

A statute is a written law enacted by a legislature. The statutes you will deal with most frequently in U.S. law are federal and state statutes. There are also local (i.e. city or county) statutes, usually called ordinances.

When a bill is passed by a legislature, it is first published in a form called a **slip law**. The slip laws of a session of the legislature are collected in a chronological publication known as **session laws**. For example, all of the public laws for each session of the U.S. Congress are collected in order of passage and published annually in *U.S. Statutes At Large*. Finally, legislation is arranged according to subject in a **code**. As slip laws and session laws, bills are published in the same form as passed by the legislature. When legislation is placed into a code (**codified**) it will likely be broken up into smaller parts since different parts of a bill will affect different areas of the law.

THE UNITED STATES CODE

All U.S. statutes currently in force are collected and arranged by subject into 50 titles in a set called *United States Code* (U.S.C.). The text of the U.S. Constitution is also contained in U.S.C. A new edition of the code is published every six years and updated by annual supplements. U.S.C. has a subject index to the entire code and many useful tables, including:

- a) Popular Names Table;
- b) Revised Titles Table, which indicates where in the current code the text of older laws can be found;
- c) Repealed Code Sections;
- d) Statutes at Large Cite Table, which indicates where statute sections are codified;
- e) Separate tables for reorganization plans, proclamations, and executive orders, which indicate where these are codified if included in the code; and
- f) Internal References Table.

The main problems with using the U.S.C for research include a publication lag of 2-3 years and a lack of case annotations.

ANNOTATED U.S. CODES

There are two sets of annotated codes, *United States Code Annotated* (USCA) and *United States Code Service* (USCS). These codes include all the features and tables of U.S.C. However, both annotated codes are superior to U.S.C. because they are updated more

frequently, include annotations of cases interpreting code sections, have detailed indexes, and provide historical notes of amendments and legislative history.

The U.S. Code, USCA, and USCS are all located on the main floor of the library on Shelf 215.

FINDING U.S. CODE SECTIONS

Index method - use the general index (USC, USCA, USCS) or specific title indexes (USCA, USCS). The indexes to the individual code titles are usually more detailed than the index to entire code.

Topic method - go directly to the relevant title(s) and examine the outline of sections at beginning of each distinct subject or use the detailed title index. There is risk in this because you may miss a pertinent reference codified in a different title.

Popular Name method - many laws are known by a popular name. For example, 42 USC 14701, concerning the registration of sex offenders, is popularly known as "Megan's Law." To find the code sections where these laws are codified, look in:

1. Shepard's "Acts & Cases by Popular Names";
2. Popular Name Tables in USC, USCA, or USCS;
3. The General Index to USCS.

COMPARISON OF ANNOTATED FEDERAL CODES

USCA and USCS have several features in common that are useful when performing statutory research.

1. Both provide historical and statutory notes of amendments and legislative history documents.
2. Both provide general indexes to the complete code and title specific indexes.
3. Both are updated by pocket parts and supplementary volumes.
4. Both include references to CFR rules promulgated under the authority of the specific code section.
5. Both provide cross-references to related code sections.

Some differences between USCA and USCS are:

1. USCA contains more annotations than USCS; USCS is selective, avoiding repetitive decisions.
2. USCS has a Research Guide with citations to ALR annotations and Am Jur 2d topics.

3. USCA has Library References with citations to CJS topics and West Digest Key Numbers.
4. USCA publishes court rules within the body of the code; USCS publishes court rules in separate volumes.
5. USCS has separate volumes for uncodified legislation; USCA does not publish uncodified laws.

WEB RESOURCES

GPO Access (www.gpoaccess.gov) - - This website is maintained by the U.S. Government Printing Office. Both the 1994 and 2000 editions of the official U.S. Code (unannotated) are available for online research.

Legal Information Institute (www.law.cornell.edu) - - This website is maintained by Cornell University Law School. You can search the U.S. Code (unannotated) by Title and Section number, keyword, or by Popular Name.

Findlaw (www.findlaw.com) - - Search the unannotated U.S. Code by Title and Section number, keyword, or Popular Name.

Thomas (thomas.loc.gov) - - Thomas is maintained by the Library of Congress. A useful website for tracking current legislation as it makes its way through Congress. The full text of bills beginning with the 101st Congress (1989-present) are available. Bill summaries are available beginning with the 93rd Congress (1973-present).

LEXIS AND WESTLAW

Westlaw provides access to the complete USCA, in both annotated and unannotated versions. The Popular Name Tables and USCA General Index are available. Westlaw also allows researchers to search the USCA by Area of Practice. Lexis provides access to the complete USCS. Both Lexis and Westlaw are “subscription only” databases, requiring a password for access.