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Learning Activity Seven

INFO 250 Instructional Design

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This plan is for an introductory course in legal research information sources and skills that will teach some of the basics of law librarianship. Taught by the Law Librarians of New England (LLNE), this class will teach participants some of the fundamental concepts of researching federal law.

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I. Needs Assessment

Much of New England is underserved in terms of public access to legal materials. Public librarians often find themselves being asked reference questions pertaining to legal matters. However, law librarianship is taught as an elective at most library schools and is not offered at others, creating a need for professional instruction in navigating legal information resources and developing a legal research strategy.

There are many online tutorials that motivated learners could access to teach themselves about law librarianship. Many of these are produced by law librarians, but are

generally geared towards law students and often assume a pre-requisite knowledge of the legal system that the typical librarian does not possess. Legal research can be a complicated topic with its own vocabulary and sets of rules and it's helpful to have an understanding of how the legal system is structured, how laws are made, and how they are published before learning the mechanics of legal research.

Academic law librarians are the best choice to design and teach this course. As experts in legal research, they are knowledgeable about a wide range of materials, including print, commercial databases, government documents, and open access materials. They also often have experience teaching this material to law students. This combined knowledge base of legal reference materials and experience in information

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literacy instruction lends itself particularly well to this endeavor. Since law is a field that consists of many sub-specialties, there will be a rotation of librarians who are leading each segment under the direction of a team leader.

II. Entry Behavior/Learner Characteristics

Class participants will be professional librarians who are experts in evaluating

information resources from the Internet, are capable of constructing advanced search queries in a commercial database, and may or may not be aware of basic legal reference materials. Learners should be able to dedicate three or more hours a week for five weeks in a hybrid class consisting of face-to-face meetings, synchronous online instruction, and independent study. Due to the potential variation in skill sets and familiarity with resources among class participants, it will be necessary to conduct some sort of advance evaluation and offer some pre-learning opportunities and extra help to individuals who need it.

III. Learning Outcomes

The course will be developed with several specific goals in mind. These include demonstrating an understanding of the United States legal system as it relates to the development of statutes and the adoption of regulations promulgated by the government agencies. These goals will be measured throughout the course as it moves from topic to topic and again at the end.

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At the end of the course students will be able to articulate the roles that the three branches of government play in creating laws. This will be demonstrated by constructing a legal research strategy in response to a hypothetical situation. The learner will look in secondary sources to find a legal citation to any applicable laws and then use that to find primary law in the form of statutes, regulations, or binding court decisions. As the three branches of government promulgate and publish laws in different ways having a demonstrable understanding of the structure of the legal system is important.

Some hypothetical situations include: “Who is responsible for regulating gluten-free food stuffs?”, “When was the ‘stolen valor’ law passed?”, “Have there been any recent lawsuits involving student use of social media?”

IV. Instructional Design Strategy

a. Information Presentation

The course will consist of two sections, an introduction to secondary sources and finding primary federal law. In Part One the learner is introduced to secondary sources as a means of identifying laws and analyzes the abbreviations used in legal citations. There will be an emphasis on identifying the title of the work by its official abbreviation and evaluating whether it is a primary or secondary authority.

Part Two will take up most of the lessons and will consist of an overview of the three branches of government, and the four main sources of laws. The branches will be

individually examined in terms of the types of laws they produce as well as where and

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when those laws are published.

Information will be presented to the learner via screencasts and meeting software that has screen-sharing capabilities. This will allow the instructors to demonstrate how to search and show how to understand the various page headers that give important clues about the law being researched. See Appendix A for specific information about the technology tools that will be used to support learning.

a. **Learner Participation**

In Part One, learners will see some print resources and demonstrations of some of the major commercial platforms such as Lexis, Westlaw, and HeinOnline along with a quick overview of the types of secondary sources that they provide. It is likely that the major vendors will donate temporary logins for participants as they have for this course in the past. Additionally, a variety of free sources from Ravel Law, FindLaw, Google Scholar, Digital Commons, and Wikipedia will be thoroughly reviewed. Learners will be given a chance to try out these tools in class and encouraged to experiment with them on their own.

Lessons for Part One will consist of a demonstration of a resource followed by a guided search on an assigned topic. Learners will then independently pick from a list of topics, or select their own, and begin searching for citations to specific laws, with the goal of finding three or four different types.

The last activity in Part One will consist of deciphering the citations and mapping them to the resource where they might be found using the Bluebook. This information will be recorded and saved for Part Two.

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For Part Two, the section of the course dealing with primary law, learners will be guided through lessons on the three branches of government. This will consist of an explanation of how each type of law is created, paired with a demonstration of how to search the primary authorities published by the U.S. Government Publishing Office to access the text of the law. In order to increase motivation and participation, examples will be chosen from topics that are related to the ones students selected in Part One. At the end of each segment learners will reinforce what they have learned by performing a series of hands-on learning activities using the exact citations that they found in Part One.

The course will be presented in a synchronous fashion, with an accompanying

web site available for review. In a distance-learning environment, it will be necessary to pause the screen sharing at some point in the lesson, and have participants minimize the meeting software in order to try the exercises on their own. Another approach would be for each participant to have two devices, one for listening to the lesson while interactively following along on the webpage.

V. Evaluation

Progress will be measured formally and informally along the way with online formative assessments that will ask the learner to articulate the main points of the lesson and challenge them to demonstrate what they know by finding legal information in an appropriate resource. The assessments will consist of multiple choice, short and long

answer questions. Informally, each lesson will conclude with the instructor evaluating the results of the hands-on activities and providing feedback to the learner. See Appendix B

curriculum for the future. Tests are important not only to the learners in the current session of the course, but also help future participants by improving the lessons, delivery and activities. A course evaluation in the form of an online survey will also be conducted at the conclusion of the course to seek feedback from the class for this purpose.

Students may or may not be intrinsically motivated to complete the course or do well, as this course does not count towards any credit-bearing instrument. A supportive online environment with regular check-ins from students and instructors alike will help boost motivation levels and allow a space for feedback. Additionally, Law Librarians of New England (LLNE), the group running the class will offer incentives such as free memberships, scholarships to annual conferences, and other prizes to successful participants. Prizes could be awarded at a research competition at the end of the course; all finishers should also receive a certificate of completion.

b. Follow-through Activities

A follow-up survey would be useful to see what material from the class enabled the learner to be successful in continuing to learn about this topic. See Appendix C for sample survey questions. As this is an introductory course, meant to impart foundational knowledge, not all of it will have practical application. That said, the participants are generally highly motivated to move onto the next level for several reasons. Many of the students are looking to switch to law librarianship as a career and classes such as the

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LLNE LRIP program are very cost effective compared to area library schools. Other students find that there is a real need among their patrons for legal reference services and will find immediate need for some of the more practical aspects of the course.

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Appendix A

Tools for Teaching/Instructional Materials

The course will be taught online with lessons presented in an asynchronous fashion, reviewed in a live session, and then reinforced through hands-on practice. There will be opportunities for both collaborative and independent work, while students explore a legal research topic that they have selected themselves. Live lectures and ongoing asynchronous discussions support learning while assessments measure progress.

There is the need to pull together many different elements, learning objects in the form of slides; recorded and live audio; embedded multimedia; interactive activities; a means of verbal and written communication for instructor and all participants in both a

synchronous and non-synchronous fashion; and a means of assessing learning and tracking results. Several options were reviewed and it became clear that an open source Learning Management System (LMS) such as Moodle would provide many, although not all, of the necessary features.

Moodle supports several different standards including SCORM and HTML. Packages are typically created using separate software such as eXe, a free tool from exeLearning.net. Course creators can export to ePub3, an open standard for ebooks, which will allow content providers to turn course materials into digital textbooks. It also has a feature that allows educational resources to be cataloged using several different models including Dublin Core. It is possible to create a course entirely within Moodle itself, eliminating the need for third party SCORM authoring software, however the

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content is not transferrable to another LMS as it would be if it were in a standardized format.

LMS systems are popular choices for learner and instructor alike. They typically offer tools that support the presentation of media-rich interactive lessons, enable group communication, manage enrollment, and track progress. The main drawbacks are a steep

learning curve and technical requirements that include having a web server that is running the correct type of database.

For the introductory course being planned, these features will be used to present materials, embed websites for review, and guide learners through research activities during independent study. Screencasts and slides will be created using Techsmith's Jing and MS PowerPoint while a variety of interactive features will enable students to try out what they have just learned. Live demonstrations and lectures will take place using standard meeting software.

The forum tool will be used for guided discussions as well as asking questions. It will also likely be necessary to use email for individual communication, as Moodle does not support an email client like some larger packages do.

Dashboards and progress monitoring are two of the biggest reasons to use an LMS. Learners have a place to track items such as assignments, forum posts, and announcements while instructors and course creators will be able to view aggregated data for course participants. This will make it possible for the organization running the course

to measure progress against ELOs, and look for areas where the curriculum needs to be adjusted.

Appendix B

Sample Formative Assessment: Secondary Sources

Each lesson will have a short formative assessment at the end. This sample is from the lesson on secondary sources.

1. Annotated reporters are considered secondary sources. Are these ever considered binding authority?
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Which one of these is the best starting point for a short overview of a legal topic?
(select all that apply)
 - a. Law review article
 - b. Legal periodical
 - c. Legal encyclopedia or practice series
 - d. A Treatise
 - e. Annotated Court Reporter
3. Write the following citation out in full: *17 Am. Jur. 2d Contracts § 74 (1964)*.

4. Name a resource that can help you decipher legal citations: _____.
5. A patron is interested in “learning about the second amendment” List three free

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online sources of information that they could consult.

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Appendix C

Follow-through Activity: Survey

Students will be assessed at the end of the class through a follow-up survey used to gauge relevancy of instruction after six months. Specific questions include:

1. Which of the following best describes the library you work in:

- a. Public
- b. Academic
- c. Special
- d. Law Firm
- e. Other_____.

(If you selected e., please proceed to question three)

2. Which of the following best describes the type of work you do in your library:

- a. Reference
- b. Technical Services
- c. Cataloging/Metadata
- d. Solo Librarian
- e. Director/Management

3. Do you think this class was helpful to your current job/career plans?

- a. Yes
- b. No

4. In the past six months how many legal reference questions have you been asked?

5. What types of legal questions are you most comfortable answering?
- a. Criminal
 - b. Civil
 - c. Business
 - d. Immigration
 - e. Landlord/Tenant
 - f. Education
 - g. Other _____.
6. What types of resources do refer your patrons to the most?
- a. Reporters
 - b. Practice Series and other legal encyclopedias
 - c. Free online resources from private companies (Ravel Law, Google Scholar)
 - d. Free online resources from the Government Publishing Office (Federal Register, US Code, Code of Federal Regulations)
 - e. Proprietary resources (Lexis Nexis, WestLaw)
 - f. Other (please describe) _____.
7. Have you referred any patrons to other libraries such as a state or academic law library?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

8. What types of legal questions were you asked, but were unable to answer? (Free

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text response).

9. Would you recommend this class to a colleague?

a. Yes

b. No

10. Please feel free to share any suggestions for improving this course:

