“MAKE REVIEWING FUN”—
LEGAL RESEARCH SCAVENGER HUNTS

BY BARBARA L. FRITSCHEL

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How To... is a regular column offering practical—and tested—suggestions for increasing teaching and training effectiveness. Readers are invited to submit descriptions of their training techniques to Ellen M. Callinan, Crowell & Moring, 1001 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004, (202) 624-2838, FAX: (202) 628-5116 or directly to the editor of Perspectives. Frank Houdek.

Reviewing material previously covered in legal research classes does not just have to be a cut and dried, “question and answer” proposition. Forget the dull and dreary. Try the “legal research scavenger hunt” method instead. Not only does it work, but it’s fun to boot!

Here’s How It Works

Divide the class into teams. Each team is given cards with clues. The clues can cover terminology (e.g., mandatory authority, secondary resources), books (e.g., a session law, a statutory code) or tasks (e.g., Shepardizing® cases, using a table of cases). Here are some samples of ones that have worked for me:

A session law
The parallel citation to 7 Ill. 2d 608
Where is the Bard Bill located in the U.S. Code?
Provide the USCA® citation in Bluebook format.
A treatise that covers only Texas law
The name of the Kansas case that cites Schnabl v. Ford Motor Co. (a Wisconsin case)
A book that contains primary, mandatory authority for every court in the United States

Teams follow the clues to retrieve items from the library and return them to their table. Give points to the team that finds all of its items first, with decreasing points for the teams that finish later—i.e., five points to the team that finishes first, three points to the team that finishes second, etc. This gives an incentive to work quickly. Once a team has declared it is finished, it cannot change any items on its table.

Then comes a challenge round. Each team examines the items collected by reviewing its opponents and places a “challenge” card by those that do not meet the requirements of the clue. Challenged teams are given an opportunity to defend their selections. Points are awarded to teams for correctly identifying items and winning challenges, deducted from teams that make incorrect challenges. Add up the points and declare a winner.

I use this scavenger hunt in a legal research class for paralegals, although it can also be easily adapted to a law school environment. With the paralegals, I allow them to use any resource (except the instructor or librarians) to help understand the clue. For example, if they do not remember what mandatory authorities are, they can use either their text or a law dictionary to refresh their memories. Each team member receives two clues. Students can help teammates, but only after they have found their objects or completed their tasks. Teams are given the same number of tasks. For example, each team might be required to Shepardize® a case, find a citation from a popular name, and update a regulation in the Federal Register.

Now for a CALR Scavenger Hunt

A couple of conditions are necessary in order to conduct a good scavenger hunt. The first is having either a time when or a part of the library where people can gather materials without disturbing other patrons. The second is having an area available where the retrieved items can be displayed.

If your library conditions are such that a scavenger hunt with books is impractical, you might try using one to review computer research skills instead. It is usually easier to reserve the computer lab than empty the library of patrons and such a "hunt" would be less disturbing to other library users. Different databases can be explored and the time element can be used to emphasize effective, narrow queries. Points can be awarded for the most proper database selection as well as getting the right answer. "Retrieving" items can be accomplished by requiring that printouts of the screens with the appropriate answers be placed on a table for the challenge round, with a notation of the database used.

1 I am fortunate in that we have access to the county law library after closing hours.
So Why Do It...

The scavenger hunt provides the instructor with a chance to tie separate segments of the class together. Clues can be developed that will refocus attention on important tasks or areas that have been introduced throughout the course. If many teams miss a clue, it may indicate a need for remedial work. Students find out what it is like to do research under time constraints. The challenge forces them to look analytically at research tools and legal materials. Finally, a scavenger hunt is a good way to consolidate terminology and technique within the context of a single "review."

Happy hunting!

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WARNING THE PROSPECTIVE LEGAL WRITING INSTRUCTOR, OR "SO YOU REALLY WANT TO TEACH?"

BY MAUREEN ARRIGO-WARD

Maureen Arrigo-Ward is one of two directors of the Legal Skills Program at California Western School of Law in San Diego, California. She is the author of "Caring for Your Apostrophes," which appeared in the Fall 1995 issue of Perspectives.

I have been a legal research and writing professional for the past 11 years. The fact that I have stuck it out that long shows that one can survive—even thrive—in this area of teaching. On the other hand, during those 11 years, I have seen busloads of teachers come and go. For one reason or another, the fit was wrong—teacher for subject, subject for teacher. Too often, confusion over expectations may have been at the core of the problem.

There was the "full-time" (so we thought) legal writing instructor, for instance, who also held a full-time tenure track teaching position at a local university. There was another "full-time" legal writing instructor who, as it turned out, conducted a rather busy (if not especially lucrative) law practice from his office. We expected one thing; they expected (and gave us) something else. Such mismatches seem even more prevalent in the case of adjunct faculty.

One adjunct we hired seemed to cancel more classes than he held. When he did hold class, more often than not he dismissed the students early. During the time he had the students captive, he shed little light on either the research or writing processes. The students despised him and apparently lost little time making their hostility known in class. The stress overcame him; he quit mid-semester.

We really should have known to expect trouble from another adjunct. During his initial interview, when asked why he wanted to teach, he commented that he "loved performing" in the courtroom and expected that it would be "just as much fun" to perform for an audience of first-year students. Unfortunately, he neglected to take into account that the students were interested in learning something and not just in watching him perform.