U.S. Law and Legal Research

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Excellent Overview

- By Gretchen Feltes, at NYU Law Library
- [http://www.nyu.lawglobal.org/globalex/United_States.htm](http://www.nyu.lawglobal.org/globalex/United_States.htm)
Three Branches of Government

- Legislative - Congress
- Judicial - Supreme Court, Circuit Courts of Appeal, District Courts (trials)
- Executive - President, Agencies
U.S. Legislation

- **U.S. Code** is the subject compilation of all federal laws currently in effect, arranged by 50 titles (broad subjects)

  *Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1201 et seq. (2000).*

- **Statutes at Large** is the chronological compilation of **Public Laws** as they are enacted

Official v. Unofficial Codes

- **U.S. Code** is the official code that comes from the U.S. government.

- Most researchers actually work in the unofficial codes, which use the same numbering and add valuable extras (citations to cases, journals, history, etc.):
  - **U.S. Code Annotated**, from West
  - **U.S. Code Service**, from Lexis
Federal Courts

Supreme Court – highest
Official Reporter: US; Unofficial: SCt, LEd 2d

Circuit Courts of Appeal – intermediate
1-11 + DC + Federal
Federal Reporter: F3d

District Courts – trials
Federal Supplement: F. Supp. 2d
Circuit Court Citation in Federal Reporter

- Jirau-Bernal v. Agrait, 37 F.3d 1 (1st Cir. 1994)
- Volume 37 of the Federal Reporter, third series. Case starts on page 1
- Decided by First Circuit in 1994
Free Web Sites for U.S. Cases

Legal Information Institute at Cornell is the world leader in providing U.S., states, foreign and international cases, codes, regulations, and Wex legal encyclopedia
http://www.law.cornell.edu/

Justia provides Internet users with free case law, codes, regulations, legal articles and legal blogs
http://www.justia.com/

Supreme Court of the United States is the official web site for the US Supreme Court, but “unofficial” opinions
http://www.supremecourtus.gov/
Cases from 50 States

Regional Reporters

Appellate cases from all states, divided in 7 regions: Atlantic, North East, North West, Pacific, South East, South West, and Southern

Official Reports

Some states publish their own cases
Regional Reporters (State Cases)

National Reporter System Map
showing the states included in each reporter
Regulations

- **Code of Federal Regulations** is the subject compilation of all federal regulations currently in effect, in 50 titles (broad subjects)

- **Federal Register** is the daily announcement of proposed & final regulations
  - 60 Fed. Reg. 50,379 (Sept.29, 1995)
GPO Access is the government’s official web site for regulations, legislation, etc.

http://www.gpoaccess.gov/

Federal Agencies Directory from Louisiana State University

http://www.lib.lsu.edu/gov/fedgov.html
Fee Based Databases

- Westlaw
- Lexis
- PACER - Public Access to Court Electronic Records
Westlaw

- A leading legal information service, providing laws, cases, regulations, articles, news, corporate information, and more
- Integrates information requested with related documents
- Expensive for law firms, low rates for law schools, and priced by the piece for the public
- [http://westlaw.com](http://westlaw.com)
Lexis

- A leading legal information service, providing laws, cases, regulations, articles, news, corporate information, and more

- Integrates information requested with related documents

- Expensive for law firms, low rates for law schools, and priced by the piece for the public

- [http://lexis.com](http://lexis.com)
PACER

- Public Access to Court Electronic Records
- Dockets, transcripts, complaints, motions, and more for federal courts
- 8 cents per page
- [http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/](http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/)
The web has made it possible for governments, universities, courts, and private companies to put user-friendly law on the web, for free.

The most extensive databases and most sophisticated searching are still from companies that charge for their services, such as Westlaw and Lexis.
This presentation is available on the Starr Workshop web page at

http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/WhoWeAre/Partners/Starr/Presentations.cfm