SELECTING A TOPIC

Prepared by Nanette Kelley Balliot, Reader Services Librarian

Whether writing for law review, a seminar course, or directed research, the Law Library has print and online resources for you to use in selecting a topic. To locate materials in the Library’s collection on a particular subject, use the Library’s WebCatalog. You can search by subject or by words in the title and contents notes. The librarians are available to assist you in locating and using these materials. If you need an item that is not in the Library’s collection, you may request the item through interlibrary loan. Contact the Circulation / Interlibrary Loan Coordinator for details.

LEGAL PERIODICALS

Law Review Articles

Law Review articles are used in two distinct ways. When selecting a topic for a seminar course or directed research, law review articles are an excellent source for information on the developments, issues, and trends in the various areas of law. When selecting a topic for writing a law review article, law reviews are used to conduct a pre-emptive search to determine if a possible topic has already been covered and therefore would not be a good choice.

To locate articles, use the legal periodical indexes such as Current Law Index, Current Index to Legal Periodicals, and Index to Legal Periodicals & Books. These indexes are available in print, online LexisNexis and Westlaw, and via the Internet. Legal Resource Index is the electronic version of Current Law Index. It indexes all the material covered in Current Law Index plus legal newspapers and law-related articles from popular newspapers and is available on Westlaw in the LRI database. Current Index to Legal Periodicals and Index to Legal Periodicals & Books are available on Westlaw in the CILP database and the ILP database respectively. To get to the individual databases on Westlaw, the path is Directory> Law Reviews, Bar Journals & Legal Periodicals> Periodical Indexes. The path on LexisNexis is Legal> Secondary Legal> Annotations and Indexes> Index to Legal Periodicals or Legal Resource Index.

To access the Law Library’s subscriptions to the legal periodical indexes from the School of Law’s home page, the path is Library>Research & Resources> Databases. Access is also available via the Law Library’s WebCatalog.

Magazines, Newspapers, and Newsletters

There are a variety of legal and general
newspapers, newsletters, and magazines to which the Library subscribes. These publications report on cases, legislation, and controversial legal issues. Many also include book reviews. Some suggested sources for ideas are current issues of American Lawyer, ABA Journal, National Law Journal, and New York Law Journal. Some of the nationally recognized newspapers such as the New York Times and Wall Street Journal may also provide you with an idea for a topic. If you want to write on a topic pertaining to Rhode Island or Massachusetts law, consult the Rhode Island Lawyers Weekly or the Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly. Most of these publications and many others are available via LexisNexis, Westlaw, and the Internet.

DATABASES

The Law Library offers Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) and Commerce Clearinghouse (CCH) databases. These databases combine case, statutory, and administrative law with expert analysis and explanatory text. Many report on recent agency activities, case decisions, proposed or newly enacted legislation, and general developments in that area of law.

The path to access these databases from the School of Law’s home page is Library>Research & Resources>Databases.

One recommended database for information on current law is BNA’s U.S. Law Week which contains summaries and analyses of newly decided federal and state cases; legal news items; and current U.S. Supreme Court opinions.

Westlaw (lawschool.westlaw.com)

The Westlaw Topical Highlights databases allow you to search twenty-five specialized areas of law for information on the activities of the judicial, legislative, and administrative branches of federal and state government. The Westlaw Bulletin database contains the most significant documents from all the Westlaw Topical Highlights databases and documents summarizing recent significant developments in areas of law for which no Westlaw Topical Highlights database exists. To view a list of Westlaw Topical Highlights or the Westlaw Bulletin databases, the path is Westlaw Directory>Legal News, Highlights, and Notable Trials>Westlaw Highlights & Bulletins>Westlaw Topical Highlights or Westlaw Bulletin.

LexisNexis (www.lexisnexis.com/lawschool)

LexisNexis offers the Emerging Issues database for individual areas of law. Each Emerging Issues database contains commentary written by attorneys practicing in that area of law. The commentary examines recent cases, regulations, trends and developments on the state, national, and international level.

LexisNexis also makes available selected documents from newsworthy litigation. These documents are collected in a single database and listed by topic or case name. The path on LexisNexis is Legal> Legal News> Legal News-Other> Newsworthy Litigation Documents. You can view the Table of Contents or conduct a search of the database.