Legal Research Resources at GULC and Beyond

This guide introduces you, as a member of Georgetown’s legal community, to the abundance of legal research resources available to you at GULC and in the surrounding Washington, D.C. area. Understanding and taking advantage of the resources discussed below can help shape your legal research and scholarship and enhance your research experience as well as your product.

This guide is organized around three phases of legal research: resources to consult when developing a research plan, resources to use when implementing your research plan, and resources to consider consulting when the scope of your paper calls for more than traditional legal resources. In each section we introduce tips and strategies that may be useful during that research phase and identify specific resources to use at the Williams Law Library or other Washington, D.C. area facilities.

We have organized this guide into three phases, but some of the resources described in one phase will be useful to you during another phase, if not at every phase of your research. For example, the Williams Library Topical Research Guides are useful to understanding the library’s holdings on a particular topic at the beginning of your research. It is also useful to use after you have started researching as a guide to resources to consult. You can even consult it again towards the end of your research to check that you have exhausted the resources available to you on campus before deciding to research elsewhere. We have organized the resources in the phase

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1 Prepared by Rebecca Carr and M. Erin Rodgers, Fall 2004.
where you may find a resource most useful, but we encourage you to adapt the particular resources to your own research process as you see fit.

I. Phase One: Plan for your Research

a. Have a Research Strategy

Whether you are writing a memorandum or a research paper, your research often will begin by consulting a few common tools: your assignment itself, secondary sources, reference works, the library tools described below, and other web tools (Lexis/Westlaw, etc.). These tools can help as you begin to develop and refine your specific research strategy or question. Other tips for developing your research question or issue are:

- For students working on legal memoranda and briefs:
  - It is important to collect and analyze your facts, figure out what jurisdiction applies, and devise a preliminary issue statement.
  - Your issue statement should inform your central research question: *under* what law, *did* something happen (the legal issue at hand), *when* your legally significant facts occurred.

- For students working on journal notes and seminar papers:
  - Your research question should involve a current issue in your field that is interesting.
  - Your research question should be narrow (appropriate to the length of the assignment), challenging (not bland, provoke thought), and grounded (research should be able to answer your question).

For further information about research, please see other handouts available from the Writing Center, particularly *You Have Your Topic, Now Get the Research Done* (available at http://www.law.georgetown.edu/writingcenter/documents.cfm).

b. Resources to Help with Pre-Research Planning

i. Meet With Your Professor

Meeting with your professor while you are coming up with your research strategy enables you to further understand your assignment and get tips on how to proceed with your research. If you are writing a scholarly paper, meeting with your professor may help you to generate or focus your ideas, or to formulate or refine a working thesis.

ii. Use Williams Library Websites to Prepare for Research

The staff of the Williams Library has compiled an array of tools to help you improve your legal research skills. Explore these tools as you prepare to research and the tools will undoubtedly save you time and improve the quality of your research. The main guide to research

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2 See SCHOLARLY WRITING FOR LAW STUDENTS, supra note 2 at 55-57.
3 Id. at 57-59.
4 See MARY BARNARD RAY AND JILL J. RAMSFIELD, LEGAL WRITING: GETTING IT RIGHT AND GETTING IT WRITTEN 311-314 (3d ed. 2000). This text has a helpful discussion of the steps to take in formulating a research strategy.
5 See ELIZABETH FAJANS & MARY R. FALK, SCHOLARLY WRITING FOR LAW STUDENTS 54 (2d ed. 2000).
6 DIANA HACKER, A POCKET STYLE MANUAL 101-102 (4th ed. 2004). This guide provides a concise discussion that is useful in thinking about how to choose your research question.
tools is located at http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/learn/tools_index.cfm. When you are planning your research, you may want to consult two of these tools: research tutorials and the topical research guides. It can sometimes be useful to look at these websites before actually beginning your research in order to gain a better understanding of what materials are out there and to perhaps learn more about a specific area of law.

- Research Tutorials - http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/tutorials/index.cfm

The Library staff designed the research tutorials to introduce you to the important tools and techniques necessary for conducting effective legal research. Online tutorials are available to improve your research skills in the following areas: Administrative Law, Cases and Digests, International Law Research, Internet Research, Legislative History, Lexis Research, Secondary Sources, Statutory Research, and Westlaw Research.

- Topical Research Guides - http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/topics/index.cfm

The Library staff has also developed topical research guides that suggest places to begin your research on particular issues or topics. These guides identify relevant major treatises, looseleaf services, important databases, and important websites for each topic. Topics covered in this website resource vary from Alternative Dispute Resolution to a guide on the topic of War, Peace, and Security. Traditional first year subjects are also well covered by these topic guides. A guide exists for each of the following topics: civil procedure, contract law, constitutional law, tort law, and property law. These guides provide valuable assistance in understanding the Library’s research materials on a particular topic and can provide quick and easy answers when trying to locate useful information on a topic.

II. Phase Two: Hit the Books and Implement your Research Plan

Once you have formulated your research strategy, the next step is implementing your research plan. During this phase, you are finding the law. As you start the research process, there are many resources at GULC to use to ensure that you are getting the information you need: Library Research Guides, Library Reference Guides, Reference Librarians, Westlaw and Lexis Representatives, as well as the resources discussed above. The actual process of researching will be much more effective and efficient if you take the time to figure out what resources you are going to use, in what order you want to use them, and where they are located.

a. Tools and Resources to Improve your Research


The guides are organized around three areas: 1) topical research, 2) state research, and 3) international and foreign research. Each guide directs users to library and online resources available for research. The state guides help with research in particular states and the international guides are topical (e.g., conducting antitrust research in foreign countries).
A sample of available resources includes guides on: administrative research, economics research, poverty law, and trial practice. The guides discuss general sources for a particular topic and often include links to other online research sources. For example, a research guide on Legislative History includes descriptions of the types of resources needed for legislative research and identifies the available print resources in the library. In addition, the guide includes links to online resources for everything from bills to hearings and floor statements. When approaching a new substantive area of research, these guides can save time and provide a thorough introduction to how to find what you need on a particular topic.

ii. **Identify Other Sources to Consult – Use a Library Reference Guides**

In addition to the Library’s Research Guides, there is an online source available for helping you determine the right reference source to consult as part of your research. The Reference Guides direct you to the Library’s collection of dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, indexes, and other sources. A full list of the guides is online at [http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/find/reference.cfm](http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/find/reference.cfm). A chart on the website helps explain what resources are available and when you may want to consult them.

iii. **Consult a Reference Librarian**

Some of the Law Center’s best available resources for legal research are the expert reference librarians who staff the William’s Library Reference Desk. The Reference Desk is located on the library’s second floor in the Main Reading Room.

When the Desk is staffed, members of the Georgetown community can consult with the reference librarian on duty. To take best advantage of the reference librarian’s assistance, it is a good idea to have specific questions about where you are starting your research and where you need help (do you need help with specific online searches or do you need help identifying other avenues or resources for research). For more information about the Reference Desk and the services it offers, consult [www.ll.georgetown.edu/services/ref_desk.cfm](http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/services/ref_desk.cfm).

Reference librarians are not only there to help with quick research questions, but are also available to help you during a research consultation. These consultations are by appointment and offer you an opportunity to strategize about your research with a reference librarian. Forms for requesting an appointment are available at [www.ll.georgetown.edu/services/ref_appoint.cfm](http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/services/ref_appoint.cfm).

iv. **Get Help with your Westlaw and Lexis Research**

Both Westlaw and Lexis systems allow you to search within a specific area of law and have practice guides and other secondary sources about that topic. Both systems also have representatives available 24 hours a day that you can call or confer with online about any research question. For Lexis, calling 1-800-45-LEXIS (455-3947) or connecting through a live research help session gives you access to legal research professionals who are available at the customer support center. For Westlaw, calling 1-800-REF-ATTY (733-2889) or emailing [west.referenceattorneys@thomson.com](mailto:west.referenceattorneys@thomson.com) gives you access to the West Reference Attorneys who provide similar research assistance.
v. Remember Phase One Resources

If you run into any problems when doing your research or you just want to ensure that you are making the most of the resources at Georgetown, you can always revisit the resources discussed in Section A. For example, if you are hitting a wall and cannot find what you need or are not finding what you were expecting, a meeting with your professor could refine your research question or help you devise alternative research plans. In addition, taking another look at the Research Tutorials and the Topical Research Guides might help you to research more efficiently or give you new ideas of places to search for information.

III. Phase Three: Knowing Where to Go Off-Campus (if you must!)

As a researcher you make many decisions. One of the decisions you will have to make is when to leave the Law Center’s campus to consult another library or archival institution. Consulting Lexis or Westlaw for cases and law review articles will provide you with much of the research you may need for a class assignment, memorandum, or brief. Depending on the topic of your paper, however, you may find it necessary to expand your research to other sources.

If your research topic involves secondary sources not well represented in the Williams Library, consulting any one of the many local libraries will likely improve the breadth and depth of your research. Georgetown University itself has three libraries in addition to the two libraries at GULC. Also, two other law school libraries exist in the D.C. area. Finally, here in the nation’s capital, we have two important federal research facilities near the Law Center.

a. Resources Available in Washington, D.C.

i. Take Advantage of Georgetown University’s Many Libraries

The Georgetown University Library on main campus includes the Lauinger Library and the Bloomer Science Library. The libraries are in separate locations on main campus, but operate jointly. The main library catalogue is searchable through GULLiver. The Medical School also has a library, the Dahlgreen Memorial Library. The main campus libraries can be important resources for secondary non-legal materials or for research related to medicine or science.

Law students can gain entry to all three libraries with their GULC GOCards. GOCards also enable law students to check out materials and use copy machines. All three libraries can be accessed by taking a Georgetown University Transportation Service (GUTS) shuttle. The shuttle schedule can be found at http://otm.georgetown.edu/guts/lawcenter.cfm.

In thinking about which facility to consult, check the library’s website and be aware of the focus of the facility’s collection:

- Lauinger Library – www.library.georgetown.edu/
  General collection: books, journals, magazines, etc.

- Blommer Library – www.library.georgetown.edu/blommer
  Specialized collection - scientific materials

- Dahlgreen Memorial Library – http://data.georgetown.edu/dml
Specialized collection – medical research

ii. Consult Other D.C. Area Law Libraries

In addition to the many resources available through Georgetown University, there are six other law school libraries with research collections in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

- Washington College of Law Library (American)
- DuFour Law Library (Catholic)
- George Mason University Law Library (GMU)
- Jacob Burns Library (GWU)
- Howard University School of Law Library
- UDC David A. Clarke School of Law Library

Information about each of these libraries, including hours of operation and links, exists at http://www.llsdc.org/libraries/edu.htm. In addition, ALADIN is an online catalog that permits you to search many of the academic libraries in the area. ALADIN is located at www.aladin.wrlc.org.

Library resources can be borrowed from other area institutions through InterLibrary Loan (consult http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/services/ill/index.cfm for more information about ILL). You can also visit many of the area university law libraries, though some libraries restrict access to their own students and faculty. For specific details about access and collections, please consult each institution’s website.

iii. Consult Federal Research Facilities


The Library of Congress (LOC) is one of the greatest collections of books and manuscripts in the world – it is the official library of members of Congress and is located near the Capitol. Prior to your visit to the LOC, you should conduct preliminary research so that you can make efficient use of the library’s vast resources. Patrons do not browse among the library’s collections; instead, the library has a closed stack system, so you must use the online catalog to find your materials. The LOC has a beautiful main reading room as well as other specialized collections (including a Law Library Reading Room, www.loc.gov/law). In addition to the Library’s immense collection of print resources, the Library also has valuable manuscript, audio, and photographic collections.

The LOC’s collections are open to researchers from the Georgetown law community so long as you obtain a free Reader Identification card. This card is needed for admission to Library reading rooms and to request materials. Cards can be obtained in Room LM 140, on the first floor of the James Madison Building by showing a photo-ID with a current address and by completing a form. You can not obtain a card through the telephone or Internet. Additional information about accessing the LOC is at http://www.loc.gov/rr/main/inforeas/infohome.
National Archives and Records Administration – www.archives.gov

If your research calls for the use of primary historical sources, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) may have resources that you should consult. The main NARA website, www.archives.gov, identifies seven NARA related facilities in the D.C. area. Of these facilities, you may find the resources of The National Archives Building (near 7th Street and Constitution Ave., N.W.) and the National Archives at College Park (near the University of Maryland in College Park, MD) most useful in your research. As with the LOC, you will be eligible to consult NARA materials after obtaining a researcher identification card.

A research trip to a NARA facility, like a trip to the LOC, is going to be most useful and productive if you plan in advance of your visit. Before visiting, consult online research guides at www.archives.gov/research_room, topic guides at www.archives.gov/research_room/getting_started/research_by_topic, and Planning your Visit at www.archives.gov/research_room/getting_started/planning_your_visit prior to your visit. A brief list of topics shows the broad scope of NARA’s holdings: African American History, Brown v. Board of Education, Court Records, Federal Laws & Regulations, and Special Prosecutors and Independent Counsels are all covered in NARA topic guides.

In addition many NARA documents are available online:

- **Prologue Magazine** – contains articles on new or noteworthy documents of collections at NARA to help give you ideas for research (www.archives.gov/publications/prologue).
- **Archival Research Catalog** – contains digitized versions of selected documents including, for example, documents related to labor and business history (otherwise only available in California). You can search through the documents, photos, and maps by keyword, organization, person, or topic (www.archives.gov/research_room/arc).