Lesson #1: It’s complicated.

Situation: Tons of publications, websites, online tools from various levels of government, but with no standardization in presentation, hardware/software needs, and/or coverage

Overall Strategy: Find order in chaos
Strategies for Librarians

Identify departments/agencies that “match” subject of interest and look deeper into their tools/resources

Examples:
If looking at schools:

- U.S. Department of Education --> National Center for Education Statistics --> Common Core of Data, Digest of Education Statistics
- Louisiana Department of Education --> Statewide Results and Data Center
- Parish School Board --> Individual School Websites

If unsure where might be, try:

- USA.gov
- Statistical Abstract
- Libguides from Government Information Librarians
Strategies for Students

Frameworks: Searching as Strategic Exploration, Research as Inquiry

- Stress need of using different sources to gather all information needed
- Plan research via identifying/exploring relevant producers/sources
- Include in plans that not all information formally published

Example: 4 levels of coverage
(1) National (Federal)  
(2) State  
(3) Parish (Local)  
(4) Community (Local)

Federal Government usually covers 1 + 2  
State government usually covers 2 + 3  
4 most desired, but least published; relies on primary data
Lesson #2: You can’t have it your way.

**Situation:** Each resource has different types, amounts, and organization of data. Does not always breakdown / subdivide (e.g. by geography, by race, by age) as researcher wants.

**Overall Strategy:** Look deeper; think broader.
Strategies for Librarians

Look into type and levels of information covered-- and which states participate

Example: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)
Louisiana participates with high schools, but not middle schools
Does not answer all questions (e.g. sexual health)

Check advanced search features, as more data may be available there

Example: American Factfinder

Check for contact information for questions/requests
Strategies for Students

Frameworks: Authority is Created and Contextual, Information Creation as Process

- Authority includes both societal position and direct experience
- Information in variety of formats but still authoritative
- Look at information’s creation process to determine if/how useful

Examples:

Look at methodology and advanced search features

Contact authorities (e.g. local government, residents) for data/suggestions

May not exist yet - so consider own information creation process (e.g. what format best)
Lesson #3: Stranger Danger

**Situation:** Sites (e.g. city-data.com) can provide information seeking but lack authority and documentation

**OR**

Credible organizations gather statistics but are not government, so students concerned with using them

**Overall Strategy:** Investigate
Strategies for Librarians

Try to locate same/similar data from authoritative source

Example: City-data.com uses information from the Census Bureau

Identify reputable sources for topics not covered in government

Example: Pew Research Center for religion

Spend time with students both in BI and individual sessions asking questions to highlight what they should/need to ask to ensure quality of information
Strategies for Students

Frameworks: Information has Value, Authority is Constructed and Contextual

- Give credit to ideas/work of others through attribution and citation
- Look into where sources come from/who created it
- Becoming creator, so consider how work affects others

Examples:

Look deeper than number (e.g. Does source explain how to interpret data, acknowledge original sources, or provide methodology?)

Realize they are acting as creators

As creators, responsibility to provide proof of authority/credibility in their work that they seek in others (e.g. provide notes in their tables, cite original sources)
Further Resources

Your/Local Government Information Librarian(s)

GOVDOC-L (Listserv)

State Agencies Database Project (GODORT, LibGuide)

FDLP Academy (Webinars)

Help! I’m an Accidental Government Information Librarian (Webinars)