Book Review: Groundhog Day, ..., AGAIN!


George Cho, Geographic Information Science: mastering the legal issues, 2005, John Wiley, xxxiii and 440 pp including References (pp 397-422) and Index (pp 423-440)
ISBN 0-470-85009-4 (hardcover currently unavailable in Australia, April 2006), 0-470-85010-8 (papercover $75.95)

It must be said that this book is a disappointment. It could only be used by the current authors of Professor Enid Campbell’s Legal Research: Materials and Methods as an omnibus example of how not to write a legal text.

The word limit imposed by the Journal’s book review editor precludes the reviewer from citing all the numerous examples of poor research and writing that clearly demonstrate the few examples included here are not isolated slips. The book is replete with dubious or ambiguous or incorrect statements of law and other failings.

Easy reading is enabled by difficult writing. With care and diligence and the guiding hand of a competent editor, readers would not be forced to mull over what is meant by:

The highest court in Australia is the High Court, which consists of seven justices, though it is unusual that the court sits in banc (page 24).
The book suffers throughout with sloppy syntax and even sloppier citations: which author, proofreader, editor, or even publisher allowed Aubry v Éditions Vice-Versa Inc (Supreme Court of Canada) to be cited as Aubrey v ...ditions Vice-Versa Inc with the misspelled party’s name disguising the connection to the earlier Quebec Court of Appeal case of Aubry v Duclos?

The starting point for the reader is the presumption that the effort expended by the author coupled with the publisher’s decision to publish indicates a valuable and creditable text. Here, each page dispels that presumption. The more one reads the less confidence one has in the book’s value.

Seven years ago this reviewer commented unfavorably on what he then saw as an excessive RRP of $215 for an earlier text by the author. With the benefit of hindsight he now retracts that view. Because of the cost of acquisition it is his current belief that the expensive ask of 1999 encouraged potential purchasers to avoid the earlier book. Unfortunately the lesser price of this text may gull those same purchasers and he concludes by suggesting that publishers have a duty to affix a higher price tag to their more egregious wares.

MMP

[The reviewer previously reviewed George Cho’s Geographic Information Systems and the Law: Mapping the Legal Frontiers (1998) in 73(6) Law Institute Journal 64 (June 1999). He then recommended potential purchasers to await the publication of a second edition which had not been deprived of the care that a book on this topic deserves.

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