

LexisNexis® Academic Research Guides

Common Legal Research Assignments

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LexisNexis Academic is the premier database for legal research in the Academic market. Many professors and librarians send their students to LexisNexis® Academic for all of their legal research assignments. Whether you're a pre-law student or just looking for basic legal material to round out your research, the following common assignments will surely help you with your research.

For this research scenario, the topic of "human trafficking" is used to explore legal developments over time. Below is an example of this type of assignment:

Find the federal statutes related to human trafficking. Determine when these federal statutes were enacted and what changes have been made to the statutes since their enactment. Looking at the time when the statutes were first enacted, was there one event or series of events that prompted Congress to take action? What were some of the arguments for and against passing these specific pieces of federal legislation? Have there been any significant convictions under these statutes? In terms of the state where you live, are there similar laws? Were they enacted before the federal laws or in response to them?

See the following pages for the six User Guides included:

1. Finding Federal Statutes on a Specific Topic
2. Determine When Federal Statutes Were Enacted and See Changes Since Then
3. Find the Event that Prompted Congress to Enact a Specific Statute
4. Find Arguments For and Against Passing a Specific Piece of Federal Legislation
5. Find Any Significant Convictions Under a Specific Statute
6. Find State Laws Similar to Federal Laws

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Find Federal Statutes in the U.S. Code on Trafficking:

What are Federal Statutes? Federal statutes are laws passed by Congress and signed by the President. Federal Statutes are collected in the United States Code.

The screenshot shows the LexisNexis Academic search interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Enter Search Terms or Citation" and a "Search" button. To the right of the search bar is a "Search By Content Type" dropdown menu. Below the search bar, there are "Advanced Options" and a "Build Your Own Segment Search" section. The "Build Your Own Segment Search" section has a dropdown menu set to "HEADING" and a text input field containing "HEADING(trafficking)". Below this, there are checkboxes for "Sources": "Annotated U.S. Code (USCS)", "Constitution of the United States", "Public Laws", "CFR - Code of Federal Regulations", and "Federal Register". At the bottom right, there are "Apply" and "Cancel" buttons. Red arrows and numbers 1-5 indicate the search strategy steps: 1. points to the search bar, 2. points to the "Annotated U.S. Code (USCS)" checkbox, 3. points to the "HEADING(trafficking)" text, 4. points to the "Apply" button, and 5. points to the "Search" button.

Search Strategy:

1. Click on the Search By Content Type menu and select “Federal Statutes & Regulations”
2. Select the check box next to “Annotated U.S. Code (USCS)” (one of the default options)
3. Select “HEADING” from the drop-down box and insert the word “trafficking” inside the parenthesis
4. Click Apply
5. Click Search

After running the search, you will see, in your results set, that the primary provisions in the United States Code that relate to human trafficking are in Title 18 (Crimes and Criminal Procedure), starting primarily with Section 1590.

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Determine When Federal Statutes Were Enacted and See Changes Since Then:

History Line

Each statute has a history line immediately following the text of the section that lists the Public Law (the act passed by Congress) which have affected that section. Typically, the history line lists the changes in chronological order, with the first listed Public Law being the act that enacted that section. For example, in Section 1590, there is the following history:

HISTORY:

(Added Oct. 28, 2000, P.L. 106-386, Div A, § 112(a)(2), 114 Stat. 1487.) (As amended Dec. 23, 2008, P.L. 110-457, Title II, Subtitle C, § 222(b)(4), 122 Stat. 5069.)

Search Strategy

Using the information in this history line, you can determine when the statute was enacted. In this example, in October of 2000 by the Public Law 106-386 (the first number refers to the 106th Congress).

You can access this Public Law by using the hypertext link in the history line. For this example, the link takes you to the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-386). In this Public Law, you can see the original language of the section when it was enacted. Note that the original language in the Public Law corresponds to subsection (a) in the current version of this section.

The second entry in the history line refers you to the different amendments made to the statute. The act was amended by Public Law 110-457 (the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008). By reviewing this public law, you see that, in 2008, Congress added subsection (b), concerning obstructing or interfering in the enforcement of

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Find the Event that Prompted Congress to Enact a Specific Statute

Search news items from a particular point in time to see if an event prompted Congress to take action.

Search Strategy

1. Use the “Search the News” widget on the Academic main page. Type in the name of the original Public Law (in the above example, the “Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act”) in quotes to search for that exact language. (The default source is “Major World Publications,” but you can also select another source, such as “All News.”)
2. Click Go
3. On the Results Page, you can sort your results from oldest to newest in order to begin with news stories that were written prior to or right after the Public Law was enacted.

Also, using the Main Search box, you can search for news stories about human trafficking in the year or two prior to the enactment of this legislation. Use the Advanced Options section to limit to Newspapers Only. Then, use the Build Your Own Segment Search box to limit to HLEAD(human w/5 trafficking). Specify your date range by limiting your search to a year or two before the passage of the Public Law. Then, click Apply and Search in order to see news stories from U.S. papers that may be related to Congress’s passage of the Public Law.

Search the News
U.S. and World News.

Search For:
Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act

By Source Type
Major World Publications

Or **by Source Title**
Start typing a title like New York Times

Go

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Find Arguments For and Against Passing a Specific Piece of Legislation:

Search the news around the time the legislation was enacted to find opinion pieces or editorials about the law. In order to see opinion pieces or letters to the editors about the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, you can start with the search below on the All News form.

The screenshot shows the LexisNexis Academic All News Search interface. The search term "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act" is entered in the search box. The "Search By Content Type" dropdown is set to "All News". The "Advanced Options" section is expanded, showing the "Date" fields, "Build Your Own Segment Search" section, and "Source" section. The "Article Type" section is checked for "Editorials & Opinions" and "Letters & Comments". The "Article Location" section is set to "US State". The "Apply" and "Cancel" buttons are at the bottom.

Search Strategy

1. Select All News from the Search By Content Type Menu
2. As in the example above, type in the name of the original Public Law (in the above example, the "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act") in quotes to search for that exact language.
3. Click Advanced Options
4. Check the boxes next to "Editorials & Opinions" and "Letters & Comments" under the Article Type to limit your search to opinion-oriented news reports.
5. Click Apply
6. Click Search

Another source of opinion or analysis is law reviews. Replicate this search, but use the Law Reviews search form

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Find Any Significant Convictions Under a Specific State Statute:

To determine if there have been any specific convictions under a specific state statute, start with the All News form.

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All News Search

The screenshot shows the LexisNexis Academic All News Search interface. A red box highlights the search area. Three red arrows with numbers point to specific elements: 1. points to the 'Search By Content Type' dropdown menu; 2. points to the search input field containing the text '"Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act" AND convic!'; 3. points to the 'Advanced Options' dropdown menu.

Search Strategy

1. Select All News from the Search By Content Type Menu
2. Type the name of the Public Law in quotes. (In this example, again, we will use the "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act.") Add the term "convic!" using the exclamation mark as a wildcard that will bring back instances of "convict," "convicted," "conviction," etc., using the "And" connector.
3. (Optional) The default source is "Newspapers," but you can also select another source, such as "All News."

Another place to search for significant convictions is on the Federal and State Cases page. Significant convictions, or appeals thereof, may appear as case opinions in the federal cases file. Input the name of the Public Act in the search box.

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Find State Laws Similar to Federal Laws:

Using the State Statutes, Codes, & Regulations Search Form, you can find state laws similar to federal laws. You can also see if the state laws were enacted before the federal laws or in response to them. Again, we will use the topic of "human trafficking" to illustrate the scenario.

Search Strategy

1. Select State Statutes and Regulations from the Search By Content Type Menu
2. Click on the Advanced Options section
3. Select the "Statutory Code" source
4. Select "HEADING" from the Drop-down box in the Build Your Own Segment Search section. Then, type "trafficking" inside the parenthesis.
5. Select your home state
6. Click Apply
7. Click Search

The screenshot shows the LexisNexis Academic search interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Enter Search Terms or Citation" and a "Search" button. Below this is the "Advanced Options" section, which includes a "Build Your Own Segment Search" area. In this area, a dropdown menu is set to "HEADING" and the text "HEADING(trafficking)" is entered in the search box. Below the search box, there are checkboxes for "Source" (All State Statutes and Legislation, All State Regulations and Registers) and "States" (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming). There are also checkboxes for "US Territories" (Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands). At the bottom right, there are "Apply" and "Cancel" buttons. Red arrows with numbers 1 through 7 point to various elements: 1 points to the "Search By Content Type" menu, 2 points to the "Advanced Options" section, 3 points to the "Statutory Code" checkbox, 4 points to the "HEADING" dropdown and the search box, 5 points to the "Texas" checkbox, 6 points to the "Apply" button, and 7 points to the "Search" button.

If searching just in the Headings does not provide any relevant results, try typing "trafficking" in the main search box, since terminology may vary from state to state and "trafficking" may only be noted in an editor's note or case annotation, if the state uses slightly different terminology or subsumes trafficking within its kidnapping or abduction statutes.

To investigate the interplay between your state's statutes and the federal statute, you can perform a search on the All News form. Search for "Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act" and the name of your state.



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