CALI Lessons in Legal Research Courses: Alternatives to Reading About Research

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There are many high quality legal research textbooks on the market. But let’s face it—they aren’t exactly the type of book that law students devour.

Flashback to your legal research instruction during law school. Did you actually read all of the assigned legal research material? Did you light the bonfire at your graduation party with your least stimulating law school books? If so, was the legal research text among the tinder? Flash forward to the present. Now you teach legal research and/or legal writing to law students. What can you do to spice up the learning experience for your students?

This article is a case study of integrating CALI lessons into the legal research curriculum at Georgia State University College of Law (GSU). In this study, I present student feedback in the form of survey data and instructor feedback in the form of anecdotes.

What Is CALI and What Are CALI Lessons?
CALI, located online at <www.cali.org>, is the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction. This nonprofit consortium of law schools “advances global legal education through computer technology, employs research, collaboration, and leadership to assist a diverse audience in the effective use of this technology in legal education, and promotes access to justice through the use of computer technology.”

In 1999, a group of five librarians known initially as the “Gang of Five” began to develop a comprehensive set of Web-based teaching materials covering a broad range of research topics. They developed a list of CALI lessons that represented this broad range and grouped them...
and WebCT are some of the classroom management software available on campuses. Blackboard and TWEN are the two classroom management packages typically used in law schools. During fall 2004, three instructors in the legal bibliography program used TWEN and one instructor designed a Web-based classroom management system that served the same purpose. During fall 2005, two instructors remained with TWEN, one switched to Blackboard, and the other remained with the in-house classroom management system.

Descriptive Statistics of Fall 2005 Students Surveyed
(Warning: Reading this section may cause your eyes to glaze over.)

Before the student perspective can be described, it is important to know some information about the students who were surveyed. There were 216 first-year law students enrolled in the fall 2005 legal bibliography program.

Of those 216 first-year law students, 178 took the survey (about 82 percent). Of those that responded to the survey, 78 percent were age 30 or younger. To be more specific, the range in age of all respondents was between 20 and 62 years of age. The average age of respondents was 28 and the most common age of respondents was 22.

There was a 46-54 percent ratio of females to males and a 70-30 percent ratio of full-time to part-time students surveyed. Seventy-six percent identified as White or European American; 10 percent as Black or African-American; 8 percent Asian or Asian-American; 1 percent as other and 5 percent did not respond to the question about race and ethnicity.

In the computing ability arena, 59 percent identified as either expert or intermediate computer users; 41 percent identified as average or below average computer users.


The data from the 2005 survey form the basis of what is reported in this article. Data from fall 2004 are reported only for comparison purposes where relevant.
### Table 1. CALI Lessons That May Fit into Legal Research Curricula

| Introduction to Legal Research          | • Cost of Legal Research by Lauren Collins  
|                                         | • Decision Point: State or Federal? by Yolanda Jones  
|                                         | • Evaluating Web Sites by Susan Llano & Erin Murphy  
|                                         | • Hold ‘em, Fold ‘em, Walk Away or Run: When to Stop the Search by Yolanda Jones  
|                                         | • Internet Legal Resources—Free Resources by Resa Kerns & Cindy Shearrer  
|                                         | • Legal Research 101: The Tools of the Trade by Sheri Lewis & Donald Arndt Jr.  
|                                         | • Legal Research Methodology by Wendy Scott & Kennard Strutin  
| Statutes                                | • Codification by Bill Taylor  
|                                         | • Finding Statutes by Kit Kreilick  
|                                         | • Forms of Federal Statutory Publication by Elizabeth Adelman & Kristina Niedringhaus  
|                                         | • Introduction to State and Federal Statutes by Mary Rumsey & Suzanne Thorpe  
|                                         | • Researching Uniform and Model Laws by Beth DiFelice  
|                                         | • Updating Federal and State Statutes by Rebecca Trammell  
| Legislative History                     | • Federal Legislative History Research—Compiled Legislative History by Lee Peoples  
|                                         | • Researching Federal Legislative History by Nancy Johnson  
| Cases                                   | • Anatomy of a Case by Brian Huddleston  
| Case Finding (Digests and ALR®)         | • American Law Reports by Kimberli Morris  
|                                         | • How to Find Case Law Using the Digests by Brian Huddleston  
| Administrative Law Research             | • Attorney General Materials by Marcia Baker  
|                                         | • Internal Agency Materials by Al Dong & Edwin Greenlee  
|                                         | • Introduction and Sources of Authority for Administrative Law by Deborah Paulus  
|                                         | • Researching Federal Administrative Regulations by Sheri Lewis & Donald Arndt Jr.  
|                                         | • Researching Federal Executive Orders by Sara Kelley  
|                                         | • Rulemaking: Federal Register and CFR by Deborah Paulus  
| Secondary Sources                       | • Introduction to Secondary Resources by Brian Huddleston  
|                                         | • Legal Encyclopedias by Brian Huddleston  
|                                         | • Mastering Looseleaf Publications by Kristina Niedringhaus & Elizabeth Adelman  
|                                         | • Using the Restatements of the Law by Sara Kelley  
| State Legal Research                    | • Arizona Legal Research—Primary Sources by Beth DiFelice & Jennifer Murray  
|                                         | • Georgia Legal Research—Primary Source Material by Elizabeth Adelman, Nancy Johnson, Nancy Adams & Terrance Manion  
|                                         | • Maryland Legal Research—Primary Authority by Sara Kelley & Susan Herrick  
|                                         | • Pennsylvania Primary Legal Research by Brent Johnson, Ed Sonnenberg & Patricia Fox  
| Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) Training | • Periodicals Indexes and Library Catalogs by C. Andrew Larrick  
| Citators                                | • Updating/Validating Case Law Using Citators by Rebecca Trammell  

Effectiveness of CALI as a Teaching Tool: The Student Perspective

To answer the question of whether CALI lessons are an effective teaching tool we asked a series of survey questions. We decided to assess how students feel about CALI lessons and if the lessons give students a deeper understanding of the material. In addition, we asked these open-ended questions: "Tell us what you like about CALI lessons"; "Tell us what you dislike about CALI lessons."

One question read, "Below are some ways to describe how you might feel about CALI lessons. Please check all [choices] that apply." One choice was "CALI lessons are an effective teaching tool." Seventy-six percent of all respondents chose the effective teaching tool option. In written comment form, students also reported that they like the interactive nature of CALI lessons; the review questions are the most sought-after aspect of CALI lessons because they provide the immediate feedback that first-year law students typically crave.

To further assess how students feel about CALI lessons we asked if students think CALI lessons are interesting or boring. (See Table 2 for a complete description of the results.) Fifty-one percent of all respondents chose "interesting." Of those respondents, the part-time contingent finds CALI lessons more interesting. Sixty-four percent of part-time students compared with 46 percent of full-time students chose interesting as their answer. In the gender category, 48 percent of male respondents compared to 38 percent of female respondents found CALI lessons interesting. While some students reported that there is educational and entertainment value in using CALI lessons, a substantial number of other students reported that the lessons were too long. This may explain the near 50-50 interesting-boring split.

To probe further into the effectiveness of CALI lessons, students were asked a true or false question: "CALI lessons gave me a deeper understanding of the topic and/or reading material." (See Table 3 for the results.) Ninety-four percent of respondents agree with this statement and, therefore, chose the "true" response. There were no differences among full-time and part-time students in 2005 and there was only a 3 percent difference along gender lines. While the 2004 survey did not request gender or other information, there was a high degree of satisfaction with the CALI lessons.

Students reported that CALI lessons are an excellent way to explain concepts not covered in depth or not understood after completing the reading and listening to the lecture.

Table 2. Are CALI Lessons Interesting or Boring?: Percent of Respondents Answering Interesting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Full-Time Respondents</th>
<th>Part-Time Respondents</th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>51 percent</td>
<td>46 percent</td>
<td>64 percent</td>
<td>48 percent</td>
<td>38 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2004</td>
<td>83 percent</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. CALI Lessons Gave Me a Deeper Understanding of the Topic and/or Reading Material: Percent of Respondents Answering True

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Full-Time Respondents</th>
<th>Part-Time Respondents</th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>94 percent</td>
<td>94 percent</td>
<td>94 percent</td>
<td>96 percent</td>
<td>93 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2004</td>
<td>83 percent</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked if students would prefer to do CALI lessons or read a legal research textbook, 83 percent of the fall 2005 respondents and 74 percent of the fall 2004 respondents would prefer a CALI lesson over reading the text. Slightly more full-time students and male students prefer CALI lessons over reading the text than their part-time or female counterparts. (See Table 4 for more details.) In written comments, students emphasized the interactive nature of the lessons, the quizzes and their instant feedback, and the entertainment value of the alternative format. CALI lessons also obtained rave reviews from those who identified themselves as visual learners. On the other hand, a few students did not appreciate the format of CALI lessons, citing eye strain, technical difficulties with the Web site, and the inability to print CALI lessons.7

In sum, 76 percent of students feel CALI lessons are effective, 51 percent of students feel CALI lessons are interesting, and 94 percent feel that CALI lessons give them a deeper understanding of the material. In addition, there is a student preference for the interactive format of CALI lessons over the printed text. Do the instructors rate the effectiveness of CALI lessons as high as their students?

### Table 4. I Would Rather Do CALI Lessons Than Read a Legal Research Textbook: Percent of Respondents Answering True

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Full-Time Respondents</th>
<th>Part-Time Respondents</th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2005</td>
<td>83 percent</td>
<td>85 percent</td>
<td>77 percent</td>
<td>83 percent</td>
<td>78 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2004</td>
<td>74 percent</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite student expectations, CALI lessons cannot be printed in the graphical format viewed by students when completing a lesson.8

Common technology glitches encountered by GSU students were quiz scoring issues for lessons with clickable images or “hot spots,” uploading scores to LessonLink, and problems registering on the CALI Web site. Concerns about these issues have been conveyed to CALI’s staff and they continue to take steps to improve in these areas.

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There are many different approaches to teaching legal research. One instructor noted how most students embraced the different approach using CALI lessons. This instructor recognized how students appreciated the instructor’s efforts to vary the way they could learn the material.

**Future Use of CALI Lessons by Law Students**

It is clear that the majority of students like CALI lessons as a supplement to their legal bibliography class. Now, let’s explore whether they will use CALI lessons to supplement other law school courses. When asked if students will use CALI lessons in other subjects throughout law school, 78 percent of the fall 2005 respondents and 81 percent of the fall 2004 respondents answered “true.” In written comments, a large number of students stated that they plan to use the CALI lessons in their property class. Other students see CALI lessons as a review tool, a way to clarify concepts from readings and lectures, and a quiz resource for concepts they are trying to grasp in other courses. On the other hand, there were a few students that will not use CALI lessons again. Some simply disliked the lessons. Others simply don’t have the time.

**Conclusion**

Legal research and writing skills are essential to every attorney’s career. As educators it is a constant challenge to keep students engaged in learning these essential skills. The implementation of different teaching resources, such as CALI lessons, may provide an excellent alternative or supplement to the traditional reading/lecture combination. This case study shows that the use of CALI lessons in legal research courses is a preferred and effective approach from both the student and instructor perspective. If we imagine that the survey participants are a cross-section of the American law student population, the lesson for us is that our students are willing to embrace, and actually prefer, alternative approaches and formats to learning legal research and writing skills.

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