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Agencies and branches at all levels of government publish a wide variety of reports, surveys, fact sheets, and other documents relating to their operation. This guide is an introduction to the scope, use, and location of these materials. Because of the relatively small size of the Goodson Law Library's print documents collection, this guide emphasizes electronic access, as well as on identifying materials available at other area documents libraries.

I. U.S. Federal Documents

A. Federal Depository Library Program

The federal government publishes a vast quantity of information. Many of these publications are distributed to libraries by the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) as part of the **Federal Depository Library Program** (<https://www.fdlp.gov>). Participating libraries receive depository materials for free, in exchange for providing public access to the documents collection.

The **Goodson Law Library** (<https://law.duke.edu/lib/>) at Duke has been a selective depository since 1978, and currently receives approximately 8% of available federal documents. The Law Library's federal documents collection is comprised of official court reporters, statutes, legislative history materials, regulations, administrative agency rulings, annual reports for selected agencies, treaty materials, and other law-related publications. In addition, the library collection includes historical documents that pre-date Duke Law's participation in the Federal Depository Library Program, with a particularly strong collection of federal documents from the 1930s and 1940s.

In addition to Duke Law's collection, the **Perkins/Bostock Library** (<https://guides.library.duke.edu/documents>) at Duke is a selective depository since 1890, receiving 80% of available materials. The **Walter Davis Library at UNC-Chapel Hill** (<https://www.lib.unc.edu/reference/govinfo/>) is a regional depository, which receives all of the documents distributed through the federal program.

B. Understanding Government Documents Call Numbers

Federal government documents are arranged by the **Superintendent of Documents (“SuDoc”) Classification System**, which differs significantly from the Library of Congress call number system used for the majority of the Law Library’s book collection. Federal documents are grouped by the **agency or department** that authored the documents, rather than by the **subject** of the publication.

In the SuDoc classification system, each federal agency and department is assigned a unique alphabetical identifier. Subordinate offices within that department are then identified by numbers. For example, “J” is the alphabetical identifier for the Justice Department; a document whose SuDoc number begins with “J 29” was published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The remainder of a government documents call number contains information which will be necessary in order to locate the item on a library shelf; see **Superintendent of Documents Classification Guidelines** (<https://www.fdlp.gov/cataloging-and-classification/classification-guidelines>) for a thorough explanation.

C. Locating Federal Government Documents

Many federal government documents have changed in recent years to an online-only publication format, and are easily accessible through a simple Internet search, through the **GovInfo** site (<https://www.govinfo.gov>), or through **DiscoverGov** (<https://discover.gpo.gov/>), which searches across GovInfo as well as other federal databases. However, documents published before the mid-1990s may be more difficult to locate, even in print, because the quality of indexes has historically been poor. Contact the Law Library Reference Desk if you are unable to locate a federal government document through the methods described below.

Duke University Libraries Catalog

Nearly all of the federal government documents in the Law Library’s collection are included in the Duke University Libraries’ **online catalog** (<https://find.library.duke.edu/>), and can be located by searching for the title, author, keyword, and/or subject. Printed documents which are also available in full text online will be noted in the item’s catalog record with a link labeled **“Online Version.”**

Monthly Catalog and Prior Indexes

The most comprehensive source for information about federal government documents is the official **Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications** (Law Library Documents GP 3.8; online-only as the *Catalog of Government Publications* since 2004 at <https://catalog.gpo.gov>), which began indexing federal documents in 1895. The title of the *Monthly Catalog* has varied slightly over the years. You may see references to *Catalogue of Publications Issued by the Government of the United States* (1895); *Catalogue of the United States Public Documents* (1895-1907); *Monthly Catalog, United States Public Documents* (1907-1939); or the *United States Government Publications Monthly Catalog* (1940-1950). All of these titles refer to the same publication.

Scans of the *Monthly Catalog* dating from 1895-2004 are available on **GovInfo** (<https://www.govinfo.gov/collection/monthly-catalog>) as well as in **HeinOnline**'s U.S. Federal Agency Documents, Decisions, and Appeals library (<https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE003131760>).

For researching a time period which predates the *Monthly Catalog*, the most useful general document indexes are:

1885-1894	<p>John H. Hickcox, <i>United States Government Publications: A Monthly Catalogue</i></p> <p>Available through Internet Archive (https://www.archive.org).</p>
1881-1893	<p>John Ames, <i>Comprehensive Index to the Publications of the United States Government, 1881-1893</i> (Law Library Ref Doc. I 15.2:In 2/2).</p> <p>Available at GovInfo (https://www.govinfo.gov/collection/government-document-indexes); Duke University community may search and browse this title electronically in the United States Congressional Serial Set Digital Collection (https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE003457404) with a "Publication Search" for 58-2 House Document 754.</p>
1774-1881	<p>Benjamin Perley Poore, <i>A Descriptive Catalogue of the Government Publications of the United States, September 5, 1774-March 4, 1881</i> (Law Library Rare Books Z1223 .A 1885).</p> <p>Available at GovInfo (https://www.govinfo.gov/collection/government-document-indexes); Searchable electronically for the Duke University community in United States Congressional Serial Set Digital Collection (https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE003457404) with a "Publication Search" for 48-2 Senate Miscellaneous Document 67.</p>

Finding Full-Text Documents Online

Federal documents that are listed in the University Libraries' catalog (<https://find.library.duke.edu/>) may provide a link to the electronic version, where one is available. DiscoverGov (<https://discover.gpo.gov/>) and the *Catalog of Government Publications* (<https://catalog.gpo.gov>) also provide links to electronic versions.

Many recent government documents are linked from the web sites of the agency or departments which publish them. The **Federal Agencies Directory** at USA.gov (<https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/a>) provides links to the home pages of agencies, departments and offices from each branch of the federal government.

There are several specialized government search engines that can be useful for quickly locating a document online. **USA.gov** (<https://www.usa.gov/>), the official web portal of the federal government, contains a good search engine. **Google**'s "site:[.extension]" operator will return search results from only ".gov" (government) or ".mil" (military) domain names. However, most general popular search engines (such as **Google** or **Bing**) will also successfully retrieve a government document with a search for the document title in quotation marks. In addition, general search engines will retrieve documents which are archived at non-governmental sites, such as university libraries and private organizations.

For online access to federal publications from the legislative and executive branches, see the Goodson Law Library Research Guides to **Federal Legislative History** (<https://law.duke.edu/lib/research-guides/federal-legislative-history>) and **Federal Administrative Law** (<https://law.duke.edu/lib/research-guides/federal-administrative-law>).

To locate government publications that have since been removed from federal websites, a number of projects track and archive such information:

- **End of Term Web Archive** (<https://eotarchive.org/>): archived U.S. government websites at the end of presidential administrations, back to 2008
- **Internet Archive Wayback Machine** (<https://web.archive.org/>): snapshots of websites from web crawlers; enter URL to view available captures and "Save Page Now" feature to capture webpages of interest
- **Harvard Law School Library Mirror of Data.gov** (<https://source.coop/repositories/harvard-lil/gov-data/description>) provides alternative access to federal datasets

Additional efforts to preserve historical and deleted federal government documents can be found at the **Data Rescue Project** (<https://www.datarescueproject.org/current-efforts/>).

II. State Documents

State governments also publish a substantial amount of documents. The Law Library receives a large number of primary state documents for all 50 states, including official court reporters, statutes, session laws, administrative codes, and Attorney General opinions. Much of this primary legal material is available online to the Duke Law community through **Lexis+** (<https://www.lexisnexis.com/lawschool>) and **Westlaw** (<https://lawschool.tr.com>), and to the University community via **Fastcase** (<https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE006257307>) and **Nexis Uni** (<https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008121060>). **HeinOnline** (<https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE003131760>), available to the Duke University community, also includes libraries of state session laws, state statutes, state reports of case law, and state Attorney General Reports and Opinions. Individual states may also make these resources available through their official web sites. Consult Cornell's **Listing by Jurisdiction** (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/states/listing>) for direct links to primary legal materials for all 50 states.

States also publish government documents on non-legal topics of interest, including reports, statistical surveys, and handbooks. State documents in the Duke Libraries' collection are included in the **online catalog** (<https://find.library.duke.edu/>). Duke Law's "Miscellaneous Documents" collection (Level 1, shelved after the federal Documents) includes a number of state publications.

Many states also provide their government documents in full text on their official web sites. Visit **USA.gov: State Governments** (<https://www.usa.gov/state-local-governments>) for direct links to state and territory home pages.

III. International Documents

International governmental organizations, such as the **United Nations** (<https://www.un.org>) and the **European Union** (https://european-union.europa.eu/index_en), also publish many reports and documents. The Goodson Law Library (<https://law.duke.edu/lib>) and Perkins/Bostock Library (<https://guides.library.duke.edu/documents/related>) receive many of these publications, which can generally be found in a search of the online catalog (<https://find.library.duke.edu/>).

In addition, many international organizations publish these documents on their official web sites. The **Northwestern University Library** has compiled a comprehensive list of links to the home pages of these organizations (<https://libguides.northwestern.edu/IGO>).

More detailed strategies for locating international documents can be found in the following Goodson Law Library Research Guides:

- **European Union**, <https://law.duke.edu/lib/research-guides/european-union>
- **Treaties**, <https://law.duke.edu/lib/research-guides/treaties>
- **United Nations**, <https://law.duke.edu/lib/research-guides/united-nations>

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