



Legal Research Resources at GULC and Beyond

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This guide introduces you, as a member of Georgetown's legal community, to the abundance of legal research resources available to you. Understanding and taking advantage of the resources discussed below can help shape your legal research and enhance both your research experience and your written product.

This guide is organized around three phases of legal research: 1) developing a research plan; 2) implementing your research plan; and 3) looking beyond typical legal resources. In each section we introduce tips and strategies that may be useful during that research phase and identify specific resources to use online, at the Williams Law Library, or at other Washington, D.C. area facilities. We have organized the resources in the phase 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.

Phase One: Planning Your Research

A. Identify your research goals

Whether you are writing a memorandum, a brief, or a research paper, your research planning typically will begin by consulting a few common resources.² The best place to start is often your assignment itself.

- For students working on memoranda, briefs, etc.: Do you understand the goal of the assignment? Do you know what legal question(s) you need to answer? Do you know the relevant facts? The scope of the topic? The applicable jurisdiction(s)?³
- For students working on scholarly papers: Do you know the possible topics you may address? Have you sufficiently narrowed the scope of your topic? Is your topic novel or does it present an opportunity to add meaningfully to the existing discourse?⁴

¹ Originally prepared by Rebecca Carr and M. Erin Rodgers, Fall 2004. Updated by Caroline Davis, Spring 2018.

² See MARY BARNARD RAY & JILL J. RAMSFIELD, *LEGAL WRITING: GETTING IT RIGHT AND GETTING IT WRITTEN* 311-314 (3d ed. 2000). This text includes a helpful discussion of the steps to take in formulating a research strategy.

³ For more on this topic, see the Writing Center's handout on [The Art and Craft of Strategic Legal Research](#).

⁴ For more on this topic, see the Writing Center's handout on research strategies for scholarly writing: [You Have Your Topic. Now Get the Research Done!](#)

Other helpful tools at this phase of planning might include secondary sources,⁵ reference works, the library tools described below, and other web tools (Lexis, Westlaw, etc.).⁶ Use these tools to gain a basic understanding of the existing body of law. That basic understanding will help you to apply the law (for memos), argue the law (for briefs), or contribute to the legal discourse (for scholarly papers).

B. Develop your research plan

Your research plan will be driven in large part by your research goals. The objective in this phase is to identify possible and likely resources which will help you meet those goals. There are generally some resources which might seem obvious to law students, like statutes or cases. But many more, often unknown, sources of legal knowledge are available to GULC students.

Before you leave this planning phase, try to have a concrete list of the types of resources you'd like to target. Though this list can and should be updated at any time as you discover new resources, it will serve as a helpful guide as you wade into the next phase of research.

To help you identify the resources you should incorporate into your research plan, consider consulting these sources of knowledge:

1. Your Professor

Meeting with your professor while developing 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. If your professor is an expert (or at least knowledgeable) in the area of your research, he or she may be able to offer suggestions regarding which resources to target as well.

In order to make the most of this meeting, come prepared. Make sure you have an understanding of what the assignment entails and at least some ideas regarding what you plan to write about. Use this meeting to confirm your understanding of the professor's expectations and to build upon the brainstorming and preparation you've already done.

2. Williams Librarians

Like your professor, the librarians at Williams Library are a great source of information in this phase. Consider talking to a librarian to help you identify the resources you should target in your research plan. To best take advantage of the librarian's assistance, it is a good idea to have specific questions about where you are starting your research and where you need help (e.g.

⁵ See ELIZABETH FAJANS & MARY R. FALK, SCHOLARLY WRITING FOR LAW STUDENTS 55-57 (2d ed. 2000).

⁶ *Id.* at 57-59.

do you need help with specific online searches or do you need help identifying other avenues or resources for research?).

Students may access the depth of knowledge of our law librarians in several ways. Request an in-person research consultation with a librarian [here](#). For quicker or shorter consultations, consider using Williams Library's "live chat" feature to talk to a librarian. On the library's [main page](#), click on the grey "chat" bar in the top right corner, just below the links to "Library Catalogs" and "My Account."

3. [Williams Library Research Tutorials](#)

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; ALM Legal Intelligence; Bloomberg, Lexis, and Westlaw; the Bluebook; Case Law Research; E-Journal Finder; HeinOnline; InterLibrary Loan; Job Hunting and Interviewing; Juris-M; Legislative History Research; Martindale.com; News Databases; ProQuest Congressional and Legislative Insight; Regulatory History; Secondary Sources; Statutory Research; Subject-based Searching; and Treaty Research.

4. [Williams Library Topical Research Guides](#)

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.

Guides exist on a variety of [U.S law topics](#), [foreign and international law topics](#), [the research process](#), [legal history](#), [introductory and non-legal topics](#), and on [finding treatises](#).

Phase Two: Implementing Your Research Plan

Once you have formulated your research strategy, the next step is implementing that plan. In Phase One, you will have developed a list of resources to consult. GULC's legal resources which might commonly be included in a research plan include (but are not limited to!):

A. Books

Williams Library has an extensive catalog of books. To identify books at Georgetown's libraries which might be helpful in your research, consult the [catalog searching tools](#) on the law

library's website. There, you can search by a variety of fields (e.g. keyword, author, subject, etc.) to locate books which may be helpful in your research.

If you can't find what you're looking for in one of Georgetown's catalogs, consider using the [InterLibrary Loan](#) service to gain access to books in a partner library's catalog. InterLibrary Loan can be a slow process, so be sure to allow yourself enough time to receive any requested books.


B. Westlaw and Lexis

Westlaw, Lexis, and Bloomberg are often the most-used legal research resources for law students. These databases provide GULC students with access to legal resources including statutes, cases, administrative regulations and decisions, and secondary sources. Bloomberg provides access to many documents which cannot be found easily (or for free) elsewhere, including practice guides and federal case dockets (a much more cost-effective alternative to navigating PACER).

Use the Research Guides and Tutorials mentioned above to maximize your use of Lexis, Westlaw, and Bloomberg; these guides and tutorials will help you identify relevant resources available on these databases. The [statutes](#), [case law](#), and [secondary sources](#) research guides might be particularly useful here. Westlaw also provides its own [guides](#) to aid in your research efforts.

Both Lexis and Westlaw also have representatives available 24 hours a day that you can call or confer with online about any research question. These representatives are experts in their databases and should be able to help you identify resources available on each database which could be helpful to your research. 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 gives you access to the West Reference Attorneys who provide similar research assistance. These Reference attorneys can also be accessed through Westlaw's chat feature, available via the "Live Chat" button at the bottom of Westlaw's homepage. Note that there may be some assignments (e.g. 1L LRW finals) where use of reference attorneys is prohibited.

C. [Williams Library Databases](#)

Consider a quick review of the databases available via Williams Library to find resources like scholarly articles, legislative history, news articles, and historical documents. Most databases clearly indicate the general topics they cover simply through their names alone. Clicking on the blue icon next to the database name () will provide more detail about the database's covered topics. Williams Library also provides a quick [overview guide](#) for those seeking articles as part of their research plan.

D. 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 above in Phase One. 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.

Phase Three: Looking Beyond Typical Legal Resources

As a researcher, you make many decisions. One of the decisions you will have to make is when to leave the Law Center's resources 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 alternative online resources or local libraries will likely improve the breadth and depth of your research. To broaden your research in this way, consider consulting the resources below.

A. Other Georgetown Libraries

The [Georgetown University Library](#) on main campus includes the Lauinger Library, the Bloomer Science Library, the Dahlgren Memorial Library of the Georgetown University Medical Center, and the Bioethics Research Library. These libraries are in separate locations on main campus but operate jointly. The main campus libraries can be important resources for secondary non-legal materials or for research related to medicine or science. The [catalog searching tools](#) mentioned above will provide information about what books are available at the other Georgetown libraries.

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.

B. Other 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:

- [Pence Law Library at Washington College of Law](#) (American)
- [DuFour Law Library at Columbus School of Law](#) (Catholic)
- [Law Library at Antonin Scalia Law School](#) (George Mason)
- [Jacob Burns Law Library](#) (George Washington University)
- [Howard University School of Law Library](#) (Howard)
- [Mason Library at UDC David A. Clarke School of Law](#) (UDC)

[Information](#) about non-Georgetown law libraries in the D.C. area is available through the Williams Library website. In addition, [ALADIN](#) is an online catalog that permits you to search many of the academic libraries in the area. 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.

For resources that can't be found at local libraries, again consider using the [InterLibrary Loan](#) service through the Williams Library.

C. Federal Resources

1. [The Library of Congress](#)

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](#)). 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 GULC 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. Preregistration can be done [online](#), but you must still report to the Reader Registration Station in person to finalize your registration.

2. [National Archives and Records Administration](#)

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](#) 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 [research tips](#), the [Guide to Federal Records](#), the [Guide to Online Tools and Research Aids](#) available through the Archives, the list of [Online Databases](#) available through the Archives, and [Planning Your Research Visit](#) prior to your visit to the Archives.

D. Unpaid Resources

For a list of free or low-cost legal research resources, see the [guide](#) on the Williams Library website.

The [Social Science Research Network](#) (SSRN) database provides access to scholarly research in the social sciences and humanities. It can be especially useful in finding research and articles which are in progress or have been written recently and have not yet made it to other databases. SSRN access is free. SSRN provides a [User Guide](#) to help researchers become familiar with the platform.

Consider also using either [Google](#) or [Google Scholar](#). Though a simple Google search will produce results which vary widely in quality, a discerning researcher may be able to identify high-quality sources which provide useful background information, additional sources, or alternate perspectives on your research topic. This approach can be especially useful for students whose topics go beyond basic statutory and case analysis. Google Scholar may provide access to articles and sources which are not available through the Library databases. See Google Scholar's own [Research Guide](#) for tips on making the most of this tool.