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Research Guides

LEGAL RESEARCH ON THE WEB

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I. GENERAL LEGAL RESEARCH SITES

There are many free legal research sites on the Internet. The sites described below are generally considered to be some of the best for legal research. Nearly all of these sources are free, but a few may require an individual subscription, an affiliation with Duke University or Duke Law, or an in-person visit to the Duke University Libraries.

For general tips and strategies in using the Internet for legal research, consult Carole A. Levitt and Mark E. Rosch, *The Cybersleuth's Guide to the Internet: Conducting Effective Investigative & Legal Research on the Web* (Ref. KF242.A1 L478 2014).

- **Goodson Law Library** (<http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/>) provides access to many online legal information sources from the **Legal Databases & Links** page (<http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/lresources>). In addition to primary law from U.S. jurisdictions, you can access **Comparative and International Law** material (<http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/foreign>) and **Research Guides** for various legal topics (http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/research_guide) as well as many other sources of legal information.
- **FindLaw** (<http://www.findlaw.com>) is a massive legal web portal owned by Thomson Reuters, with links to legal materials on everything from court opinions to legal forms, practice areas and news. Also includes lawyer directories by practice area and location.
- **Justia** (<http://www.justia.com/>) provides free access to a variety of legal information, including cases, organized by jurisdiction and subject area. Also includes databases of legal blogs and social-media legal news sources and has an in-depth blog of its own, Verdict, with analysis of current legal issues.
- **Legal Information Institute** (<http://www.law.cornell.edu>): Cornell Law's extensive collection of free U.S. legal material, including unofficial full-text copies of Supreme Court opinions, federal court rules, the *U.S. Code*, and the *Code of Federal Regulations*. The Legal Encyclopedia section provides a helpful starting place for researching legal topics. Cornell's US-focused LII site is part of a worldwide network of Legal Information

Institutes, committed to providing free access to legal materials. To access LII sites for other regions, visit **WorldLII** (<http://www.worldlii.org/>).

- **Library of Congress Guide to Law Online** (<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/guide.php>) provides annotated links to free legal materials for the U.S. federal system, states and territories, and international research.
- **Public Library of Law** (<http://www.plol.org>) provides free access to primary sources in U.S. law, including federal and state cases, statutes, regulations, and constitutions. Legal forms are also available. The Public Library of Law was created by the makers of **Fastcase** (see section IV, Low-Cost Legal Research Services), and also includes links to fee-based content through the Fastcase service.
- **WashLaw Web** (<http://www.washlaw.edu/>) Large and diverse collection of web links to legal material, maintained by the Washburn School of Law. The information is arranged by jurisdiction and topic.

II. GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

The Internet remains an important source for legal information from federal, state and local governments. Below are some of the important sites for federal government information as well as a few starting points for locating state law information.

A. Federal Courts

- **Court Links** (<http://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/federal-courts-public/court-website-links>): The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts provides links to all available federal court websites. Many courts provide at least a selection of their opinions online for free.
- **FindLaw** provides a searchable database of U.S. Supreme Court opinions (<http://www.findlaw.com/casecode/supreme.html>) as well as a Case Summary search for lower court opinions (<http://caselaw.findlaw.com/summary/>) since 2000.
- **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.com/>) offers free searching for, and full text of, published court opinions from the U.S. Supreme Court since 1791 and from the lower federal courts since 1923.
- Cornell's **Legal Information Institute** provides a searchable archive of federal court opinions (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/federal/opinions.html>), including Supreme Court opinions back to 1990 (with selected "landmark" earlier decisions also included), as well as lower federal court opinions generally back to the mid-1990s.
- The **U.S. Supreme Court** official website (<http://www.supremecourt.gov/>) includes Court calendars and schedules, background information about the Court and justices, Court Rules, bar admissions information, case handling guides and general public information. Also includes slip opinions for the current term, PDF copies of the bound *United States Reports* back to 1991, and "slip list" advance sheets (with links to opinions) for previous terms not yet published in a bound volume. For more information on researching the U.S. Supreme Court, see the Goodson Law Library's Research Guide (<http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/researchguides/ussup>).

B. State Courts

- **National Center for State Courts** (<http://www.ncsc.org/>): Several courts provide their own opinions online in PDF form. The directory of State Court Web Sites (<http://www.ncsc.org/Information-and-Resources/Browse-by-State/State-Court-Websites.aspx>) is an excellent starting place.
- **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.com/>) offers free searching for, and full text of, published appellate court opinions in all 50 states back to 1950.
- **HeinOnline** (<http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003131760>) includes images of state case reporters in its library **State Reports: A Historical Archive**. **NOTE:** Remote access is limited to Duke University faculty, students and staff with a NetID and password.
- **LLMC Digital** (<http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003350980>) includes scans of historical state case reporters. Availability varies by court. This resource is most useful for historical information. **NOTE:** Remote access is limited to Duke University faculty, students and staff with a NetID and password.

C. Legislation and Regulations

Federal

- **Congress.gov** (<http://www.congress.gov/>): Primary online source for federal legislative material. Contains new public laws, pending bills, status of bills, committee reports and hearings. Full text of legislation available from 1989 (101st Congress) to present, with bill summary/status information available back to 1973.
- **Office of the Law Revision Counsel** (<http://uscode.house.gov/>): This office within the U.S. House of Representatives offers several options for accessing the current and historical editions of the official *United States Code* (U.S.C.) in both HTML and PDF formats for download. The searchable **U.S. Code** is a particularly user-friendly option.
- **Federal Administrative Agency Decisions & Other Actions** (http://guides.lib.virginia.edu/administrative_decisions): Can be searched by agency or by subject. Availability of material varies by agency.
- **GovInfo.gov** (<http://www.govinfo.gov/>): Full-text access to the *Code of Federal Regulations* (back to 1996), *Federal Register* (back to 1994), *Congressional Record* (back to 1994 for daily edition and 1961 for permanent edition) and other government documents from the U.S. Government Publishing Office.
- **HeinOnline** (<http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003131760>) provides archival PDF copies of the *U.S. Code*, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, the *Code of Federal Regulations*, and the *Federal Register*. **NOTE:** Remote access is limited to Duke University faculty, students and staff with a NetID and password.
- **ProQuest Congressional** (<http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE002487153>) contains a great deal of federal legislative material, including CIS Legislative Histories for public laws, committee reports and congressional documents, bills, the *Congressional Record*, and congressional hearings. **NOTE:** Remote access is limited to Duke University faculty, students and staff with a NetID and password.
- **USA.gov** (<http://www.usa.gov/>) provides one-stop access to all online U.S. government resources (local, state and federal). Includes topical arrangements, a useful A-Z list of

government agencies and departments and Spanish translation of several web pages.

State

- **National Conference of State Legislatures** (<http://www.ncsl.org/>): Many states provide their legislative enactments on free websites. To easily locate those states, begin with this site, which provides links to state legislature websites.
- **WashLaw Web** (<http://www.washlaw.edu/>): Washburn School of Law links to state government websites, where legislative and administrative materials can often be found.

III. LEGAL PERIODICALS

An increasing amount of legal scholarship is available on the Internet. The sites below provide access to many full-text online legal journals.

- The **American Bar Association's Legal Technology Resource Center Journal Search** (http://www.americanbar.org/groups/departments_offices/legal_technology_resources/resources/free_journal_search.html) searches the full text of articles from more than 400 open access law journals.
- **Google Scholar** (<http://scholar.google.com/>) offers free searching for journal articles, linking to full text where available.
- **HeinOnline** (<http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE003131760>) provides full-text access to hundreds of law reviews and journals, generally dating back to the journal's first volume. In some cases, the most recent volume(s) are not provided. **NOTE:** Remote access is limited to Duke University faculty, students and staff with a NetID and password.
- **Social Science Research Network** (<http://www.ssrn.com>) provides abstracts and PDFs for thousands of scholarly papers, including working papers and pre-publication versions of legal journal articles.

IV. LOW-COST LEGAL RESEARCH SERVICES

Under the terms of its contract with the research services Lexis Advance, Westlaw and Bloomberg Law, the Goodson Law Library may provide individual password access only to current Law School students, faculty and staff members. Users who do not meet these criteria may use a campus-wide version of Lexis, **Nexis Uni** (<https://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE008121060>) on-site at Duke or off-campus with a Duke NetID and password. Users may also be interested in these alternative legal research services:

- **Casemaker** (<http://www.casemaker.us>) is a legal research system which is available free to current members of nearly half of the state bar associations. **CasemakerX** (<http://www.casemakerx.com>) is a version for law students, which includes full access to the Casemaker research resources. Duke Law students may register for free access to CasemakerX with a school e-mail address.

- **Fastcase** (<http://search.library.duke.edu/search?id=DUKE006257307>) is also offered by more than half of the state bar associations to its members, including North Carolina. Fastcase includes 50-state and federal case law databases. Current Duke Law students, faculty and staff can access the full text of Fastcase with a NetID and password.
- **Ravel Law** (<http://www.ravellaw.com>) includes federal and state case law research service with unique visual presentation of results. Also includes Judge Analytics and Court Analytics modules, linking biographical profiles of state and federal judges with analysis of their most-cited judges, courts, and opinions. Duke community members are eligible for free access; sign up for an account with a current Duke.edu email. Members of the public may sign up for an Open account which allows basic case law searching and full text.
- **VersusLaw** (<http://www.versuslaw.com>) Versuslaw is another low-cost alternative for legal research mainly for primary law such as state and federal cases, statutes and administrative regulations. Current law students may register under the “Special Groups” section at the bottom of the home page.

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