

Getting Started with Online Legislative Research

Legislative research can be one of the most interesting and most frustrating forms of research. Because of the involved nature of the legislative process, tracking a bill from introduction to its final point is often challenging. Many pieces of legislation never make it beyond the first stages of the process, while others merge with or are absorbed by other bills. Below are some online resources which will help in determining what has happened to introduced legislation.

Federal (U. S.) Legislation Resources	
<u><i>Lexis/Nexis Congressional</i></u> TM 101 st Congress (1989-90) - present	Available on campus and remotely with an UM-St. Louis SSO ID and password.
<u><i>THOMAS - Library of Congress</i></u> 93 rd Congress (1973-74) - present	Freely available online at http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas2.html
<u><i>GPO Access Legislative Resources</i></u> - various dates depending on section searched	Freely available online at http://www.gpoaccess.gov/

All of the above mentioned sites provide a means to trace bills as they pass through the legislative process. Information available in each database includes: bill name and number, summary and/or full-text, sponsors and co-sponsors, committee assignments, legislative action, etc. If the bill becomes a Public Law, each of the systems will track the bill from introduction to signature by the President and provide the Public Law number. References to hearings, committee reports, debates in Congress, and other pertinent items can also be found.

Missouri (State) Legislative Resources	
<u><i>Missouri General Assembly Joint Bill Tracking</i></u> 1995 -	Freely available online at http://www.house.mo.gov/billcentral.aspx

The Missouri General Assembly site is the primary online source currently available for conducting comprehensive Missouri state legislative research. Limited searching may be done in the *Lexis Nexis Academic*TM database. Once in the database, select the <Legal> tab (top left of screen), then <Federal & Sate Codes> (on the left of the screen). You must select <MO-Rev. Statutes...> from the Sources drop down box to search for MO legislation. This is limited to only those pieces of legislation which have been enacted (passed) and have become part of the State Code. This is a smaller number of items than the total number of bills introduced each year.

The default in the Missouri General Assembly site is to the Basic Search which uses keywords, sponsor/co-sponsor or bill title information found on the cover sheets accompanying each bill.

The Advanced function searches information from the Cover Sheets plus all House and Senate Bill Text, Bills Summaries, Amendments, Fiscal Notes, Committee Reports, Courtesy Resolutions and Member Data Pages. Because of the scope of what is being searched, terms and strategy need to be much more focused when using the Advanced search.

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