

Providence College

From the Selected Works of Janice G. Schuster

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Legal Source

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ccAdvisor

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Legal Source. EBSCO
<https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/legal-source>

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Primary Category

Political Science & Law

Secondary Categories

Business & Economics
 Government Information
 Political Science & Law
 Sociology, Education, Anthropology, Psychology

Abstract:

Legal Source is a high-quality resource that is the result of a merger between EBSCO Information Services and H.W. Wilson. The content dates back to 1912 and covers many disciplines including criminal justice, international law, federal law, organized crime, medical law, labor and human resources, ethics and the environment. The EBSCO search interface is well-developed and facilitates retrieval of relevant citations. The ability to search for images and by citation are added bonuses.

Overview:

Developed from a merger of high-quality databases from EBSCO and H.W. Wilson, *Legal Source* provides full-text coverage of the world's most respected scholarly journals, making it a valuable resource for attorneys, educators, business people, law librarians, students, paralegals and others involved with the law. Legal Source provides information on current issues, studies and trends in the legal world. It includes over 2.5 million records from over 1,200 full-text journals, including book reviews and case citations. Topics covered include criminal justice, international law, federal law, organized crime, medical law, labor and human resources, ethics and the environment. The online *Index to Legal Periodicals and Books* is the basis for the indexing.

Information about the product, including a complete title list, can be found at: <https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/legal-source>

User Interface:

Search interface: The EBSCO search interface is straightforward, user-friendly, and uses terms that patrons should understand (with the possible exception of "Thesaurus.") The links for Advanced Search; Basic Search; Search History; and Search Options are easily visible on the basic search screen. At my library, we prefer to have our search interfaces default to the Advanced Search; for libraries that have chosen the Basic Search as the default, the fact that the Advanced Search button appears clearly on the Basic Search screen might encourage users to take advantage of the advanced searching options.

The Advanced Search screen prominently displays the search options at approximately eye level, including search modes, expanders and limiting options. It is good that the options appear on the screen without the need to scroll down. Many of the patrons in my library have a hard time finding anything that requires them to scroll to another screen.

Searching: The basic search screen is Google-esque; there is one blank box for entering the search strategy. I did a basic search for "presidential powers" (without quotation marks) and retrieved 2,228 citations. As in Google, when I added quotation marks to the same search, there were fewer results: 61 citations were retrieved. The basic search therefore uses the Google search mechanism: understood Boolean OR if the words are entered with no punctuation; phrase searching if parentheses are used. This emulation of Google searching is good for patrons who are interested only in the most basic search.

Advanced searching provides many options. Fields available for searching include all text fields, abstract, subject, author, court cases, historical subject, journal name, statute, statute jurisdiction and title. Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT are available. I used the Boolean AND to add "Obama" to my "presidential powers" search. The results went from 61 citations to 3.

The search history function is particularly useful. I use it frequently when teaching our college's students how to use EBSCO's databases. The list of past searches facilitates teaching Boolean searching to students.

I also find EBSCO's SmartText Searching feature to be useful. When I substituted "Trump" for "Obama" in my search, the system responded that my "initial search query did not yield any results. However, using SmartText Searching, results were found based on your keywords." Since it couldn't find any hits when searching for "presidential powers" as a phrase AND "Trump," it ignored the phrase designation and searched for presidential powers as keywords. It was able to retrieve 10 citations, most of which look like they would be useful.

Help Screens: The EBSCOhost help screens should be context specific. When I am on the advanced search screen and click on the Help link on the top right of the screen, it should take me directly to help for the search screen. As it is, it takes me to a busy page filled with words and links. How is an undergraduate student going to know which link to click on?

Results Display: The results display is clean and easy to read. Clicking on the title link takes one to the full record display, including tools on the right side: add to folder, print, email, save, cite, export, create note, permalink and share. The PDF link, when available, is on the left side. The display includes useful information presented clearly.

Historic Content: Access to historic legal resources is vital. Current law builds on previous cases, reasoning, and arguments. Legal Source includes historic content back to 1912. The historic content provides citations to articles from a variety of sources. For example, a search for "Watergate" retrieved citations from *Nation*, *New York Times*, *Public Administration Review*, and *CQ Weekly*.

Accessibility: The EBSCOhost platform is WCAG 2.0 Level A compliant. EBSCO has invested time and resources to exceed Web accessibility guidelines and to support several features that are part of the WCAG Level AA compliance by improving page orientation and navigation of EBSCOhost.

Notable features include:

- Introductory text and shortcuts for screen reader users
- Elimination of most tables to improve searching with screen readers or keyboard controls
- Descriptive page titles, section header tags and selected link labels
- Redesigned form controls for easier tab navigation
- Streamlined code for simpler page structures
- Access keys support international keyboards functionality across multiple browsers
- Detailed alternative text image descriptions
- Decreased page size means shorter download times for all users

In addition, EBSCOhost meets, and in many cases, exceeds, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards

Critical Evaluation:

Among the greatest strengths of Legal Source is its full-text coverage of resources back to 1912, including many that were previously unavailable. The EBSCO platform provides a reliable and efficient search engine. The thesaurus includes many cross-references to allow for better search results. The Cited References link at the top of the screen provides access to a specific article when the citation is known. The ability to search for images by clicking on More on the top navigation bar is useful. A search for "representative payee" resulted in 20 records containing images; the records clearly indicate the image type. My search resulted in charts and graphs, but there might be additional images available.

The database's main weakness is the lack of context-specific help screens. It would benefit EBSCO's users if they developed context-specific help screens across their EBSCOhost databases.

Competitive Products:

The main competitors to Legal Source are:

HeinOnline

HeinOnline is a premier online database containing more than 145 million pages and 140,000 titles of legal history and government documents in a fully searchable, image-based format. *HeinOnline* bridges the gap in historical research by providing comprehensive coverage from inception of more than 2,300 law-related periodicals. In addition to its vast collection of law journals, *HeinOnline* contains the entire Congressional Record, Federal Register and Code of Federal Regulations, complete coverage of the U.S. Reports back to 1754, and entire databases dedicated to treaties, constitutions, case law, world trials, classic treatises, international trade, foreign relations, U.S. Presidents, and much more.

LegalTrac (Gale)

Ideal for students, law school faculty, and legal researchers, *LegalTrac* provides indexing for more than 1,200 major law reviews, legal newspapers, specialty publications, Bar Association journals, and international legal journals, including more than 200 titles in full text. The American Association of Law Libraries not only endorses *LegalTrac*, its special advisory committee selects, reviews, and enhances the content of this resource. The database offers coverage of federal and state cases, laws and regulations, legal practice and taxation, as well as British Commonwealth, European Union, and international law.

Exclusive features, including Topic Finder, *InterLink*, and a mobile-optimized interface, support and enhance the search experience.

ProQuest Criminology Collection

The Criminology Collection supports research on crime, its causes and impacts, and legal and social implications, as well as law enforcement and security services. The collection includes the Criminal Justice Database, a full-text and index database supporting research on crime geared towards scholars and career criminal justice professionals. It also includes National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) Abstracts Database, which is published by the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, to index research on criminal justice. The collection includes further index and full-text coverage of scholarly journals along with correctional and law enforcement trade publications, crime reports, crime blogs, and other relevant material for researchers or those preparing for careers in criminal justice, law enforcement, and related fields.

SAGE Criminology Collection

This collection includes 38 peer-reviewed journals published by SAGE and participating societies, encompassing over 25,000 articles. Complimentary access back to 1999, where available, is included as long as the current collection subscription is maintained. The subjects covered include corrections, criminal justice, family and domestic violence, forensic psychology, juvenile delinquency, juvenile justice, penology, and policing.

Westlaw Campus Research

Comprehensive database of legal materials, including cases, statutes, and regulations of the U.S. government and the various state governments; includes the legal encyclopedia American Jurisprudence 2nd and American Law Reports; case law from 1789 to present; current statutes and regulations. Documents can also be accessed through broad subject categories such as Civil Rights, International Law and Environmental Law.

Purchase Contract:

The EBSCO license agreement seems standard. An interesting inclusion is the statement that alumni of the licensee are not included as authorized users. At my institution, alumni access to our electronic resources is an issue we have been grappling with. There are no governing law or indemnification clauses.

The license agreement is available here: <https://www.ebsco.com/terms-of-use>

Pricing:

Annual subscription pricing for academic institutions is based on a variety of factors including but not limited to FTE, existing EBSCO subscriptions, consortial agreements and/or buying groups. There is no one-time purchase option. EBSCO never double charges for the same journal that a customer already has from another database.

Authentication:

EBSCOhost offers several different methods of authentication for users:

- IP Address
- Patterned IDs
- Patron ID files
- Referring URL
- User ID and Password
- Cookie Authentication
- Athens Authentication
- Shibboleth Authentication
- HTTPS Authentication
- Personal User Authentication
- Guest Access
- Embedded URL

Detailed description of each method can be found on EBSCO's [support page](#).

References:

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2. Hickey, L. 2014. "Review of Legal Source." *Choice*. http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T004&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=39&docId=GALE%7CA392069369&docType=Website&SORT&contentSegment=&prodId=LitRC&contentSet=GALE%7CA392069369&searchId=R1&userGroupName=providence_main&inPS=true
3. Quinn, Mary Ellen. 2011. "Fall E-Reference Update, 2011: Part 1: Databases." *Booklist*. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=67685168&site=ehost-live>

Composite Score 4.13

Content Score	User Interface/Searchability Score	Pricing Score	Purchase/Contract Options Score
3.5	4.5	4.5	4.0
Content Notes	User Interface/Searchability Notes	Pricing Notes	Purchase/Contract Options Notes
The content is reliable and of high quality. An improvement would be the inclusion of statutory law. Some case law is included but more would be useful.	The EBSCOhost interface has developed into a high-quality search engine. SmartText searching results in citations even when the user's search results in no hits.	Legal Source is very reasonably priced.	There should be an option to buy the database as a one-time purchase. The licensing agreement could be an industry standard.

About the Author:

Janice G. Schuster is commons librarian, research, education and collections/associate professor at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. She is responsible for the library's electronic resources and serials, co-chairs the library's Knowledge Collections group and serves on the library's assessment group. She serves the college in many ways including: *Faculty Senate*: elected at-large senator, appointed secretary for Senate website and listserv, appointed member of the Faculty Status committee and of the ad hoc committee to reevaluate the college's anti-harassment policy; *Common Reading Program*: member of the steering committee, chair of the library resources subcommittee and member of the essay contest subcommittee. She has served for many years as the co-chair of the Electronic Resources Affinity Group of the Higher Education Library and Information Network (HELIN) consortium. She has published on electronic resources, serials, adoption and livable communities. She holds B.A. and M.L.S. degrees from Indiana University (Bloomington). http://works.bepress.com/janice_schuster

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