Using U.S. Government Information for Research in History

Access this guide online at: http://bit.ly/1Bga1uE

U.S. Government Information clearly has a place in the study of US History, but did you know there is also a wealth of information produced by the U.S. Government about other areas of the world? The U.S. Government has always been interested in other nations, whether because they were considered a threat, or because there is some aspect of their government and/or operations the U.S. would like to emulate. Especially as a young nation, the U.S. sent government officials around the world to explore how other countries did everything from manufacturing to agriculture to international commerce.

The Saint Louis University Libraries subscribe to a number of databases with extensive collections of digitized historical U.S. Government documents and materials, and there are more available freely online. This guide will give you an idea of what is available, but please contact and/or make an appointment with Rebecca Hyde (rebecca.hyde@slu.edu or http://rebeccahyde.youcanbook.me) at the beginning of your research process when you suspect U.S. Government information may be helpful. I can guide you to the nest resources for your topic and give you an idea of what departments/agencies/bureaus may have been interested in, or published on, your area of interest. I can also give you a primer on things like Congressional research and documents, which can feel like a specialty all its own, but is very important for much research in U.S. history!

Finding Print Resources in the SLU Libraries

The Saint Louis University collection dates back to 1866 (with selected older materials), all housed in the Locust Street Storage Facility. However, our government documents were not comprehensively included in the SLU Libraries Catalog until 2000, which means you have to use other sources to find out what was published prior to 2000.

- **The Catalog of Government Publications**: [http://catalog.gpo.gov/F](http://catalog.gpo.gov/F) This library catalog includes all government publications released to depository library from 1976 on, as well as selected older material. We will have most documents included in the catalog and can easily borrow or obtain a copy from another library if we don’t have it.

- **Hathi Trust**: [www.hathitrust.org](http://www.hathitrust.org) While not limited to government documents, Hathi Trust includes an extensive collection of digitized government documents, providing full-text for all government documents included in the catalog. If you want print volumes of anything you find here, or need an annual report, etc. from a year not digitized, we probably have it, or we can find you a copy!

- **The Old Fashioned Way!** To comprehensively search all the titles released by the U.S. Government you’ll need to turn to print indexes. The best ones to start with are listed below:
  - **Guide to U.S. Government Publications**, Pius Reference, Level 5 Z1223.Z7 A574 (Although this is not a complete index this guide will list all major periodical titles and categories of publications for every department and bureau 1789-present.)
Want to determine if we have the volumes you need? Rebecca Hyde (rhydel@slu.edu, 977-3106) or Jesse Swoboda (swobodaj@slu.edu, 977-5611) to find out if we have it in the collection. Volumes can be delivered to Pius Library. For more extensive research, you can make an appointment to visit the Locust Street Facility.

Congressional Publications & Major Executive Branch Publications

U.S. Congressional Serial Set

The Congressional Serial Set contains selected documents and reports of the House of Representatives and the Senate, including numerous documents and annual reports from the executive branch, as they were presented to Congress. It is also a rich source of maps and statistics. If you’re looking for primary sources related to anything happening around the world in the 19th century, you should look in the Serial Set.

- Selected print volumes available in the Locust Street Library Facility.

The American State Papers, the predecessor to the Serial Set, is also available full text through the Library: http://ezp.slu.edu/login?url=http://infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=ASPA


This database includes a wealth of information both historical and current and can give you an idea of whether there might be useful information published or produced by the U.S. government on your research topic. The focus is on Congressional material but since Congress talks about almost everything that could possibly be relevant, current or historically, you will find much useful information here. Including:

- **CRS Reports** (2004-present): The Congressional Research Service (CRS) provides members of Congress, committees, and congressional staff with nonpartisan and objective research and analysis on all public policy issues. The Reports are on a wide variety of issues and often provide succinct histories, summaries and timelines of particular issues.

- **U.S Congressional Hearings** (1824-present, published & unpublished): This database indexes and provides full text for all Congressional Hearings from 1824 to the present. Very recent Hearings often include the full text of some prepared testimony, even if the official transcript has yet to be published. If for any reason you need the print version of a hearing, the print is usually...
available at the Locust Street Facility or at the Law Library. Recent hearings can also be found full-text online through the Government Printing Office’s GovInfo: https://www.govinfo.gov/

- **U.S. Congressional Serial Set** (1789-1969): The full text of the Congressional Serial Set can be found here as well as in a standalone database. The indexing available on ProQuest Congressional tends to be better if you’re looking for a specific item, especially an annual report of a particular department. The digitization in this database is mostly from microfiche, so using the standalone database if you have trouble reading any of the text, etc.

- **Executive Branch Documents** (1789-1942): This digital collection attempts to include every document (over 120,000 titles) produced by the executive branch of the U.S. Government (and not included in the U.S. Serial Set) from 1789 to 1909, plus an additional 200,000 published between 1909 and 1942. It includes valuable information on every part of American life, government actions and functions, and more.

- **Other Content:** Other document types are included in the database, some full-text and some just indexed. These additional documents include: House & Senate Reports (1789-present), House & Senate Documents (1817-present), Committee Prints & Miscellaneous publications (1817-present), Bills & Laws (1987-present), and selected Legislative Histories (1969-present)

Found something in this database that’s not full-text? Ask for assistance finding it – chances are we have a print, digital, or microfiche copy or can obtain one for you.


- **The Congressional Record & Predecessors** (1789-present): The Congressional Record is the official record of the proceedings and debates of the United States Congress, presented in chronological order. The text of its predecessors, The Register of Debates, The Annals of Congress and The Congressional Globe, are also included in this database. These publications do not contain proceedings of Congressional committees, only what happens on the main floor of the Congress and the Senate. (Congress has always liked to talk about EVERYTHING.)

- **The U.S. Statutes at Large** (1789-present): Full-text of every Public and Private Law ever passed by the U.S. Congress, arranged in chronological order. Also includes treaties passed by Congress.

- **U.S. Presidential Library** (George Washington – Barack Obama): Includes *Messages and Papers of the Presidents, Public Papers of the Presidents, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Economic Report of the President* and much more.

- **U.S. Federal Agency Documents, Decisions and Appeals** (coverage varies): This collection focuses of agency level decisions and courts such as *Decisions of the National Labor Relations Board, FCC Reports, Decisions of the Comptroller of the Treasury, Court of Claims Reports, Administrative Reports Under Immigration and Nationality Laws, Reports of the U.S. Tax Court* and many more.
Primary Documents for U.S. Foreign Policy Research

Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)

This title contains selected documents related to U.S. Foreign Relations. The volumes are generally broken up by country/region (Soviet Union, Western Europe, etc.) as well as by major conflict or subject (National Security Policy, Suez Crisis, etc.) These volumes are generally released 30 to 40 years after the fact because of security and classification issues, and contain many letters and communications not publicly available elsewhere. The latest volumes released are from the Reagan Administration (1980s).

Where volumes from this set can be found:
- Department of State Website (includes volumes from to the Truman Administration to the most recently available): http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments
- HeinOnline includes FRUS from 1861 to the most recently available: http://ezp.slu.edu/login?url=http://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?collection=forrel
- University of Wisconsin Digital Collections (includes volumes online back to the Lincoln Administration): http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/

Declassified Documents

Many foreign policy documents are never published by the government, many because of the lengthy time they remain classified. If they are not published in the Foreign Relations of the United States, you must look elsewhere to find declassified documents.

- National Security Archive: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/index.html
  The National Security Archive is an organization created by journalists dedicated to a more open government. Among other resources, it includes the largest freely available library of declassified documents.

- Agency Reading Rooms: Individual agencies also have their own reading rooms where you can find documents declassified by FOIA requests. These are more tedious to sift through, but can be helpful, especially if you have something very specific in mind. A web search for “FOIA Reading Room” will bring up the electronic reading rooms of many government agencies such as the FBI, Department of Defense, CIA and more. If you are interested in a particular agency, add that to your search.

- Your FOIA Request: After extensive research, you may find there is additional information out there that is still classified or considered sensitive. Information on how to file a FOIA request can be found here: https://www.foia.gov/how-to.html.
National Archives & Records Administration (NARA)

There are many records and papers produced by agencies that never get released. They are not actually classified they are just considered internal departmental documents and are therefore not published. Records like these as well as other published and classified documents eventually end up at NARA.

Although NARA puts select material online, most material related to foreign relations will either be on microfiche or only available at the National Archives. There are two main tools that will assist you in finding out where records of interest may be located.

Guide to Federal Records
This reference source provides general descriptions of the Record Group collections held by the National Archives. Knowing what record group and section your material is likely to be in will be very helpful when visiting the archives or when trying to locate microfiche of the materials. This guide also indicates which branch of the Archives holds the materials in particular record groups.

- Online at http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/

The Microfilm Catalog
The Microfilm Catalog allows you to search by keyword, record group and more to see if records in your area of interest have been microfilmed. The Catalog also often includes pdf guides to microfilm sets that allow you to explore content more thoroughly. If you know what is contained in specific rolls you can often request only a couple microfilm rolls from a set rather than requesting all of them. The Microfilm Catalog is linked from the main Archives research page: http://www.archives.gov/research/ (There are also other resources on this site that may be useful depending on your research.)

Requesting National Archives Fiche
You can request NARA microfilm through the Library’s Inter-Library Loan Service (ILL).

- Use ILLiad to request microfilm, (http://illiad.slu.edu/illiad/xii/logon.html) including as much relevant information as you can. The standard “loan” form is not designed for microfilm, so fill in the information wherever you can.

If you plan to go to the National Archives in D.C. to do research, prepare as much as possible beforehand, including getting what you can on microfilm. Talk with your SLU Librarians or make an appointment at the local branch of the National Archives to make the most of your limited research time in D.C.

This is just the tip of the iceberg!
For more information or research assistance with U.S. Government Information contact:

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rebecca.hyde@slu.edu or 314-977-3106
Book an appointment at: https://rebeccahyde.youcanbook.me

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