

The paper I am submitting for consideration of the Library Research Award is the Legal Memo I wrote for my Introduction to Environmental Law (ENSP330) class. As a part of the class, we had a library research information session where Librarian Judy Markowitz gave us an overview of how to do legal research. She created a very helpful research guide page specific for our class.

For my legal memo on the Barro Blanco dam in Panama, I began my research by searching for news articles to gain an understanding of both sides of the debate. I came up with this topic as we were able to choose from a list of ten questions relating to environmental law. Since I am interested in international environmental law and indigenous rights, I chose the following question- Did the Panamanian government violate international law by approving the Barro Blanco hydroelectric dam project? For my initial news searches, I used the suggested environmental news sites (Greenwire and GreenFILE) given on our class' library research page. These were helpful as they had comprehensive coverage on the environmental policy debate about the Barro Blanco Dam.

After I gained a basic understanding of the issue, I began focusing my research tactics on international law resources. Specifically I used the HeinOnline Foreign and International Resources, LexisNexis Academic, Globalex, International Law Guide from the Library of Congress, and the World Legal Information Institute. These resources outlined on our class' research guide page gave me helpful sources for the international law instruments I was referencing in my paper. I gained a better understanding of the difference between "soft" non-binding international legal instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples versus binding international environmental agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. These international instruments were central to my argument that Panama did violate international law when approving Barro Blanco since it did not properly gain indigenous consent as mandated by the aforementioned legal instruments.

Judy Markowitz helped me learn the proper techniques on conducting effecting searches in the given databases. She informed us on how to narrow searches by looking for keywords in only the title rather than the whole text. This was extremely helpful in producing sources that were highly relevant to my research. Additionally, my professor for the course- Joanna Goger- gave me advice specific to international environmental law since it is a complicated field to understand. She helped me figure out the strategy I should use for my argument, encouraging me to also mention "soft" international legal norms since they do also have an impact on the government.

When selecting sources, I chose ones which discussed about the issue of the Barro Blanco dam while maintaining credibility. I wanted to ensure that my sources were balanced and portrayed both aspects of the debate. Additionally, I tried to cite as many peer-reviewed articles as possible since this strengthened the validity of my argument. While I tried to find journal articles, I also used internet sources found on organizational websites since they were helpful for more specific information about the Barro Blanco Dam. I also found the text of the international agreements online and used these to strengthen my argument that the Barro Blanco dam did violate international law. I did so by citing articles in these agreements which outlines the proper approval process for mega projects when in indigenous areas.

During the research process, I learned about the complexity of international environmental law and how it is important to see what countries are signatories to the declarations and conventions in order to see whether it actually has a binding effect on them or not. Additionally, understanding the difference between the binding status of the different types

of international agreements- conventions, declarations, protocols, etc- was crucial since each one has a differing impact on the parties who have signed on to it. This is important for my future career since I hope to work on international environmental policy issues. Specifically, I want to work on international environmental management conflicts, and understanding the international legal arena surrounding the environmental issues is crucial for effective conflict mitigation.

Reflecting on my research experience, I would change the order in which I did research on the international environmental agreements. I would have first done background research to understand the framework of binding versus non-binding international agreements. After fully understanding this, I would then begin my research on the specific agreements relevant to my case. The library would be a better place for my research needs if there were guides which the librarians could point us to who had a background in specific types of research. Specific to my case, it would have been extremely helpful if a librarian had a point person on hand who has done extensive research on international environmental law and then could suggest me to him/her in order for help on specific issues. These “point people” could be put into a database available for students so that when a student is has questions on a given type of research, they could go directly to an expert.