆ Speed of Internet connection

Objectivity

- ◆ What is the purpose of the page?
- ◆ Is it primary material from an official source?
- ◆ Is material presented with a minimum of bias?
- ◆ Is it provided by a group with a particular agenda?
- ◆ Is the page presented to persuade the viewer in a particular way?

Intended Audience

- ◆ Is the material appropriate for the audience?
- ◆ If the page is for a particular audience, is the content and organization appropriate?

Primary or Secondary Materials (What are you looking for?)

- ◆ Primary materials are official materials that provide the exact text of constitutions, laws, cases, regulations, etc. (Responds to the question: "What is the law?")
- ◆ Secondary materials provide commentary, description, instructions, information for consumers (check URL; should end in .gov, .edu, .mil, .net or .org)

Federal Primary Law on the Internet

- ◆ United States Code, Statutes
- ◆ U.S. Constitution
- ◆ Federal Courts - Cases
- ◆ Bills, committee reports, hearings
- ◆ Federal Regulations, agency decisions
- ◆ Specialized collections of primary law sources arranged by topic

State Primary Law on the Internet

- ❖ State Codes
- ❖ State Constitutions
- ❖ State Regulations
- ❖ State Agency opinions/decisions
- ❖ State Court Cases

Federal Secondary Materials on the Internet

- ❖ FirstGov <http://www.frstgov.gov/> (provides gateways to government services)
- ❖ Use site of a government agency
- ❖ Use a collected site with a topic index (e.g. copyright, bankruptcy)

State Secondary Materials on the Internet

- ❖ State Agency sites
- ❖ Topical indexes addressing specific subjects (family law, business law, etc.)
- ❖ Collected sites (e.g. FindLaw <http://www.findlaw.com/>)
- ❖ Online research guides by topic (e.g. How to change your name) or in general instructions on legal research methods (e.g. Virtualchase <http://www.virtualchase.com/>)

Legal Sites Arranged by Topic

- ❖ May have links to both primary and secondary resources
- ❖ Helpful if research issue is addressed (copyright, bankruptcy, etc.)
- ❖ Many collected sites have information arranged by subject

Materials for Specific Audiences

- ❖ For consumers
- ❖ Nolo's site (<http://www.nolo.com>)
- ❖ FirstGov (<http://www.frstgov.gov/>)
- ❖ Legal Research guides, by topic
- ❖ For children or students (<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/>)

Collected Sites

- ❖ FindLaw (<http://www.findlaw.com/>)
- ❖ Hieros Gamos (<http://www.hg.org/>)
- ❖ AllLaw.com (<http://www.alllaw.com/>)

Networking

- ❖ Referrals
- ❖ Interlibrary Loan
- ❖ Mailing lists
- ❖ E-mail
- ❖ Real time reference services

Search Engines

- ❖ Specialized search engines
- LawCrawler (<http://lawcrawler.findlaw.com/>)
- Google Uncle Sam (<http://www.google.com/unclesam>)

Problem Areas on the Web

- ◆ Lack of indexing
- ◆ Materials may not be specific for jurisdiction
- ◆ Specialized legal vocabulary may require use of a legal thesaurus or legal dictionary
- ◆ For the layperson, legal materials may be difficult. A legal encyclopedia may be needed.

Next meeting: July 18, 2002. The group will take a tour of the Albany Institute of History and Art Library.