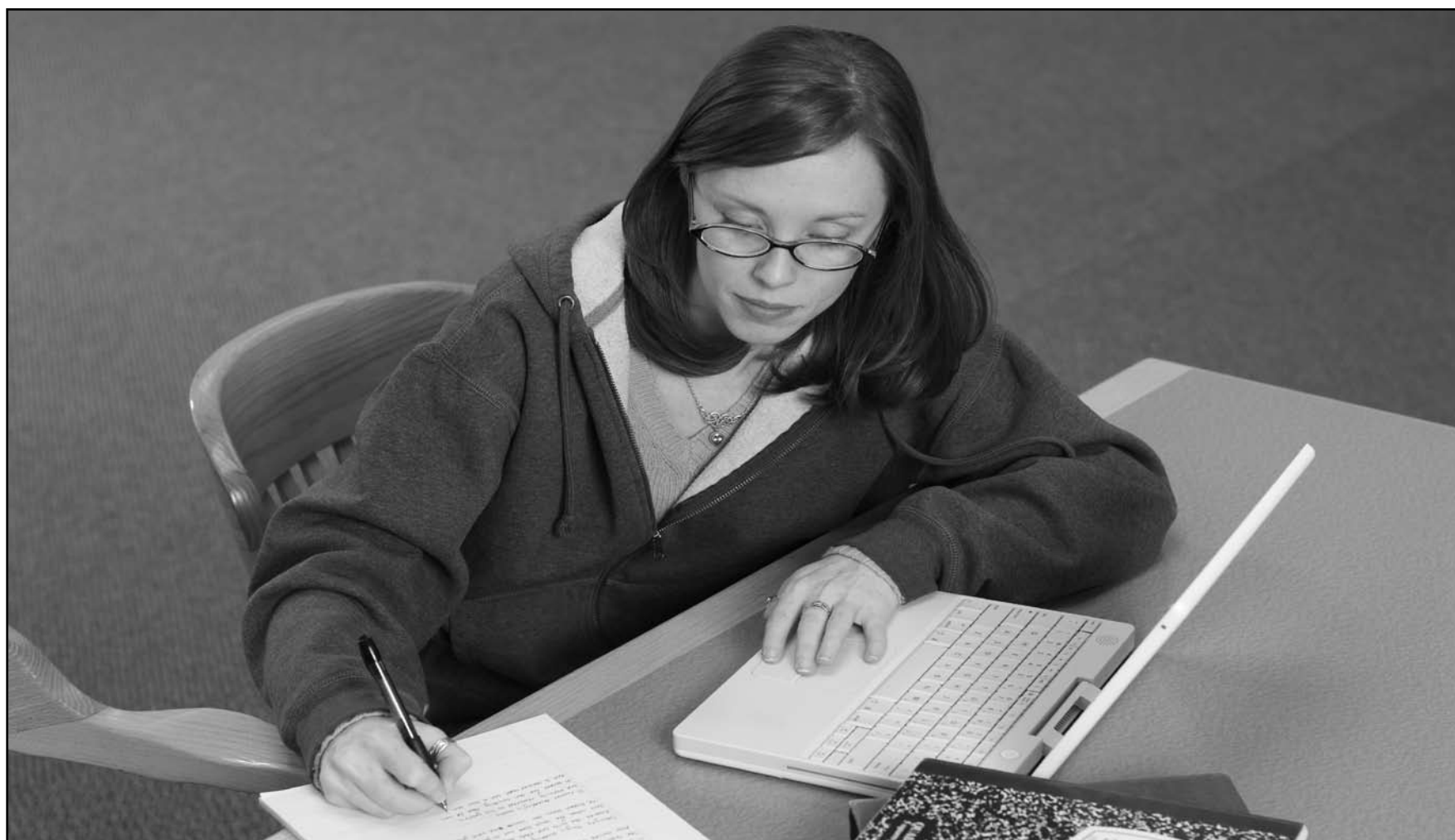


Northern California Association of Law Librarians



"I'd Like Help With Some Research on How to Do Research. . ."

Andrea N. Rubin, M.L.I.S.
Assistant Librarian
Coblentz, Patch, Duffy & Bass LLP

With special thanks to Lee Ryan at the University of San Francisco Zief Law Library

If time is money, the importance of efficient legal research skills cannot be ignored during an economic crisis. Just as capital must be invested appropriately for future survival and gain, research skills need to be instilled and cultivated for long-term value.

With this in mind, the Northern California Association of Law Librarians ("NOCALL") is planning a workshop entitled "Bridge to Nowhere? Successfully Spanning the Legal Research Gap" as part of the NOCALL Spring Institute in April. The theme of the Institute is: Clearing the Economic

Fog: Understanding the Issues & Moving Forward in the Economic Crisis.

The workshop will take place on Friday April 24, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon at the Hotel Whitcomb, located near San Francisco's Civic Center.

This "Train the Trainers" workshop focuses on techniques for improving (or introducing) research skills to summer and fall associates. Presenters will offer tips, training suggestions, and handouts to librarians who must quickly introduce new associates to effective research. Material will include techniques for developing research strategies, identifying and using reliable legal resources, and working cost-effectively in a variety of ways. From point-of-need interactions to hour-long orientation and training sessions, the workshop will

provide a range of strategies to guide the new attorneys in an organization.

"These days you don't want the summer associate to be a loss leader," says Lee Ryan, senior reference librarian at the University of San Francisco. Even if summer associates don't return to the firm where they spend the summer, everyone will benefit in the long run if law firms agree on proper research training for summer associates as a best practice. Librarians are in a position to notice trends in research habits and tactics, and can share training tactics inter-organizationally.

The workshop was developed by a group of academic and law firm librarians who have been gathering periodically for a little more than a year to discuss summer associate training issues.

Contact info: For more information on NOCALL, please visit <http://www.nocall.org>. If you would like to be a part of NOCALL, a membership application is available at <http://www.nocall.org/forms/membershipapp.pdf>.

Northern California Association of Law Librarians

To help clarify concerns and needs, the group prepared a survey and distributed it on various listservs where librarians would see it. About one hundred people responded to the survey, which included questions like: What skills do you think are most necessary for summer associates? What skills do you find need the most improvement? What opportunities do you have to teach research? What structures are in place at your firm? Survey responses and the observations of group members developed into the core topics for the workshop that will take place in April.

Ryan explains that research skills as they are taught in law school are often not helpful in law firm situations. In law school, students learn to analyze cases and acquire the skills necessary to write academic papers and pass a three-hour final exam. Some students receive research instruction in their first year of law school, but without any real-life application, students don't appreciate the context of what they are learning, and don't necessarily remember the material a few years later. Even if students study research skills while still in school, there is no guarantee that they'll be exposed to the professional level research that is expected in law firms.

Because advanced legal research is offered in small classes, law schools can only offer these classes to 20-50 students a year. With approximately 250 law students at USF, for example, many are not being reached. Some students do externships with judges or law offices, but students can easily go through law school without being exposed to professional research. Many summer and fall associates show up in law firms unprepared.

The partnership between academic and firm librarians led the group to agree upon some core topics that firm librarians need to address with summer and fall associates. For example, the new attorneys need to understand levels of legal authority (state vs. federal, case vs. statute vs. regulations). Another important issue is the different

types of secondary sources available – practice guides, digests, and treatises. In preparation for making decisions about sources, summer associates need to learn how to interview an assigning attorney to be sure that they understand a project clearly and understand the attorney's preferences for how they carry out the project.

Special attention will be given in the workshop to efficient use of online resources. Among other things, attendees will learn how to provide guidance on effective Boolean searching and advanced Boolean searching.

In each segment of the workshop, presenters will offer specific tips and tie them together with helpful anecdotes and stories. Participants will come away from the seminar with sample training materials that librarians, the planning committee, and survey responders have submitted.

The hope is that participants will be able to adapt the workshop ideas and materials to the structures they already have in place at their firms.

Although the workshop assumes an audience of mostly law firm librarians, it would be useful to anyone whose organization regularly gets an influx of new law students, interns, or staff attorneys, including government agencies.

Private firms and government agencies have different financial structures, but all of these organizations are concerned with cost efficiency. All libraries and their parent organizations benefit when researchers use resources efficiently. Staff remaining at state agencies after budget cuts must use time and resources well, even if the agency has a flat-rate contract with an online vendor. Even some academic library staff can come away from the workshop with training ideas if they teach legal research on any level.

For more information about the workshop, please visit NOCALL's website at www.nocall.org.

Sidebar freebie tips for new researchers

- Don't hesitate to use the toll-free support numbers for online services like Lexis and Westlaw. There are several benefits to this. The reference attorney strategizes and does multiple searches before handing the correct search string and source over to you, so that the firm doesn't pay for the initial attempts. In addition, talking about your project with the reference attorney will help you clarify and understand your question better. Finally, the reference attorneys usually explain the different sources they are using as they are assisting you, and you can make note of these for future projects. If possible, have them email you the trail or history of what they did.

- Try to combine multiple searches into one search, and then narrow or focus the search on each issue individually. For example, if you are researching five judges, use OR connectors to do one search on all of their names, and then use an AND connector to focus on each judge individually.

- Use print and online sources together. For example, read a chapter in a treatise on your topic, and then keycite or shepardize relevant cases you find in the treatise to find other cases and secondary materials.

- Use tables of cited code sections at the backs of treatises to go directly to the part of the book that applies to your research question.

- Use search engines to find government websites and articles by specialists that provide you with more terms of art. Use these new terms to help you unearth more information.

- When using print copies of codes, look up your code section in the pocket parts at the backs of the volumes to be sure you have the most current information.

Silicon Valley offices of O'Melveny & Myers LLP.