



*Nathan Headrick, law student at Georgetown University, and Ellen Callinan, library Web services coordinator and adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University law library, provide the student and librarian perspectives of using online tutorials.*

## Speakers Provide Blueprint for Online Tutorials That Satisfy Librarians, Faculty and Students

by Peter A. Hook

Law librarians and others desiring to create and use online tutorials will want to consult the audio tape of the Annual Meeting program H-2: "Using Online Tutorials to Teach Legal Research" for advice. The program provided a pragmatic blueprint on how to quickly create numerous online tutorials for legal research and writing programs, along with suggestions on how to incorporate online tutorials into the legal research and writing curriculum.

The strength of this program laid in the multiple perspectives of the speakers. Representatives of three different groups — a student user, a faculty member and a librarian — from the Georgetown University Law Center discussed the creation and use of a series of online legal research tutorials that were developed specifically for the Georgetown law students.

**Nathan Headrick**, a law student who recently used the tutorials in his legal research and writing class, prefaced his remarks by stating that he was part of "a generation that took the [Law School Admissions Test] on a computer and not at a hard wooden desk." As a result, students in his generation are receptive to online learning, he said. To prevent law students from taking "the path of least resistance," Headrick encouraged tutorial designers to compose their tutorials so that students don't skip to the online problem set or get by with minimal effort. Today's media- and image-driven society calls for visually refreshing tutorials that are more akin to *USA Today* than the *Wall Street Journal*, Headrick recommended. He also suggested integrating real-world issues as often and as soon as possible, customizing the tutorials so students feel like they "own" the experience, and creating personalized welcome screens with a checklist of what the user has already completed.



*Cheryl Nyberg, reference librarian at the University of Washington Gallagher Law Library, poses a question.*

**Ellen Callinan**, a reference librarian who was responsible for the Web authoring of the tutorials, examined the mechanics of producing numerous tutorials with a consistent appearance and formula. She described the Georgetown experience as an "assembly-line production." First came development of a prototype. After the prototype was vetted to both the librarians and the legal-research instructors, it became the model for all subsequent tutorials. Colors, graphics, branding elements, navigation tools, site maps and help icons were standardized for all tutorials. Callinan made numerous shell pages containing each of these features. Librarians inserted the content they had written for each topic into these shell pages. This division of labor accommodated the various degrees of Web-authoring experience among the library staff and enabled rapid production of the tutorials.

**Diana Donahoe**, a member of the legal research and writing faculty, described the genesis of the tutorials and how they were used in class. She explained that Georgetown immediately began using the online tutorials to teach legal research after the success of the school's initial online tutorial to orient students about general legal research. The students who used the original orientation tutorial and accompanying quiz before the beginning of classes were prepared. They attended the first day of class with a basic understanding of legal materials. Success with this tutorial prompted the research and writing faculty to request tutorials on all first-year research topics. Each of the five writing instructors was paired with two librarians to create the content of the various tutorials. Faculty research assistants tested the completed tutorials. Donahoe explained the various ways that the tutorials and accompanying problem sets were used by the research and writing instructors. The tutorials were heavily used by the students as a review tool for the end-of-the-semester exams.

Georgetown plans to improve subsequent versions of the tutorials. In response to student feedback, the new tutorials will contain interactive quizzes and more visual elements throughout. The improved tutorials will also better highlight key points and integrate the teaching of legal research with the writing exercise.

(continued on page 31)

The speakers could have mentioned a few more important items to make this already-strong program even better. They could have acknowledged the need to make tutorials accessible to sight-impaired users. (See program J-1: “Creating Better Connections: Access to Web Site Content for the Sight-Impaired.”) I would have also preferred that the speakers suggest books and articles that could help librarians create online tutorials or point out other successful online tutorials from other academic institutions. Nonetheless, these very minor shortcomings were easily offset by the speakers’ successful blueprint and their varied and poignant insights. The loud and sustained applause at the end of this well-attended program was definitely merited.

The specific tutorials discussed during the program can be found at <http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/tutorials>.

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