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Legal Information Institutes (LIs) - Free Legal Stuff

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Legal Research Tips

Legal Information Institutes (LIIs) –Free Legal Stuff

Yemisi Dina

Multi-disciplinary and comparative approach to legal studies implies that research should go outside the conventional research sources and consult a variety of options. Open access to legal information is made possible by legal information institutes worldwide. In the early 1990s, the Australian Legal Information Institute (AustliI) initiated this unique medium of disseminating free legal information. LIIs have grown significantly over the last 10 years into the following:

- ◆ Asian Legal Information Institute (AsianLI) <http://www.asianlii.org>
- ◆ Australian Legal Information Institute (AustliI) <http://www.austlii.edu>
- ◆ British & Irish Legal Information Institute (BAILII) <http://www.bailii.org>
- ◆ Canadian Legal Information Institute (CANLII) <http://www.canlii.org>
- ◆ Common Law Legal Information Institute (CommonLI) <http://www.commonlii.org/>
- ◆ CORNELL Legal Information Institute (Cornell LI) <http://www.law.cornell.edu/>
- ◆ Cyprus law (CYLAW) <http://www.cylaw.org/>
- ◆ Hong Kong Law (HKLII) <http://www.hklii.org/>
- ◆ Ireland Law (IRLII) <http://www.ucc.ie/law/irlII/index.php>
- ◆ New Zealand Law (NZLII) <http://www.nzlii.org/>
- ◆ Pacific Islands Law (PacLI) <http://www.paclii.org/>
- ◆ South Africa Law SAFLII <http://www.saflii.org/>
- ◆ World LI <http://www.worldlii.org/> 

Coverage of these databases spans across all jurisdictions of the world for case law, legislation, and articles. Lately they now feature leading case law by subject, for example you are able to find a list of British or Irish contract cases in BAILII. You are also able to sign up for RSS feeds which notifies you about recent decisions or modifications.

Note however that you cannot Google the materials, you have to search in each database.

You never know what you will find and they are all in full text accessible all the time, no passwords required!

Selective v. Exhaustive

Sharon Wang

Before starting a research project, it is always important to determine the scope of the research. One of the questions that need to be answered is whether the particular project requires an exhaustive or selective search.

Selective and exhaustive searches are two different strategies in research. For a selective search, the goal is to find the most relevant and high quality information sources. Therefore, it is key to identify the best information sources where potentially “good enough” materials can be found. On the other hand, exhaustive searches require researchers to be able to locate all possible sources that might be relevant on the subject. Filling the gap is the most important step in the process.

Accordingly, when conducting a selective research, the quality of the information matters the most. Researchers should make sure that the materials found are authoritative, reliable and highly relevant. A good researcher knows exactly when and where to stop. For an exhaustive search, although the quality is still of importance, it is more important that no relevant sources are missing. To do so, it is recommended to check the scope notes of each source: which years are covered? Which Jurisdictions? And what types of documents are expected from one source, etc. Such information helps researchers to decide the completeness of a source.

Of course there is always a balance between being selective and exhaustive and this balance varies in different contexts. It is then left for each researcher to decide how to keep this balance.

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