

# Glendale College Library Workshop

## Government Resources - Outline

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### Core Competencies:

- Recognize the need for information and define a research topic by *identifying the types of materials that are appropriate for the project*.
  - Develop and implement an effective search strategy appropriate for an information need by *choosing and accessing appropriate information sources for the research question*.
  - Assess the research strategy by *determining whether the information retrieved is relevant and sufficient for the project*.
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### Preparation:

- Get copies of the Government Resources handout that includes the activity worksheet and exercises.

### Workshop Outline:

1. Start off by asking students *why* government resources are important:
  - Largest provider of statistics, studies, research due to ability to provide grants/funding.
  - Government resources provide information on issues that are personally relevant to students.
  - Often, the government will have *something* on a topic students are researching.
  - If time permits, explain to them the Federal Depository Library Program; in short, this program was established to protect "the public's right to know by collecting, organizing, maintaining, preserving, and assisting users with information from the Federal Government," and further, to ensure "equity of access and dedicated to free and unrestricted public use...to serve as one of the vital links between the people and our Government."  
**6-7 minutes**
2. Very briefly review the Print Resources on the Government Resources handout and note how the handout is organized.
  - Choose two print sources to discuss. Statistical Abstracts and Occupational Outlook Handbook seem to be the most interesting to students. They will actually look at these when you hand them out.
  - Other print sources of interest are listed in the handout. Students can take notes on their handouts on whichever print source you choose to discuss.  
**6-7 minutes**

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3. **Discussion/Class Activity:** Verbally walk students through the first two exercises on **RAND** and **Lexis Nexis**. Very briefly introduce and show students how to access five databases on the handout, focusing primarily on **Rand** and **LexisNexis ACADEMIC**. *These activities are designed to get students to be more interactive and participatory.*

**RAND** -- Have students try to come up with their own customized statistical report using the **Rand California** database of statistics. Tell them that RAND is not comprehensive but does have a variety of statistics. They should use the guided worksheet to jot down notes.

- Ask students to explore and browse the link **Statistics**, which provides a nice synopsis of the various databases available for searching.
- Ask students to explore and browse the link **What's New**, which provides the latest statistics databases available for searching.
- Users can also construct their own customized statistical report for assignments and presentations. Have students try out this feature.
- The **CountryWatch** database has this same function (to create your own customized statistical report) in their **CountryWatch Data** feature. If there's time, students might be interested in this database as well.

**LexisNexis ACADEMIC** -- This is a very rich database, but is less user-friendly than most. Point out the news tabs and have them explore the links on the left and take note of the kind of information they find, which they can jot down on their guided notes handout. Point out the **How Do I?** link, and warn them about the date limits for each type of search; most default to **"Previous six months."** After this initial exploration:

- Ask students to explore and browse the link **Polls and Surveys**, which is located under **Reference**. Users may search for polls by keyword or question. They may limit by sponsor, number of participants, and date. An example might be "school prayer."

**15 minutes**

*If time permits, ask 1 student each to present his/her/their results by showing what was done for each database. (Try the control software for this part of the workshop.)*

4. **Discussion:** Ask students to think about the general structure of the government, namely the three branches (judicial, legislative, executive) of government (*see handout/worksheet*), and the three levels of government (federal, state,

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local/municipal). This discussion will introduce them to the idea of how different government websites organize their information: for example, by service, by department, etc.

- Use (a) [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov) , (b) [www.ca.gov](http://www.ca.gov) , (c) <http://lacounty.info> , or <http://www.ci.la.ca.us/>. Students critique the sites for initial reactions, organization, ease of navigation, comprehensiveness of information; how is the information organized and why, etc. Which is most useful? Why?
- Remind them that not all government websites will contain the same kind of information. It depends on what the specific jurisdiction governs. If they don't find information on a specific jurisdiction's website, they should try another level of government to see what it has. One government site might tell the public how to do something, and another might just provide legislation or policy information.
- Students generally like [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov) the best, and complain about [www.ca.gov](http://www.ca.gov). These two are good sites to contrast since they are so different in terms of organization and content.

**15 minutes**

#### **Individual or Small Group Exercise:**

**Students will:**

- (1) select one of four topics included in the worksheet**
  - (2) select the government website they think would have the most useful information on the topic**
  - (3) answer the questions for exercise**
  - (4) discuss observations in class**
- Challenge students to first use the organization and structure of the website to find the information. Then, they can go to the search engine to see what kind of results they get compared to what they found by using the organization of content.
  - Search engines are not all the same and will not find everything. For example, search engines will not search for content within PDF files and a lot of government documents might be in PDF format only.

**15 minutes**