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Advanced Search Techniques: Tracking Legislation through GPO Access' Congressional Databases

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This demonstration showed participants how to track legislation through Congressional databases on GPO Access, highlighting the connections among the Congressional Record, Congressional Bills, Public Laws, U.S. Code, and History of Bills databases. This handout includes general information about the five databases that were covered, as well as searches that track one specific piece of legislation from its introduction as a bill in the Congressional Record to its codification in the U.S. Code.

Selected legislation:

S. 1254 (104th Congress)

To disapprove of amendments to the Federal Sentencing Guidelines relating to lowering of crack sentences and sentences for money laundering and transactions in property derived from unlawful activity.

Public Law 104-38 (104th Congress)

To disapprove of amendments to the Federal Sentencing Guidelines relating to lowering of crack sentences and sentences for money laundering and transactions in property derived from unlawful activity.

28 USC Sec. 994 (1994, Supplement 1)

TITLE 28--JUDICIARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURE

PART III--COURT OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES

CHAPTER 58--UNITED STATES SENTENCING COMMISSION

Sec. 994. Duties of the Commission

Database Highlights:

Congressional Record

- Official record of the proceedings and debates of the United States Congress
- Published daily when Congress is in session
- GPO Access contains volumes from 140 (1994) to the present; 1994 is available only on the simple-search page at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aaces002.html.
- Database for the current session is usually updated daily by 11 a.m., except when a late adjournment delays production of the issue
- New feature: Browse the Daily Digest for the most recent issue
- General search tips:
 - Congresspeople listed by last name and Mr., Mrs., or Ms.
 - Search for bills as "h.r. #" (or "h r #") and "s. #" (or "s #")

Congressional Bills

- All published versions of each bill
- GPO Access contains bills from the 103rd Congress (1993-94) to the present.
- Current database is updated daily by 6 a.m. when bills are published and approved for release.
- List of version abbreviations and some definitions available from Helpful Hints
- Text additions and deletions
 - PDF files: Added text in italics; Deleted text stricken through
 - ASCII text files: Added text in quotation marks; Deleted text marked by <DELETED> and </DELETED> tags
- Search by bill number same as in Congressional Record

Public Laws

- Text of public laws enacted from the 104th Congress to the present
- Updated when the publication of a slip law is authorized by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration

Once a law is signed by the President, it is assigned a public-law number and issued in print as a "slip law." At the end of each session of Congress, the slip laws are compiled into bound volumes called the Statutes at Large, and they are known as "session laws." The Statutes at Large present a chronological arrangement of the laws in the exact order that they have been enacted. There is not a Statutes at Large database on GPO Access; however, the text of laws published in Public Laws and Statutes at Large is the same. Users may perform a search by Statutes at Large citation in both the Public Laws and U.S. Code databases.

- New feature: Browse catalog of public laws with hyperlinks
- Marginal notes from PDF files are marked by <<NOTE: >> in ASCII text files
- General search tips:
 - Search by bill number same as before
 - Search by public law: "public law #-#" (e.g., "public law 105-198")
 - Search by Statutes at Large citation: "# stat #" (e.g., "112 stat 3280")
 - Search by U.S. Code citation: "# usc #" (e.g., "31 usc 5112")
- If unable to find text of public law, search for enrolled version of bill in Congressional Bills

U.S. Code

- Codification of the general and permanent laws of the United States
- Prepared and published by the Office of the Law Revision Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives, every six years
- GPO Access contains the text from the most recent print revision of the U.S. Code in 1994, which codifies the laws that were in effect as of January 4, 1995, plus supplemental databases, which reflect changes to the U.S. Code on an annual basis.

Supplement 1 contains the laws that were in effect as of January 16, 1996.

Supplement 2 contains the laws that were in effect as of January 6, 1997.

Supplement 3 contains the laws that were in effect as of January 26, 1998.

Supplements 1 and 2 are complete and contain all 50 titles. At this time, supplement 3 contains only titles 1 through 25; titles will be added incrementally as they become available.

- General search tips:
 - Search by bill number same as before
 - Search by Statutes at Large citation same as before
 - Search by public law: "pub. l. #" or "pub l #" (e.g., "pub. l. 103-40")
 - Search by U.S. Code citation: "#usc#" (e.g., "7USC511")
 - Use truncation to find multiple subsections of U.S. Code (e.g., "7USC511*")
- When a section is affected by a law passed after a supplement's revision date, the header for that section includes a note that identifies the public law affecting it. In order to find the updated information, you must search the Public Laws databases for the referenced public law number.

History of Bills

- Lists legislative actions on bills that are reported in the Congressional Record
- Part of the print version of the Congressional Record Index, which is published biweekly by the Joint Committee on Printing when Congress is in session
- Maintained as a separate database on GPO Access
- GPO Access contains volumes from 129 (1983) to the present.

- Cumulative from the beginning of each Congressional session
- Current database is updated daily, usually the day after publication of the Congressional Record
- Typical entry includes a bill number, title, summary, names of sponsors and co-sponsors, and a chronological list of actions on the bill, each of which references a Congressional Record page number and the date when the action was reported
- General search tips:
 - Search by bill number same as before
 - Search by public law number same as in Public Laws databases:
"public law #"
- The Congressional Record Index (CRI) online is structured the same way as the History of Bills. Hyperlinks are available to the indexed Congressional Record documents in the 1998 CRI.