

HOMEGROWN INGREDIENTS: CREATING TOOLS WHEN THE INFORMATION LITERACY SUPERMARKET FAILS YOU

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When established sources change formats, switch platforms, or upgrade, they are not always user-friendly, especially for inexperienced researchers. Librarians are flexible, but typical resources -- print, web-based, or otherwise -- are not. By capitalizing on the librarian's research skills, the professor's subject expertise, and the plethora of free tools, the learning experience students (and professors and librarians) have is more rewarding. Customized research tools lead students to relevant information in simpler, more efficient ways, so instruction can focus on how to *use* the information students are finding rather than complicated, confusing information hunting.

THE CHALLENGE

The University of Dubuque is a small, private institution that offers undergraduate, graduate, and seminary programs. The focus of the undergraduate degree is professional programs with a liberal arts core. The Charles C. Myers Library employs five professional librarians and five paraprofessionals.

One of the Core Curriculum requirements is COM 101: Introduction to Speech Communication, traditionally taken in a student's first or second year. There are approximately ten sections of the course offered each semester. A full-time communications faculty member acts as course coordinator, providing the common syllabus, instructional tools, and support to all faculty, both full-time and adjunct, who teach the course. The author of this paper acts as library liaison to the Core Curriculum, including this course. Three of the five librarians

provide the common Information Literacy (IL) instruction for this course.

There are three major speeches in the course: fact, policy, and values. Librarians lead two research sessions during the semester, one for each of the last two speeches. The third major assignment in the course, a speech based on a recent Supreme Court case, is the focus of this paper. The student must articulate the value at stake in the case, both sides of the question at hand, and the ruling of the court before stating their stance on the issue. A vast majority of the information the students require to write the speech is publicly available in the case's legal briefs and opinions. Therefore, the information literacy instruction is focused on two primary tasks: selection of a Supreme Court case and location and use of the appropriate documentation.

SUPREME COURT CASES: THE CASE FOR A DATABASE

Ideal Supreme Court cases for this assignment satisfy the following requirements:

- Has been argued in the last five terms
- Has a value-based issue at stake
- Covers a topic of interest to the student

The course instructors and librarians are more concerned with the first two requirements; the students only seem to see the last of those three. They want the crazy arrest stories while the instructors want a crazy arrest story that led to a question of search and seizure issues from last year's docket.

Supreme Court cases are unlike current bills in Congress, the subject of the students' previous speech, in that they are not named in a manner that suggests the topic of their

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content. Also, legal researchers search for a particular case or legal precedent so court case documentation is arranged to facilitate that process. It is not organized for students, most with little political knowledge, to search for a case based on its values and topic as measured by its eye-catching story.

Originally, students chose a court case by browsing *Supreme Court Debates*, a print source that summarized current cases and their arguments. However, the source was recently digitized making it much more difficult to browse. The librarians switched gears and led students to a series of websites such as *The Oyez Project* or *On The Docket* which tag cases with metadata like subject area or keyword. Eventually, though, these sites failed to keep current with either their tagging or their content. This was quite problematic once the tagged cases aged beyond the assignment's five-year limit. By that point, the search strategy for students was reduced to guess and check, clicking on random cases until something appropriate and interesting emerged. Librarians and course instructors continued to employ this frustrating strategy for an additional year with *SCOTUSblog*, a website that did not tag the cases, but did have all the court documents in one compact location, before they decided to take the situation into their own hands.

THE DATABASE: THE DIRTY DETAILS

Instead of changing an effective assignment to adapt it to inadequate search tools, the course coordinator and library liaison created and adapted tools to fit the assignment. They collaborated to develop a local database of recent Supreme Court cases that fulfill the expectations of the assignment, tagging them with issue metadata as well as relevant keywords.

The first step to creating the database was to select a content platform to use. Considerations included: ease of use on the public end, price, ease of updating, ability to link out to external content, browsability, searchability, and ability to mount in a course page. Tools within the university's course management software (CMS), Microsoft Excel and Access, and Google Spreadsheets and Docs made the short list of possibilities.

Options internal to the CMS were dismissed as viable options as all lacked ability to search or sort. Access would have had the cleanest looking product with the most sophisticated search options. However, the complexity of both the creation and student use quickly negated it as an ideal solution. Excel passed the rest of the tests, but failed on the scale issues. This resource requires an update at least once each semester, and there are approximately ten sections of this course each semester. Using Excel would have required, at minimum, a new file upload to the Library CMS course and changing the link to that resource in every section of the course each semester. Web-based options would eliminate this extra layer of work.

Google Docs did not offer any searching or sorting options beyond simple text searches of the content. Google Spreadsheets, however, offered a web-based option that was free, easy to update, easy to use, and allowed for both searching and sorting. The librarians had also previously used it for other

instruction purposes. A method for linking to external content was initially unclear, but a quick search of Google help pages led to the correct formula.

The course coordinator had previously compiled a list of cases students had used in the past to aid current students in making selections. Using that list, as well as the library liaison's familiarity with the cases, a product of having assisted in the class for seven semesters, a beta-version of the database was constructed. It contained fields for the case name, year argued, and value at stake. The library liaison and a library graduate student intern working on the database quickly realized that beyond the amendments, the "value at stake" was hard to pin down succinctly. In order to help with this, the library liaison and course coordinator agreed upon a set of controlled vocabulary aimed at novice college student searchers. This field was later changed to "issue" and a field of controlled keywords was also added. Each course name linked out to the corresponding *SCOTUSblog* page that contained all of the documentation for the case.

A shortened URL of the database in list view (<http://df.tba/-courtcases>) is then linked to the library page in the course in the CMS and also linked directly in each section's page. When edits or updates are necessary, Google automatically republishes the database under the same URL, making any relinking unnecessary.

I GOT "ARRESTED" STORY: SCHOOLHOUSE ROCK FOR THE COURTS

Regardless of how they find the case, students struggle to recognize which legal document contains the information they need. They also struggle to apply the correct court documents to the assignment at hand. The argument, value presented in the case, and the court decision are buried in legal documents with names that do not illuminate their content. Beyond this, the judicial process is a bit of a mystery to most students. During the unit on legislation, most instructors show the Schoolhouse Rock video "I'm Just a Bill." No such resources exist explaining the road to the Supreme Court and the myriad of documents produced along the way.

To combat this, the library liaison devised a first-person, interactive narrative, taking a case from original arrest through the Supreme Court decision that introduced relevant court documents and basic background information about the Supreme Court along the way (Appendix A). After a semester of telling the story, it was evident the students need something they can refer back to after the research day. A humorous visual storyboard, created in Prezi, provides students with a deliverable to aid memory and recall of the information after the research day. The "I Got Arrested" storyboard illustrates the process and names the legal documents utilized at each step, while providing context to why they are written. The "why" behind the documents helps students to remember what each document contains and also explicitly links the documents to the outline template from the textbook. The call-and-response nature of the narrative requires the students to be actively involved in the

“story time.”

The prezi (<http://dft.ba/-arreststory>) is embedded in a webpage on the library CMS page which is then linked in each section’s page. The centralized linking allows for easy updates.

HOW DOES IT WORK? STEPPING OUTSIDE THE POINT AND CLICK BOX

The database and story time were first piloted during the summer in a session with six students. The initial feedback was quite positive. A few language choices were changed in the database, but no major changes were necessary. Students navigated the database with ease after a short introduction. The story went over well, but the overall success of that portion of the instruction was the quality of the final speech. Implementation of the two resources at the same time was important. Using the database to select cases freed up precious class time to invest in the story time. This was particularly important as use of the database alone would have led the students directly to the court documentation that meant nothing to them. Context at the point of need is key.

BUT DID IT WORK?--INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK

Instructors of the course have been overwhelmingly supportive of the new initiatives. On a recent questionnaire, all of the instructors said the database has significantly decreased the amount of time students have spent selecting a case, leaving them more time to focus on crafting a better final product. The course coordinator explained, “Having the students get their case picked earlier with the database allowed me to work with them in greater depth on building an effective speech. That’s the most important thing for me in this assignment, and so I’m incredibly grateful for it.” Another instructor commented that students were “drastically relieved following the library session as the database enabled them to effectively and easily navigate through cases that were of personal interest and followed all course guidelines.” The same instructor commented on the ease with which students were able to navigate the database, which eliminated much of the confusion she had encountered about the assignment prior to its introduction. The overall consensus about the database is that instructors appreciate the ability to spend more time on the course content rather than approving selected cases for the students.

The reaction to the story time has also been positive. Many of the instructors commented that the story does a good job of explaining a complex process on the students’ level. One instructor explains, the “story effectively engages the students and facilitates class discussion.” Another says, “I think it makes the learning process of how a case gets to the Supreme Court fun and easy to understand.” A few concerns about the length of the story arose. The library liaison is currently working on strategies to cut length without sacrificing content. Another modification suggested by an instructor regarding annotating the textbook’s outline template has already been implemented. At the beginning of the story, the librarian asks the students to pull out their textbook to the outline template so they can

annotate it with the names of the appropriate documents for each section. This has aided in increasing students’ attention as they see direct utility of the information about to be presented.

In addition to the instructors’ feedback, the librarians involved in teaching the lesson have noted a few issues with the resources. The database requires updates, additions, and clean-up each semester. Deleting cases that have aged beyond the assignment and adding the new cases each fall had already been taken into consideration. However due to additional cases being picked up mid-term or cases that are dropped rather than decided, the database needs more updating than originally envisioned. Additionally, some of the *SCOTUSblog* URLs change after they are initially linked in the database, mostly due to changes in case names.

The storyboard worked well in class and has only required minor tweaking of text colors for ease of reading when projected. One side effect of the narrative is that it requires librarians to teach and reinforce subject content rather than just research process. The librarians who taught this class had to familiarize themselves with the judicial process well enough to be able to field questions from students about it. It is a different feel than teaching a hands-on research process.

CONCLUSION

It is still a little early in the implementation process to draw too many conclusions, but one instructor sums it up this way: “Students had a much better end product, in other words, they were able to find the raw materials they needed, construct the argument, and then go beyond this to get into the underlying cultural issue, which is the point of this speech.” From the librarian’s perspective, creation of local tools can be time-intensive, but the resulting value to all involved is well worth the effort.

APPENDIX A: “I GOT ARRESTED” NARRATIVE

It’s Supreme Court story time, ladies and gentlemen. I’m going to tell you the story of how I “got arrested.” No I didn’t get arrested, that’s what the air quotes are for. Follow along, and pay attention. During this story, I’m going to introduce you to the Supreme Court process and the loads of documents along the way. These documents are going to be useful later. Oh, and I’m going to need your help at a few points along the way so be ready. Ready? Ok.

Once upon a time, I was in a bit of a hurry, as I often am, and ran across the street where there wasn’t a crosswalk. The next thing I know a cop car is flashing their lights. I panic. Because, you know, I’ve never been in trouble before. I blurt out “I didn’t mean to do it. I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have done it.” Little do I know, that the cop wasn’t out to get me for jaywalking, he was looking for someone who looked exactly like me who was guilty of a much more heinous crime. They throw me in the cop car, and I get a lawyer. Not a very good one as you’re about to find out, because I’m convicted solely on my admission of guilt.

As I’m rotting away in jail, I get to thinking. I don’t ever remember being read my Miranda rights. *What are my Miranda rights?* [A chorus of “You have a right to remain silent....] Wait, you’re telling me I had a right to keep my mouth shut?? Huh. Ok, so after I remember this, I hire a lawyer, a better one this time. And we appeal my conviction on the grounds that I wasn’t read my Miranda rights and didn’t know I had the right to keep my big mouth shut. This happens at the Supreme Court of Iowa. Unlike at the lowest level, there are no juries, just three judges. Sadly, despite my lawyer’s best efforts, the court agrees with the state. But we’re not done, we appeal again, this time to the Circuit Court of Appeals. There are 13 Circuit Courts that cover the country. *Like my first appeal, my case is about what? Cause it’s not about me jaywalking any more. It’s about* [violation of Miranda rights]. Right, my Miranda rights. So anyway, my lawyer argues that I didn’t know I had the right to shut up. And the police/state argue back that it wasn’t their fault they didn’t have enough time to read me my rights before I went on blurting out confessions. I was nervous! The judges decide the state was right. But I’ve got one last fight. The Supreme Court, we’ll call the case *Me v. Iowa*. We’ll get to why it’s called that in a second.

Now, mind you during this entire process, which can take YEARS, I’ve been rotting away in jail. The first step to this process is go get the court to take my case. Because they don’t have to. They’re busy people. So my lawyer writes up a document called the **petition or writ of certiorari**, just the beginning in a long string of documents with Latin names that make no sense to us non-lawyers. In this petition, my lawyer argues why the court ought to take my case. It’s all about how my Miranda rights were violated, but also how it’s so much bigger than that. Because when the Supreme Court decides a case, it’s not just about me. It affects everyone in that situation. It sets precedent. Take the Miranda rights for example. Those and the fact that they have to be read to you, comes directly from a Supreme Court case called *Miranda v. Arizona* in 1966. Before that, you were just expected to know your rights. Anyway, where was I, petitions. Right. So my lawyer brilliantly explains how I’ve been wronged and how important it is that the Supreme Court fix this and make sure it doesn’t happen to everyone else in this situation. But because all’s fair in love, war and the Supreme Court, the state of Iowa gets to write something too. They call it the **brief in opposition**, and basically they say, don’t worry about it Supreme Court, don’t waste your time, we decided right the first two times. No worries.

Thankfully my lawyer is more convincing, and the Supreme Court takes my case. It’s called *Me v. Iowa*, because the side who is unhappy with the last decision and petitions the court is always named first and is called the **petitioner**. You might want to take note of that since that term shows up on your outline!

Ok, a quick overview of the court. *Anyone know how many judges (also called justices) are on the court?* [nine] *Out of curiosity, anyone know how many of them are women?* [three] Right. And they work on a calendar sort of like you guys do, from October thru July, so when you start looking at the year something was argued or decided, it’ll say

11-12 like academic calendars do. *How do you get to be a Supreme Court Justice?* [presidential appointment, Congress approval] *And how long do you get the job for?* [til death or retirement] Man. Cushy job. Summers off, job til you die? Awesome.

Alright, back to the process. So they've taken the case. When the lawyers argue their case, they only get 30 minutes to get through their entire argument. Plus, any of the 9 justices can interrupt them at anytime to ask a question. It'd be like trying to get through a 15-page paper presentation in a room with 9 of your professors interrupting with questions. You think the lawyers going to get through the whole argument? Yeah, not so much. So...my lawyer writes up another document called a **Merit Brief**. In that, he or she outlines their entire argument, (because they know they won't get through it all in court). And Iowa's lawyer does the same thing, called the **opposition brief**. But remember how I said this case won't just affect me and the state of Iowa? Other people are concerned about the outcome. Iowa's got some friends. And because we love paperwork in this world, they get a chance to say something too. In this case, a few other states and the Police Association write **Amicus Briefs**. If any of you speak Latin...or more likely Spanish, you can guess that amicus means friend. Literally "friend of this side." But fear not, I'm not alone either. The American Bar Association and the ACLU are concerned about me. They also write "friends of the court" briefs. My lawyers also get a chance to write a "this is why Iowa is wrong" **reply brief**. So, **briefs** are where the arguments live. Remember that, there'll be a quiz later.

The court finally hears the case. Like I said before, each side gets 30 minutes. During that, the court reporter you always see in the front typing away furiously in Law and Order is there typing up a **transcript**. You can get your hands on that, one website actually formats them like it's a chat transcript with little icons for each person. They don't allow video cameras in the court (because they haven't quite caught up with the 21st century among other reasons), but they do allow **audio recordings**, so if you'd rather listen to it than read it or to cure your insomnia, feel free to download it and put it on your iPod.

So they've finally heard it, and now they decide! Well, not right away. Like any good college student, they like to procrastinate until the due date. Remember their weird calendar? Right, so they might hear the argument in November, but technically they don't have to tell us anything until July. So, they put it off. It's not uncommon for them to wait months before telling us who won. Speaking of which, *how many votes does it take to win?* [five, just a simple majority] I won't hold you suspense any longer. I win, 5-4!! Obviously...I'm telling the story aren't I? So, those five, whom I like to call the winning justices, have an obligation to tell me, well...my lawyers, why they decided what they did. Basically they have to write up a paper explaining themselves. Again, like most people, they realize writing in a group is tough, so the person who's been on the court the longest in that group decides who's gonna write it up. Usually the newest justice gets stuck with it. Nice to know it sucks to be the newbie there too. Unless of course they think it's going to be super important case that everyone will know like *Roe v. Wade* or *Miranda*. Then they write it for themselves. That thing they write? It's called the **opinion or decision**. Now those on the losing side do the same thing. Only it's called the **dissent**, because they disagree with the other side. Sometimes you get that one person who either votes yes or no, but for a different reason. They write a **concurring opinion**. Those aren't super common, but just in case you run across one.

So that's it. That's the process. And now you may be wondering, but why do I care? Because all those documents I just explained are what you'll need to write your speech. I took this next part from your textbook outline sample. Here's where you'll find all pieces of your speech.