Skill in the spotlight: Legal Research – Resources at the Library

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When doing legal research, the library can assist you in various ways. This document provides an overview of the different services that are available to you.

I want to conduct legal research, where do I start?

Make sure that you have access to all the services that the library offers. To ensure worldwide access to databases, journals, e-books and more, always use the links on the library website. When logged in with your SoliID and password, you can consult all subscription-based online resources of the library. To make optimal use of our collections when you are working from home, download the browser extension Library Access.

It is important that you update your information literacy skills that can help you to find, evaluate and process scientific information. The library offers various tools in this area:

- **Libguides**: subject-specific online guides with tips, background information and training to help you find and work with scientific sources.
- **Compass**: an online library training on the LifeLong Learning platform with different modules on finding and accessing information, setting up a search, evaluating sources and storing and using sources. You can either take the entire course or work through each of these modules separately.

What are the different search tools available to me when looking for literature?

To find the best possible sources, make sure you become well-acquainted with the legal collection and the most used search engines. WorldCat is the library catalogue in which you can find our books, both hardcopy and digital. You can search WorldCat via an optimized entry offered by Utrecht University Library which can be found here: https://utrechtuniversity.on.worldcat.org/. The library has subscriptions on an enormous amount of journals. Some of these journals are available in print and can be found at the Drift, and whereas our e-journals can be consulted via the UU list of electronic journals.

Search engines are arranged by discipline on the library website. Select a search engine that fits the type of material you are looking for. You can also use Google Scholar, a general search engine, as a starting point, because it has a large coverage and is very user friendly. Manually add the UBU-link to Google Scholar to create a quick link to the full text version of an article. Be aware that Google Scholar may not provide a complete overview of the available sources on the subject you are researching. As your search becomes more specific, switch to our legal search engines, like Rechtsorde or Legal Intelligence. You can find an overview of these on the following library page.
How do I set up a search?

When setting up a search it is important to distinguish between primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic (can include texts of law, original research, datasets etc.). Secondary sources are one step removed from primary sources, though they often quote or refer to primary sources. They can cover the same topic as primary sources, but add a layer of interpretation and analysis. Whether looking for primary or secondary sources, always try to track down the original source and read it for yourself and refer to it directly.

Because of the enormous amount of information that is available through our search engines and databases, focusing on the right search terms is one of the major parts of your search strategy. Do not randomly start your query but make sure to be efficient by using relevant and well-defined search terms. Often you can add so called Boolean operators (such as and, or, not, and near) to your query to make your searches more efficient, convenient and successful. Check the help menu of the applicable search engine to see which options are available.

There are several search methods such as the snowball search method and the citation search method. When applying the snowball method you search by using information from an article that you have found earlier. For instance, you can search for other publications by the same author or you can use keywords you have found in the article. The most common strategy is to search in the reference list or footnotes of the article. This way of searching for references goes back in time to older publications. When using the citation search method, you first identify a key article, author or book which you are studying or has been referenced in an article you are looking at. You can then conduct a citation search in a database like Google Scholar, by using that resource’s title or author’s name. A benefit of this method is that it is going forward in time and leads you to newer articles. Please take into account that a recent article may have no citations yet or only a few.

How do I make correct use of my sources in the writing phase?

When conducting legal research it is important that you observe the norms and values that ensure academic integrity. Plagiarism is the appropriation of another author’s works, thoughts, or ideas and the representation of such as one’s own work (for a formal definition see here). It is considered an academic sin. If the university discovers a case of fraud or plagiarism, sanctions can be implemented on the offender.

To prevent plagiarism it is important to include footnotes and a detailed reference list. To make this process easier there are several free tools available to help you to collect, organize and cite your sources. Zotero and Mendeley are examples of such programs, that allow you to create a literature list and incorporate citations into the text, without having to enter all references manually. The library also has licenses to several paid reference management systems like Endnote and Refworks. Use the available libguide to learn more about reference management and to choose the program that is most suited to your type of research.

Who can I contact at the library?

You can always come to the desk at the entrance of the library at the Drift 27 for help. If you prefer, you can email your questions to library@uu.nl. There are three subject librarians that you can contact for questions regarding a specific collection:

- Sicco Spermon (s.spermon@uu.nl) criminal law, social law, legal theory.
- Sandrien Banens (s.h.banens@uu.nl) public international law, European law, international human rights.
- Saskia Manuela-Bergmans (s.a.manuela-bergmans@uu.nl) private law, constitutional and administrative law, legal history.