

College of William & Mary Law School
William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository

Library Staff Publications

The Wolf Law Library

2012

Book Review of Fundamentals of Government Information: Mining, Finding, Evaluating, and Using Government Resources

Benjamin J. Keele
benjamin.j.keele@gmail.com

Repository Citation

Keele, Benjamin J., "Book Review of Fundamentals of Government Information: Mining, Finding, Evaluating, and Using Government Resources" (2012). *Library Staff Publications*. Paper 39.
<http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/libpubs/39>

Copyright c 2012 by the authors. This article is brought to you by the William & Mary Law School Scholarship Repository.
<http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/libpubs>

Fundamentals of Government Information: Mining, Finding, Evaluating, and Using Government Resources, by Eric J. Forte, Cassandra J. Hartnett, and Andrea L. Sevetson. New York: Neal Schuman Publishers, 2011. 396 pp. \$80.00. ISBN 978 1 55570 737 8.

Government information presents special challenges for librarians and researchers. A unique classification system and major changes due to digital publishing are two important examples. In *Fundamentals of Government Information*, the authors address these and other challenges, producing a guide that deserves a spot in any library that assists researchers looking for information from the federal government.

The first part of the book follows in the vein of *United States Government Information: Policies and Sources* (Peter Herson et al., 2002), discussing the history and basic structure of government information and covering the major types of legal and regulatory documents: congressional materials, presidential documents, laws, and regulations. While *United States Government Information* is more thorough in its coverage of sources' history and mentions many obscure presidential documents, *Fundamentals of Government Information* focuses more on describing how to use the many digital and print access points for legal materials. Especially complete and clear is the text's explanation of how laws and administrative regulations are made. I am seriously considering assigning these chapters as readings for law students in my advanced research techniques class.

The second part switches from organizing its chapters by the publishing agency to the topic of the documents. Chapters by outside authors are dedicated to educational, environmental, health, and scientific sources. Many different agencies may deal with a given topic, so this organizational scheme is appropriate. Reading these chapters, I felt pulled into the mindset of a government information librarian who considers which elements of the vast governmental structure would be involved in a given question. For instance, searching for patent information may require searching patent applications from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, reports from the Senate Judiciary Committee, or opinions from the specialized U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Statistical products from the Census Bureau and other research agencies receive extensive explanation. While proprietary statistics databases such as ProQuest Statistical Insight are mentioned, the book's focus is on free government databases. A chapter on researching in government archives and filing Freedom of Information Act requests gives guidance on obtaining government information that is not widely available.

Fundamentals of Government Information is an eminently readable introduction to government information, but it also references

plenty of sources for further research. For instructors, each chapter ends with five exercises to help students practice working with government materials. Since government information is increasingly moving to digital formats, the book devotes more attention to online access points than print ones. While this makes the book current, libraries with strong print government document collections, such as regional repositories, should not discard older classics such as Hernon, Sears, or Morehead. Nonetheless, *Fundamentals of Government Information* is an excellent guide and belongs in any library that helps patrons with questions relating to government publications.—**Benjamin J. Keele, Reference Librarian, Wolf Law Library, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA 23187, USA** <bjkeele@wm.edu>.

doi:[10.1016/j.acalib.2011.11.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2011.11.014)
