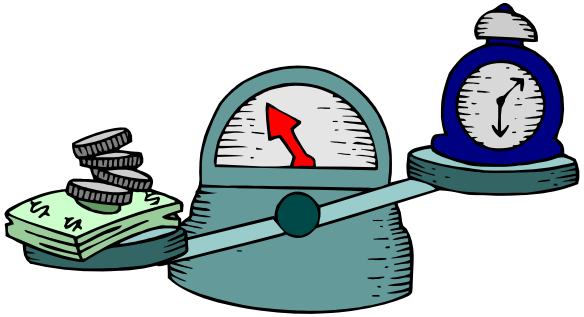


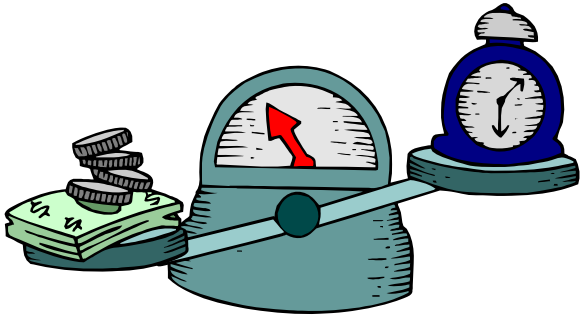
"Teaching Dollars and Sense"

Incorporating Cost-Effective Research Techniques in the First-Year LWR Course

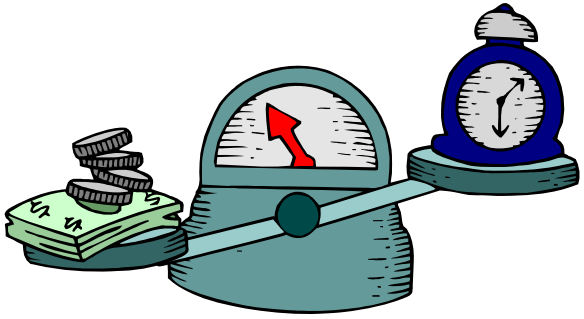
Alison Julien & Kira Zaporski
Marquette University Law School

Teaching Cost-Effective Research

- Why?
- How?
- Was it worthwhile?



Why teach cost-effective research strategies?

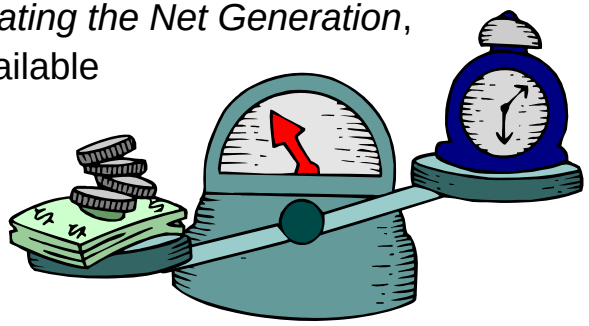


Audience

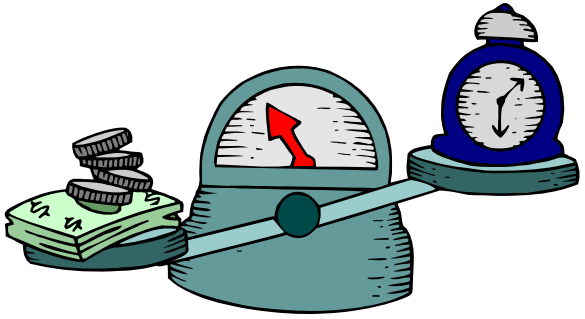
Audience

- "Recent surveys exploring college student use of the Web versus the library confirm the commonly held perception of faculty and librarians that students' primary sources of information for coursework are resources found on the Web and that most students use a search engine such as Google as their first point of entry to information rather than searching the library Web site or catalog."

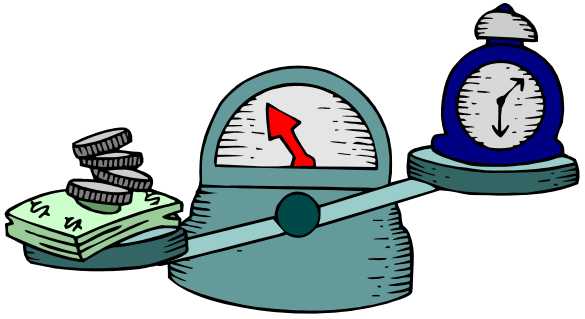
Joan K. Lippincott, *Net Generation Students and Libraries*, in *Educating the Net Generation*, 13.3-13.4 (Diana G. Oblinger & James L. Oblinger, eds., 2005), available at www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgen/.



Why teach it in the first year?

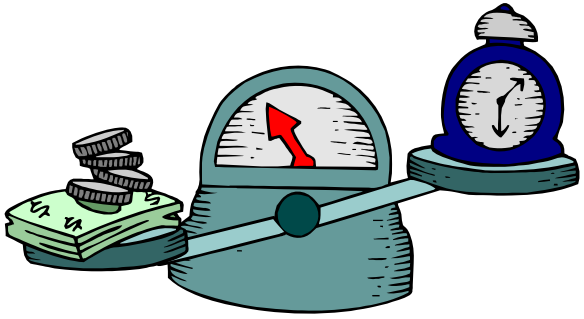


How do we teach cost-effective research strategies?



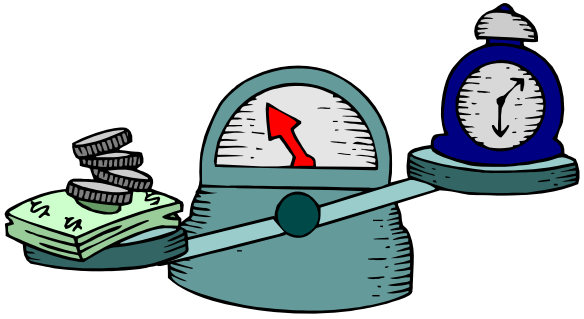
Exercise

- Linked to writing assignment
- Consists of time sheet, “Research Trail,” and “Search History”
- Students calculate total cost of research by adding billable hours to “hard” online research costs



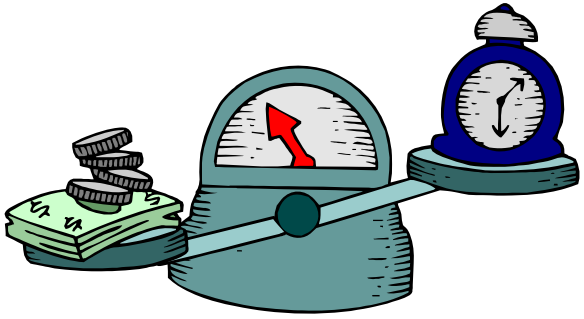
Timing

- Choose a time when teaching students the pricing structure is less likely to “chill” their research process.



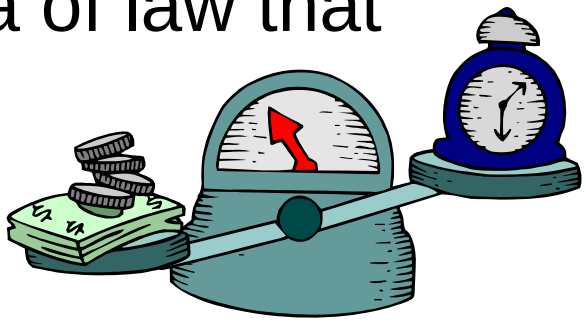
Cost-Effective Research Strategies

- Know the culture of your workplace
- Know the pricing plan for electronic sources in your workplace
- Know the billing practice in your workplace



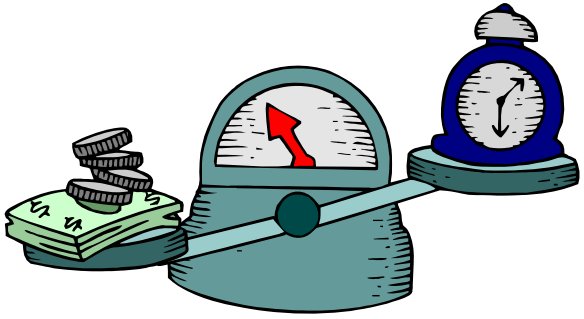
Cost-Effective Research Strategies

- Plan your research path
  - Consider whether you have a logical starting point
    - Do you have a citation to a relevant authority?
    - Do you need to begin with a secondary source to get a broad overview of the area?
  - Determine whether there are sources that are particularly helpful for the area of law that you're researching



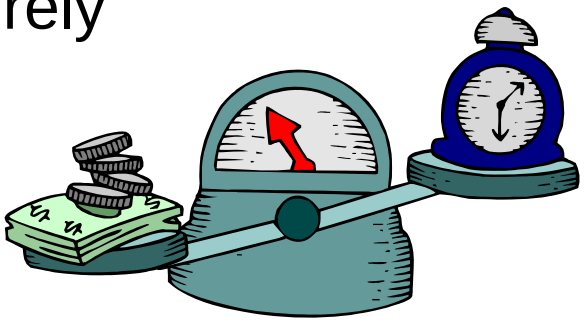
Cost-Effective Research Strategies

- Document your research path
  - Take notes as you go
    - Resource, including edition or currency
    - Search terms
    - Briefly, the results
    - Where you left off and suggestions to yourself for next steps



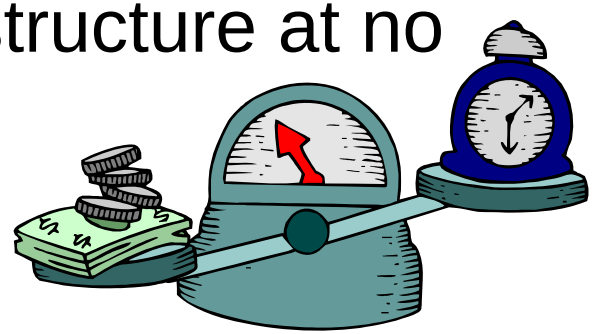
Strategies for Online Research

- Get some background and vocabulary before going online
- Choose a pricing option (hourly or transactional)
  - Hourly makes more sense when you are doing many searches but are not staying online to review the results
  - Transactional makes more sense when running fewer searches, planning to remain online to review results, or planning to search entirely within databases in your flat-fee structure



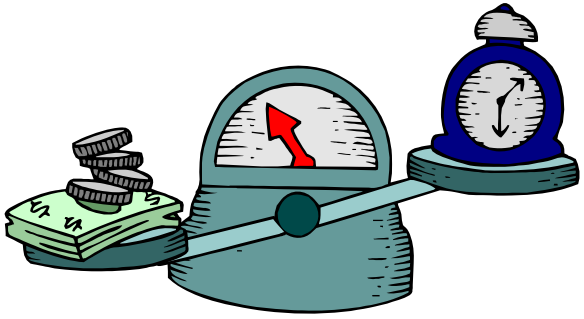
Strategies for Online Research

- Many workplaces have negotiated some sort of flat-fee structure within their transactional pricing plans
  - They are then able to run searches in databases within that flat-fee structure at no additional charge
  - They are also able to use “Get a Document/Find” or “Shepard’s/Keycite” for documents within that flat-fee structure at no additional charge



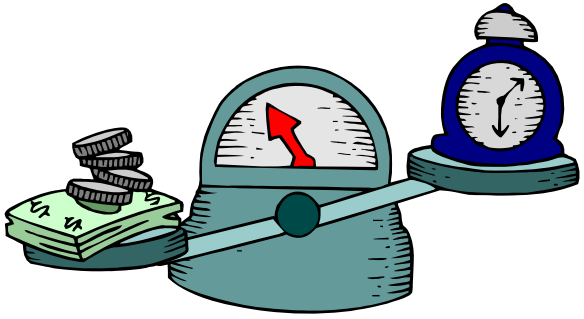
Strategies For Online Research

- Transactional Pricing
  - Find/Get a Document (by citation) - $5.00/cite
  - Keycite/Shepard's - $5.00/cite
  - Printing – $5.00/document; $1.50/page
  - Standard Database (single state) - $50.00/search
  - Larger Database (combined databases) - $100.00/search
- Hourly Pricing
  - Standard Database – $5.00/minute
  - Larger Database – $10.00/minute



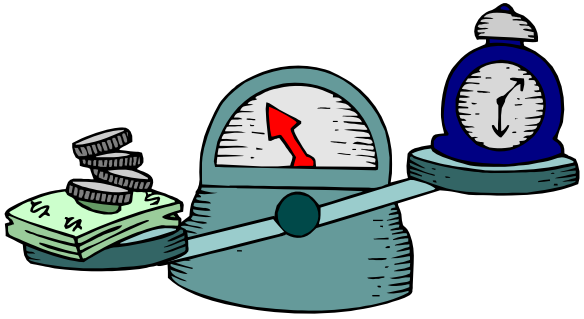
Strategies for Online Research

- Choose an appropriate database
- Choose the most appropriate search
  - Natural language?
  - Boolean?



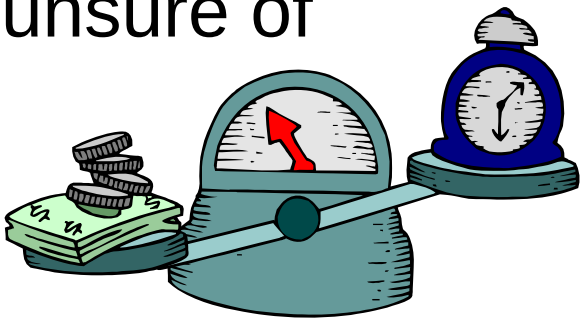
Cost-Effective Research Strategies

- Begin with a broad search
  - Narrow the search using focus/locate
- Precision v. Recall
  - find the right balance between "recall“ and "precision"



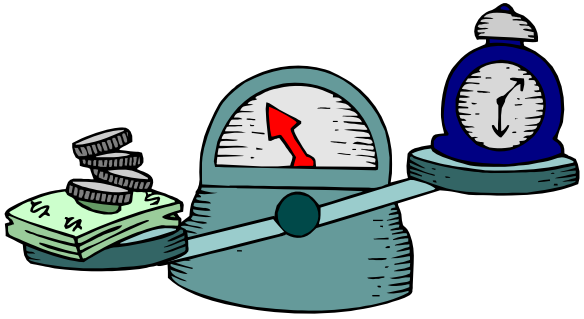
Cost-Effective Research Strategies

- When running a Boolean search
  - Synonyms
  - Connectors
  - Universal character
  - Root expander
- Don’t forget to spell-check your search!
  - Use the universal character if unsure of spelling



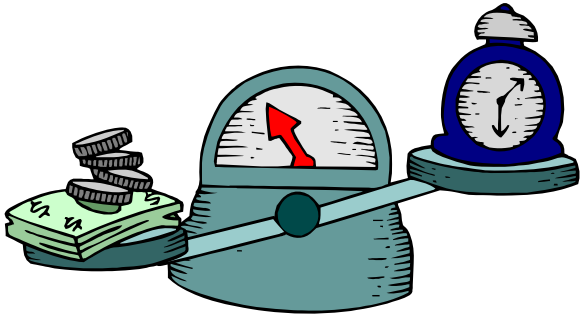
Cost-Effective Research Strategies

- Directory
- TOC
- Index
- History / Research Trail
- Results Plus
- Book Browse/Docs in Sequence

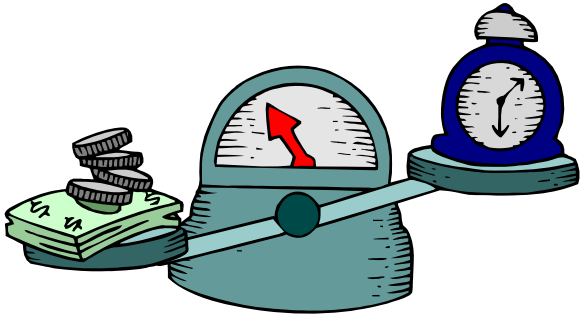


Cost-Effective Research Strategies

- “Free” online research
  - LexisOne
  - Findlaw
  - State and federal government websites
  - Law firm websites

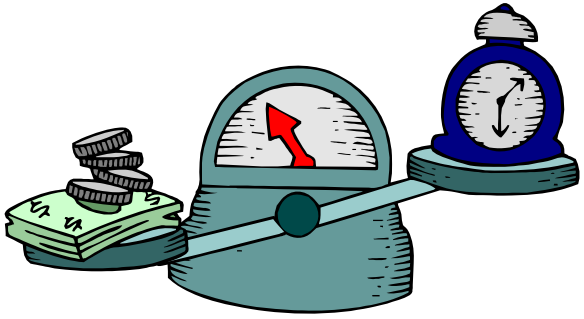


Was the exercise worthwhile?



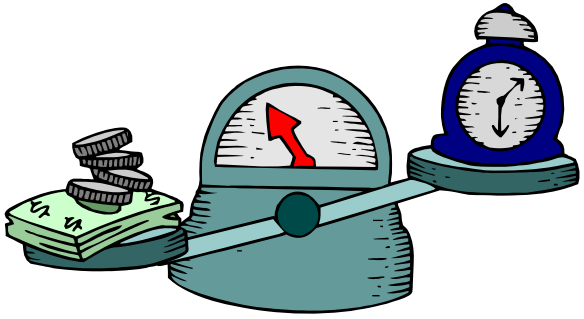
Lessons we learned from reviewing the assignment

- Students learned
  - To think before doing - to formulate a plan before jumping online and plugging in terms
  - To take good notes (and therefore avoid backtracking)
  - The importance of tools that provide context
  - The importance of vocabulary



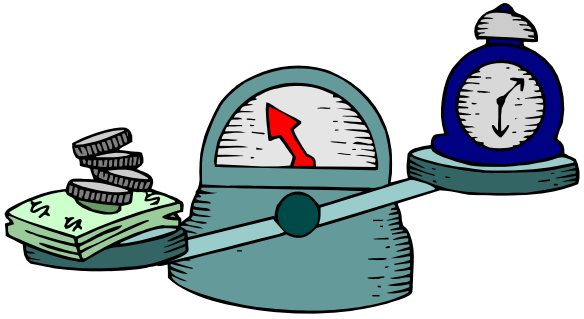
Lessons we learned as to students' use of print resources

- Half of our students used print resources at some point in the research process
- Of the students who used print, most of them
  - Used it at or near the beginning of the research process
  - Used it to
    - Generate search terms
    - Get an "overview"
    - Locate statutes and court rules



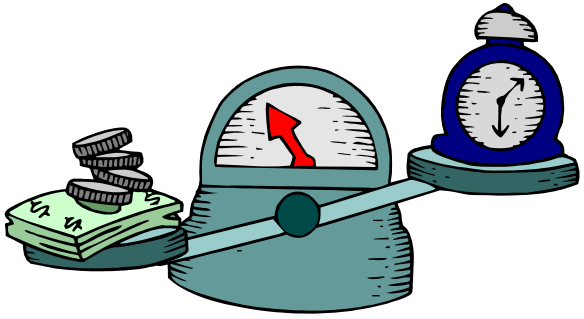
Lessons we learned as to students' use of online sources

- Students
  - Chose appropriate databases
  - Used topical search tools effectively
  - Increased and improved their use of Boolean searches
  - Used Keycite and Shepard's for updating *and* for research



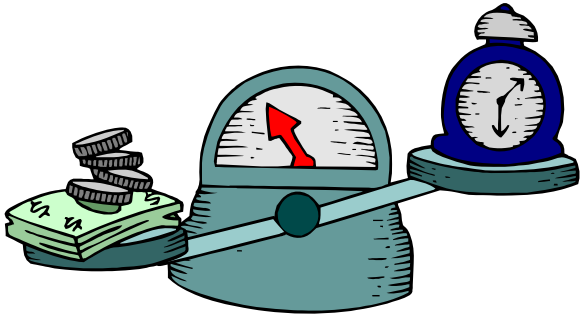
What did students report?

- They learned
  - The importance of following a plan
  - Not to duplicate their efforts
  - To pay attention to the “hard costs” *and* the billable hours
  - The importance of continuing to refine their skills with print sources



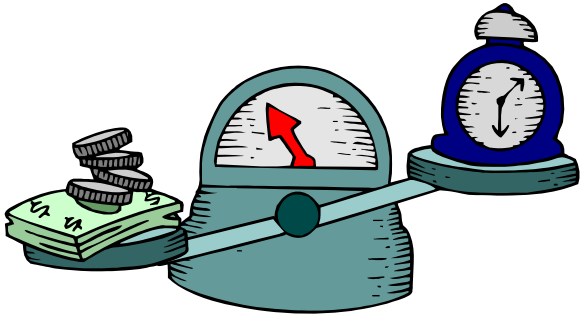
What did students report?

- To be more conscientious about database selection
- To think before “clicking”



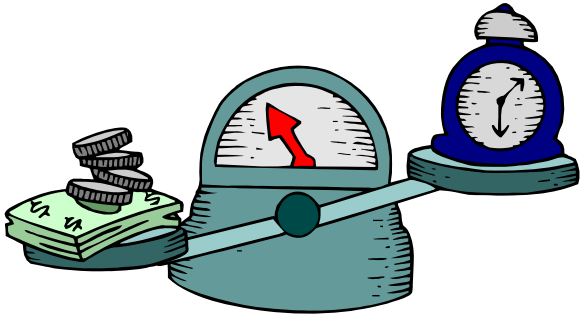
Other student comments

- “I know that students are pressed for time, but it is absolutely worth investing additional time in this exercise … for the purpose of becoming a better researcher.”



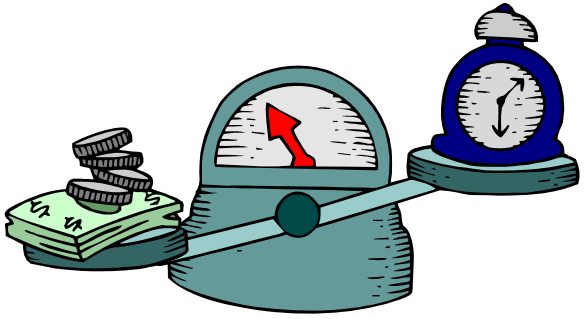
Other student comments

- “I . . . think that it is important to get into the habit of researching cost effectively early on in law school; this way when you enter the professional world it is like second nature and you don’t have to completely change the way you research when you get a job.”



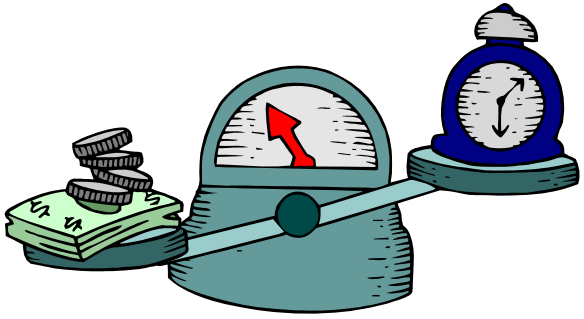
Other student comments

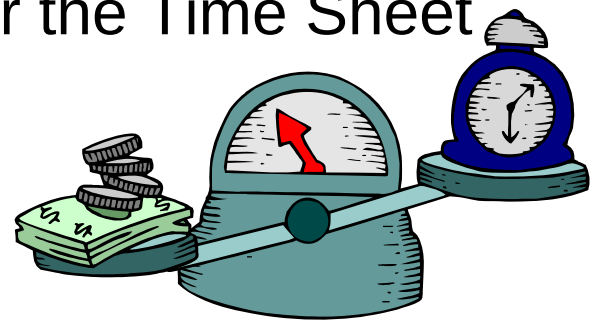
- “I think the exercise is absolutely necessary, and I did learn a great deal from it. It helped curb my procrastination somewhat, especially since I had to account for all I was doing …I think it’s like our parents making us eat our vegetables: We hate it at first, but we look back on it later on in life when we’re more mature about such things, and we appreciate the necessity of doing it.”



Other student comments

- “It was even easier to use cost cost-effective searching methods than the very costly searching methods at times.”
- “I felt the exercise was extremely helpful and alleviated concerns I had before starting summer employment.”



Some final “tips” about the exercise

- Understand that anonymity can be difficult to achieve
- Remind students that “Search History” and “Research Trail” aren’t saved forever
- Consider whether you want electronic copies or hard copies
- Emphasize the importance of keeping up with the time sheet entries
- Suggest that they keep track of their transactional costs as they go
- Consider giving them a few days after they turn in the writing assignment to calculate costs for the Time Sheet Exercise