Secondary to None:
An Analysis of Secondary Source Lists and Treatise Finders at the Top 50 Law Schools

Background
Having “practice ready” graduates that enter the workforce requiring minimal training from senior attorneys has become a key goal in legal education in recent years. In support of this goal, the AALL Academic Libraries Special Interest Section (AALL ALL-SIS) has produced several surveys asking practitioners what skills new attorneys lack. Though the group’s June 2013 report on the survey results showed that almost half of attorneys thought recent grads used secondary sources “adequately,” the June 2015 report highlighted numerous comments from practitioners stating that more effective use of secondary sources—particularly treatises—would lead to significantly more time- and cost-efficient research.

Research Questions
1) Does the law library’s site have a page specifically address secondary resources?

2) Does the law library’s site explain the importance and use of treatises/secondary sources?

3) Does the law library’s page list treatises for specific subjects?

4) Do the treatise lists signify which treatises are the most respected?

Results
- Note: because of the way the U.S. News Report addresses ties, there were 51 schools in my data set.

Question 1: Does the law library’s site have a page specifically address secondary resources?

Of the 25 websites that did have pages dedicated to treatises, only 19 discussed the use and/or importance of treatises.

The most successful of these 19 discussed how to find and access treatises and how to judge the quality of a treatise.

Best Examples:
- Vanderbilt University
- Washington University in St. Louis

Question 2: Does the law library’s site explain the importance and use of treatises/secondary sources?

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Question 3: Does the law library’s page list treatises for specific subjects?

Outlier: University of Southern California topped the list with 139 subjects listed, but I question whether the number and specificity of the subject terms hinders access.

Question 4: Do the treatise lists signify which treatises are the most respected?

Conclusions
- Just over ⅛ of law school library websites in the top 50 law schools do not address secondary sources/treatises.
- Libraries could address this issue with minimal work by creating a guide explaining the use and importance of treatises/secondary sources and linking to outside treatise finders such as Georgetown and Harvard.
- For maximum effect, libraries could start with the above, then expand to include treatise lists for 20-60 subjects.

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