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 (http://www.fdlp.gov). Participating libraries receive depository materials for free, in exchange for providing public access to the documents collection.

The Goodson Law Library (http://www.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 In addition, the library collection includes historical documents which pre-date Duke Law’s participation in the Federal Depository Library Program, with a particularly strong collection of federal documents from the 1930s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 (http://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 (http://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 System (http://www.fdlp.gov/catalogingandclassification/cataloging-articles/1791-superintendent-of-documents-sudocs-classification-scheme?showall) 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. 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 (http://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 since 2004 at http://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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Availability</th>
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**Finding Full-Text Documents Online**

Federal documents which are listed in the University Libraries’ catalog ([http://find.library.duke.edu](http://find.library.duke.edu)) may provide a link to the electronic version, where one is available. The online version of the *Monthly Catalog* ([http://catalog.gpo.gov](http://catalog.gpo.gov)) also provides 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](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 which can be useful for quickly locating a document online. USA.gov (http://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, Yahoo 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 (http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/researchguides/fedleg) and Federal Administrative Law (http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/researchguides/fedadminlaw).

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 LexisNexis (http://lawschool.lexis.com) and Westlaw (http://lawschool.westlaw.com); HeinOnline (http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=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 (http://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 (http://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 (http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/State-and-Territories.shtml) for direct links to state and territory home pages.

III. International Documents

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

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