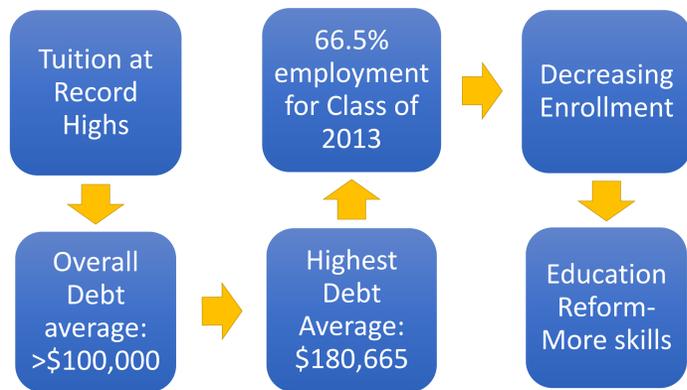


# Librarian Support of Students in Law School Clinics

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## Trend in legal educational reform: Increased focus on skills



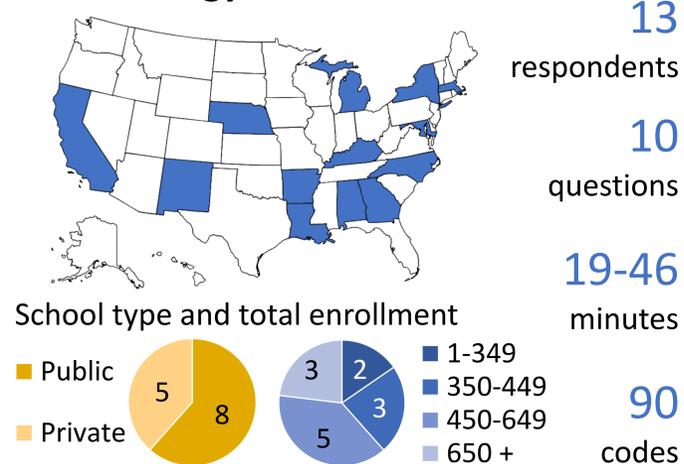
Recent economic pressures have wreaked havoc on the job prospects of law students. The rising cost of the degree along with perceived decreased benefits (low employment) have led to falling enrollment. Reform efforts have focused on adding skills-based or experiential learning in the form of law school clinics. Attorneys (clinicians) supervise students as they represent real clients in specific legal areas which vary by clinic (e.g. immigration law).

## How can law librarians support clinic students?

This qualitative project uses **confidential interviews** with 13 clinicians to examine:

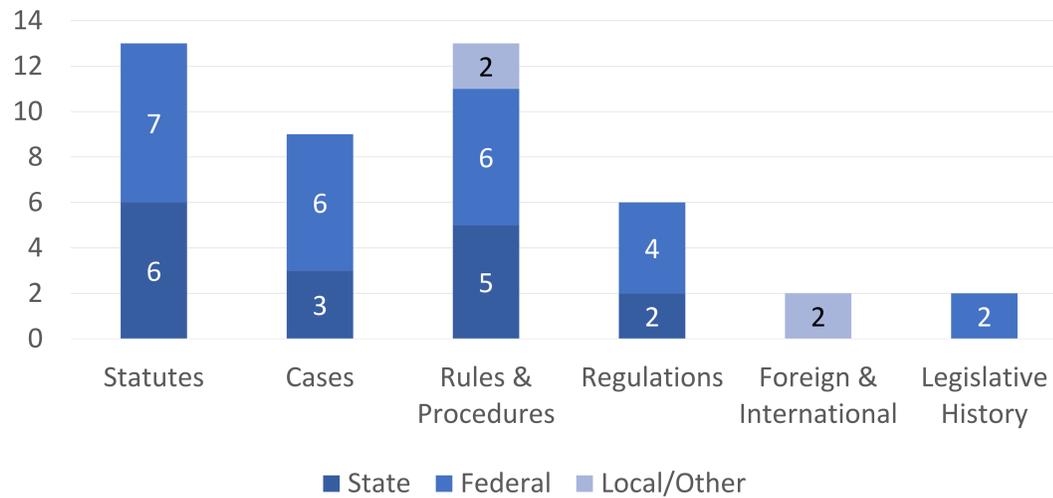
- 1) What areas of law, resources, or skills can librarians focus on to better prepare students for clinic?
- 2) What are librarians currently doing to support clinics?

## Methodology: The interviews



## Most commonly used primary sources in clinics

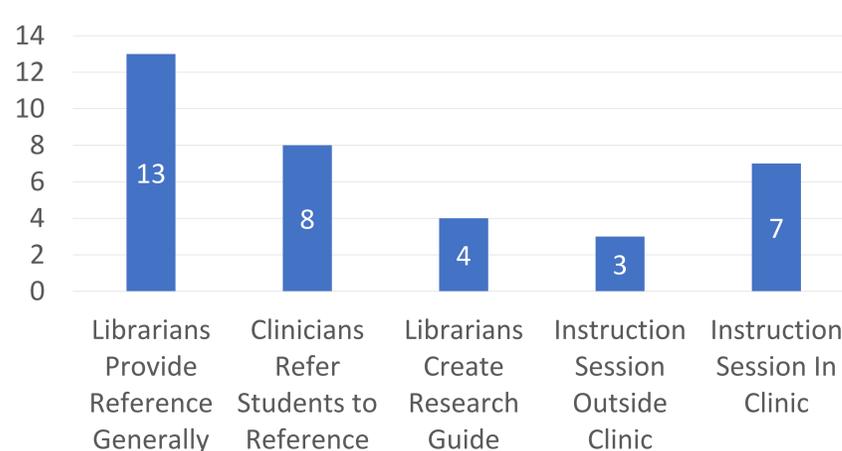
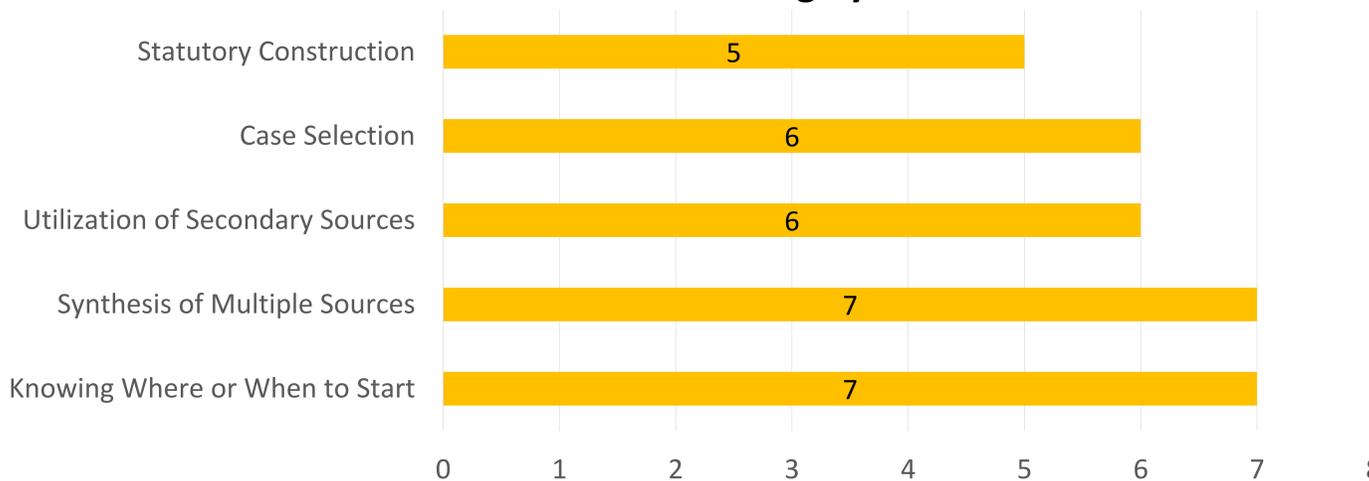
Clinicians identified the most commonly used resources for librarians to focus on in legal research instruction. All 13 clinics used **statutes** and **court rules** and procedures, something that many academic classes fail to address adequately. Many clinicians noted that students were required to go beyond primary law research. The most common type of source used in conjunction with primary law were **subject-specific treatises and practice guides** (secondary sources).



## Other necessary research & sources

1. Subject-Specific Secondary Sources (10)
2. Background in New Areas of Law (8)
3. Non-Legal or Factual Research (3)

## Skills Perceived as Lacking by Clinicians



## How are librarians currently supporting clinics?

Although clinicians expressed positive feelings about librarian support, the majority of that support came in the form of general reference services. Only 7 of the clinics invited librarians to offer research sessions formally in the clinic. **None** had library liaisons or co-teaching models.

## Emerging themes

- ❖ **Legal research low priority:** Compared to the substantive work of legal representation, legal research instruction was given relatively low priority in all clinics. This was mostly due to time constraints and the necessary prioritization of client work.
- ❖ **The perils of electronic research.** In the words of one clinician, **“They don’t know how to use books... I thumb through the [statutory] code and I say ‘Oh, I didn’t see that.’ I might be looking for something... and I might find something else that I wasn’t aware of. And you just don’t get that on the computer training that they get.”** Though clinicians framed the problem as student reluctance to use books, the more critical issue that emerged is that students’ electronic searching *methods* (primarily keyword searching) do not effectively educate them about the **context** of the law or answer they seek. This leads to shallow, incomplete searching that may entirely miss critical legal issues in a case.

## Conclusions

1. There are significant barriers to adequate legal research instruction in clinics. Broader issues related to prioritization and electronic research seem to impact the success of students as much as any subject expertise or lack thereof.
2. There is **no one size fits all model** of clinic support. Each clinic uses different sources and different law.
3. To effectively support students in clinics, **law librarians must engage with the clinics** at their own schools, learning the ins and outs of the clinic practice and requirements in order to help guide law students as they become lawyers. The interview modeled in this project may act as a guide for librarians who wish to do so.