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Book Review of Finding Answers to Legal Questions, Second Edition

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Tucker, Virginia M., and Marc Lampson. *Finding the Answers to Legal Questions, Second Edition*. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2018. 232p. \$75.

*Reviewed by Susan David deMaine**

¶76 Law librarians know all too well how challenging it can be to work with public patrons who have legal questions. It comes as no surprise that these questions would be even more challenging for public librarians, most of whom lack legal expertise and legal research experience. Virginia M. Tucker and Marc Lampson's *Finding the Answers to Legal Questions, Second Edition* is a well-written and useful book aimed at public librarians who want to increase their understanding of legal resources and research techniques, as well as build a collection to help their patrons access the most frequently needed information. The authors are both experienced county law librarians, and their expertise and experience are evident throughout the text.

¶77 Like the first edition, this second edition begins with foundational information about the American legal system, secondary sources, and primary sources. The text is quite readable and packed with explanatory information. A non-law librarian may still find it somewhat challenging due to the unique nature of the resources the authors cover, such as *American Law Reports*, but on the whole, the authors do an excellent job of explaining in laypersons' terms what the resources contain and how they work.

¶78 One aspect of this foundational part of the book that was distracting was that the text ping-ponged between print and electronic resources for each branch

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of government, first at the federal level and then at the state level. For example, in the section on U.S. Supreme Court cases, the text first discusses print resources: the three main reporters, *United States Law Week*, digests in general, and three different specific digests, even including the *Decennial Digest*. The authors then switch to websites and cover the Supreme Court's website, Cornell's Legal Information Institute, and Oyez, finishing with mentions of FindLaw, FedWorld, FDsys, and a few others. The narrative switches back to print for the courts of appeals, and the cycle repeats. Then again for the federal district courts, other federal courts, and finally once more for the states in the next chapter. By the end of Part I, Cornell's LII has been covered at least ten times. "Recaps" throughout this part restate the resources in a table format, which helps, but they still bounce between print and electronic. This seems an odd choice since most public libraries are unlikely to have many of the print materials, except perhaps for state statutes. A single explanation of print reporters and digests followed by electronic recommendations would have been less jumbled.

¶79 Part II is designed to prepare the public librarian for the reference interview and actual search for information. It includes a discussion of challenges familiar to law librarians who provide reference services—a patron's lack of knowledge about the legal system, the law, and legal research—and goes on to discuss the basics of formulating search strategies in both print and electronic materials. It also includes information to help the public librarian locate further help in the form of both law libraries and lawyers. As with Part I, this section of the book is, on the whole, accessible while still being dense with information.

¶80 In Part III, the authors dive into frequently requested areas of the law such as debt collection, wills, bankruptcy, and employment. They use a question-and-answer format to cover some very basic law (yes, you need to respond to a summons; no, you cannot skip out on child support) and introduce relevant topical resources to help answer questions. For example, in the chapter on family law, these questions appear: "What makes a marriage invalid or void? And isn't there a way to annul a marriage? What are the differences anyway?" (p.108). The response does not provide a direct answer, of course, but it does briefly discuss annulment versus divorce and then goes on to guide the librarian to consult the state statutes on marriage. For other questions, the librarian is directed to secondary sources such as form books or treatises, fifty-state surveys, Nolo guides, ABA materials, and many other resources. This part of the book, with its practical and realistic approach, stands out as the most useful and thorough. Given the nature of the questions, there was some repetition of "consult the state statutes" and similar answers, but this did not distract from the content.

¶81 Part IV offers advice for the public librarian on building a legal research collection and evaluating materials, both print and electronic. The advice on jurisdiction, currency, and using Google Scholar is spot-on, but the advice on creating a website, blog, or wiki seems dated and almost patronizing given that public librarians are likely to already have these skills, and if they do not, this book is not the place to get them. Similarly, the discussion about looking at domain name suffixes to assess website trustworthiness seemed unnecessary given the target audience.

¶82 This publication is a second edition, and the structure and content appear to have changed little. URLs and suggested materials have been updated to reflect

changing titles and online locations, and some updates have been made to the text where necessary. It is a more compact design and feels less like a workbook than the original edition. Appendixes include a short glossary as well as a summary list of online resources, which is considerably shorter than the list that appeared in the original edition. The volume concludes with a thorough index.

¶83 Despite a few flaws, this book is an excellent resource for public librarians, its target audience, looking to expand their capability to help patrons with legal questions. It would also be valuable to a new law librarian, and sections of it would be appropriate and helpful for law students, paralegal students, and public patrons undertaking their own research. Even for the experienced law librarian, Part III suggests resources that may be useful in answering *pro se* questions in certain areas. This book fills a real need and does so admirably.
