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

Technology for Teaching ... is a periodic feature of Perspectives, designed to introduce and describe the ways in which teachers of legal research and writing are using technology to enhance their teaching. Through Volume 9, this column was edited by Christopher Simoni, Associate Dean for Library and Information Services and Professor of Law, Northwestern University School of Law. Readers are invited to submit their own “technological solutions” to Mary A. Hotchkiss, Perspectives Editor, University of Washington School of Law, William H. Gates Hall, Box 353020, Seattle, WA 98195-3020, phone: (206) 616-9333; e-mail: hotchma@u.washington.edu.

By Elizabeth G. Adelman¹

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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 data² 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.”³

In 1999, a group of five librarians known initially as the “Gang of Five”⁴ 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

² GSU legal bibliography students were surveyed during the fall of 2004 and the fall of 2005. The 2004 and 2005 surveys were drafted and the data were analyzed under the supervision of a credentialed specialist in research methods. The surveys were submitted to, and approved by, the university's Institutional Review Board (GSU IRB Protocols H05556 and H06061). The data from the 2005 survey form the basis of what is reported in this article. Data from fall 2004 are reported for comparison purposes only if the same questions were asked in the fall 2005 survey. Student participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The fall 2004 survey was administered as a TWEN® quiz and the fall 2005 survey was administered to students on the last day of class by a volunteer from the second-year class. The survey data were compiled and entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. In this article, the results from both surveys are, for the most part, expressed as percentages.

³ CALI's mission statement is located at <www2.cali.org/index.php?fuseaction=static.mission> (last visited June 6, 2006).

⁴ Nancy Johnson, Kit Kreilick, Victoria Trotta, Gretchen Van Dam, and Sally Wise.

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Georgia State University College of Law legal research instructors during this project. In addition, the author wishes to thank Nancy Johnson for her support of this project and her contributions to this article and Kristina Niedringhaus for her editorial assistance.

“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.”

thematically into a grid. The current grid⁵ has been developed by the Gang of Five's progeny, the Legal Research Community Authoring Project Advisory Panel. To date, there are about 53 CALI lessons in the legal research category and this number is growing fast. Lessons actually used in GSU's first-year legal research program varied by professor. See Table 1 for a list of topics that are typically taught in first-year legal research courses and the CALI lessons that could be used to supplement the assigned reading for these substantive units.

Description of the Legal Research Program

The legal research course at GSU is a one-credit, pass/fail course required for each law student in the 1L curriculum. During the fall 2004 and 2005 semesters, there were four sections of the course and each section was taught by a different law librarian. The evening section of the legal research course consisted of mostly part-time students. The other three sections were filled predominantly by full-time students.

The textbook policy for the legal research program changed for the incoming fall 2004 students and remained the policy for fall 2005. Collectively, four legal bibliography instructors drafted short chapters on each topic taught in the program. The chapters were used in lieu of a traditional textbook. The chapters were supplemented by relevant CALI lessons, which were to be completed outside of the classroom.

We sought classroom management software to help us organize the various components of our courses. Classroom management software enables the instructor to organize and make available documents, Web sites, chat rooms, links to CALI lessons, and other resources in one central Web-based location. Blackboard (LexisNexis®), The West Education Network® or TWEN (West),

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.⁶ 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.

⁵ The legal research grid is available at: <www2.cali.org/index.php?fuseaction=lessons.gridlist&categoryid=24&categoryname=Legal%20Writing%20&%20Research> (last visited June 6, 2006).

⁶ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Federal Legislative History Research—Compiled Legislative History by Lee Peoples• Researching Federal Legislative History by Nancy Johnson
Cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anatomy of a Case by Brian Huddleston
Case Finding (Digests and ALR®)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• American Law Reports by Kimberli Morris• How to Find Case Law Using the Digests by Brian Huddleston
Administrative Law Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Periodicals Indexes and Library Catalogs by C. Andrew Larrick
Citators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updating/Validating Case Law Using Citators by Rebecca Trammell

“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.”

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. In addition, the respondents consider CALI lessons an excellent review tool.

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

	All Respondents	Full-Time Respondents	Part-Time Respondents	Male Respondents	Female
Fall 2005	51 percent	46 percent	64 percent	48 percent	38 percent
Fall 2004	83 percent	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

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

	All Respondents	Full-Time Respondents	Part-Time Respondents	Male Respondents	Female
Fall 2005	94 percent	94 percent	94 percent	96 percent	93 percent
Fall 2004	83 percent	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Student Preferences Regarding Format of Learning Tools for Legal Bibliography

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?

Effectiveness of CALI Lessons as a Teaching Tool: The Instructor Perspective

All four instructors agree that CALI lessons are an effective teaching tool and they plan to assign them in future legal research classes. Technology glitches aside,⁸ instructors agree that students who did the CALI lessons as a supplement to the reading excelled in obvious ways over their classmates who did not do the CALI lessons. For example, one instructor explained that the completion of an assigned CALI lesson as preparation for class provided students an additional opportunity to have the material presented a second time during the lecture. This instructor noted that these students asked excellent questions, providing evidence that they had an understanding or were on the cusp of understanding difficult concepts such as how to navigate a print digest.

In sections where some exam questions were taken directly from the CALI lessons, instructors observed that students who completed the CALI lessons tended to score higher on exams. Also, instructors noted a significant increase in final exam scores during the fall 2005 semester. They attribute the increase in scores, in part, to making more CALI lessons available in fall 2005 as compared to the previous year.

“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.”

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

	All Respondents	Full-Time Respondents	Part-Time Respondents	Male Respondents	Female
Fall 2005	83 percent	85 percent	77 percent	83 percent	78 percent
Fall 2004	74 percent	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

⁷ 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.

“ [T]he 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. ”

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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Another Perspective

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