



SCHOOL OF LAW
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Texas A&M University School of Law
Texas A&M Law Scholarship

Faculty Scholarship

1-1976

Juris: Legal Information in the Department of Justice

James E. Hambleton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.tamu.edu/facscholar>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

James E. Hambleton, *Juris: Legal Information in the Department of Justice*, 69 Law Libr. J. 199 (1976).
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.tamu.edu/facscholar/147>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Texas A&M Law Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Texas A&M Law Scholarship. For more information, please contact aretteen@law.tamu.edu.

Juris: Legal Information in the Department of Justice

By JAMES E. HAMBLETON*

JURIS is the computerized legal information system being developed by the Department of Justice for use by its attorneys. The system has been devised not only to help in statutory and case law research, but to provide access to memoranda, briefs, and other work products generated in daily departmental activity. From modest beginnings, JURIS has grown in use and in data-base capabilities. JURIS search strategy, which involves building up sets of data into a search "tree," has proven to be effective for its users. After a year-long evaluation project was completed in May 1975, the results indicated enough user acceptance to justify continuation and expansion of the program. JURIS plans for the future include an enlarged data base and receipt in early 1976 of a specially designed terminal tailored for JURIS and its users. The Department of Justice has an effective legal information resource in JURIS, which continues to grow in effectiveness with data-base expansion and new hardware acquisition.

In early 1970, the Justice Department began formulating plans for a computer-based legal information retrieval system. This system was conceived as providing on-line, interactive access through remote terminals to a data base that would consist of materials in two major areas.

The data base would hold first Federal statutory and case law. Secondly, it would contain the "work product" of the Justice Department; that is, briefs, memos, policy directives, procedural manuals, and other material generated by Justice Department attorneys in their day-to-day work routine.

It was reasoned that such a system would cut down needless duplication in brief preparation and legal writing, and would reduce the time spent on certain types of legal research by U.S. attorneys and their assistants. By having the full text of previous work on-line, attorneys might be able to find a brief on point already prepared. This capability would theoretically improve the quality and uniformity of the Department's legal briefs and opinions, and might also aid in speeding up judicial proceedings.

The proposed computer system would also provide better communication of Department of Justice administrative and procedural changes. By including the manuals of rules and regulations in the data base, and by updating them as changes occurred, U.S. attorneys in remote field offices could check easily on exact depart-

mental procedure. By including the *U.S. Code* and the *Code of Federal Regulations* in the data base, they would also have less trouble getting the most up-to-date and accurate Federal laws and regulations.

With this overall strategy of providing a total information system, a pilot project was started in 1971 and JURIS (Justice Retrieval and Inquiry System) evolved. Initially, the test terminal, located in the main justice building in Washington, D.C., was hooked up to the NASA/RECON system with a small file of case abstracts. As the pilot project progressed, JURIS became independent and fully "in-house." The main IBM S370/155 computer now in use is located in downtown Washington. The project is under the supervision of the Legal Information Systems Group of the Office of Management and Finance of the Department of Justice.

For the next 2 years (1972 and 1973) JURIS remained very much in the experimental stage. In fact, until 1974 the only file that was at all productive was that of the *U.S. Code*. In mid-1974, there were still only a half dozen terminals operational; JURIS was used mostly for demonstrations, training, and an occasional search request. The data base was still too limited to be of much real research value, containing only a few hundred selected memoranda and briefs, a few score of volumes of *U.S. Reports*, and the code.

At this time it was decided that a thorough evaluation of automated retrieval systems be undertaken so that the future of JURIS could

* Librarian, Arnold & Porter, Washington, D.C.

be better charted. This evaluation project would extend from July 1974 through May 1975, and would assess the operational and economic advantages of automated retrieval systems for legal information.

Since the JURIS data base was so limited, the project included a contract with Mead Data Corporation for access to the LEXIS system. By contracting for a subscription to LEXIS, half of JURIS proposed capability could be satisfied. With LEXIS providing Federal case law, the JURIS people could concentrate on loading their data base with "work product" material (memos, briefs, etc.). It was little trouble to make the two systems compatible. From the same remote terminal, an attorney could access LEXIS case law or JURIS memos or briefs.

The evaluation project, then, began in mid-1974 with both the LEXIS and JURIS data bases available. Mead Data supplied the Department of Justice with its CRT (cathode ray tube) terminals. From this point on JURIS/LEXIS use grew rapidly. LEXIS already had a solid case law data base, so Justice attorneys were able to conduct productive research immediately. As the JURIS data base was loaded with more internal departmental paperwork, it, too, became productive.

The Department began an expanded training program as more terminals became available. From October 1974 through April 1975, U.S. attorneys and assistants from the various field offices were flown into Washington and New York for intensive 2-day training sessions. Twenty-four people a week were trained in Washington, and the same number every other week in New York. Thus, at its peak, the staff was training nearly 100 attorneys a month in Washington and 48 per month in New York. From May through June of 1975, these training sessions continued in Washington. As of July, a "circuit riding" program was implemented with staff trainers sent for on-the-spot instruction to one of the field offices. There were 21 terminals in operation when circuit riding began. As of mid-August, this extensive program had resulted in 900 Department of Justice lawyers trained to use the LEXIS system, with 700 of these also trained to access JURIS. This number was out of a total attorney population of roughly 3,000. Almost a third, then, of the attorneys employed by the Department of Justice were familiar with the system. A positive byproduct of the training sessions was user sug-

gestions on the kind of material that should be included in the JURIS data base. Many of these suggestions were followed so that JURIS has become tailored to its users' needs. This obviously has increased its day-to-day effectiveness for many of the attorneys.

During the evaluation period, the JURIS data base was being fed a daily diet of Department "work product." This information was processed by various firms with which the Justice Department has contracted. By mid-August, over 3,000 briefs had been entered into the data base.

At the end of the evaluation period, the results indicated massive user acceptance: 99 percent of the attorneys surveyed recommended that the Department continue the use of automated research. A large majority also reported great time savings and more satisfactory research when using the computer. This evaluation was presented to the Deputy Attorney General, who approved plans for further development of the JURIS system and authorized a new terminal designed specifically for JURIS and its users. This new terminal will eliminate some interface problems between the user and terminal that were discovered in the training sessions. The function or command keys will have English words substituted for some of the algebraic symbols currently used on the key caps. These new terminals are scheduled for delivery sometime in the spring.

When the contract with Mead Data expired at the end of the evaluation period, the Department of Justice wanted to extend the LEXIS subscription so that its data base would remain available. A month-by-month extension was granted. However, in mid-August, when Mead Data and the Department were still unable to agree to terms for a new contract, the LEXIS subscription was cancelled, resulting in the loss of the LEXIS data base, particularly its Federal case law files. As was pointed out, most case law ceased to be loaded into the JURIS data base when the Department contracted with LEXIS. So now JURIS has been left with very little Federal case law. One remedy for this has been to borrow the case law data base from FLITE (Federal Legal Information Through Electronics), an old Air Force project with a strong Federal file, including the full-text opinions of the U.S. Reports. The FLITE people have sent magnetic tapes of this library to Washington to be loaded into JURIS. The FLITE library

will become a part of the JURIS data base next spring.

Since the Department of Justice decided to continue and enhance JURIS, other legal data bases or information services are constantly under study for possible inclusion into the JURIS system. Negotiations are on-going with other legal information systems with possibilities of either buying data or subscribing to services being explored. Any data base or system that might enhance JURIS or make it more effective for its users is considered.

At the present time, JURIS contains individual subject files that are combined in different ways to form cumulative files. Some of these cumulative files are in turn combined to form libraries. A user can access a single file, combined files, or a whole library. The major library is that which contains the briefs and memoranda, called the "DOJ" library. It consists of the Federal Condemnation Handbook file, and the following three combined files. The first combined file is the "Briefs" file, which consists of the individual files of selected Solicitor General, civil division, tax division, and antitrust division briefs and pleadings. The second combined file, the "Tax" file, contains selected tax division briefs and the file of internal memoranda of the tax division. The Attorney General's numbered memoranda file and the file of the U.S. Attorney's Bulletin, Points to Remember, make up the third combined file of the major "DOJ" library.

There are four more libraries. The "Claims" library contains two individual files. This first has *U.S. Court of Claims Decisions*, volumes 134-200. The second is the "hot" claims file, consisting of court decisions from the first few months of the current year. The "Propat" library deals with the proposed changes in the patent laws. Each file in this library contains simply the Senate bill proposing such changes. The "Statlaw" library contains four individual files: Public Laws of the 93d Congress, the *U.S. Code* (1970 ed.) with Supplement II, recent Executive Orders, and selected titles of the *Code of Federal Regulations*. The last library is the "Code" library, and simply contains the Public Law file and the *U.S. Code* file.

The arrangement of these individual files into different combinations provides great flexibility for the user. Searches are initiated in JURIS by signing on at the terminal and indicating which files one wishes to search. The user then

formulates his search strategy using Boolean logic.¹ One selects words that deal with the subject to be searched, and combines them with the Boolean connectors "and," "or," and "but not."

When these key words are typed into the terminal, all documents in the particular file accessed are instantaneously scanned for those particular words within the "and," "or," and "but not" parameters specified. Also, the searcher indicates whether he wants the key words to appear within the document as a whole, or within a single sentence. Soon the user will also have the capability of specifying that the key words be within a range of a certain number of sentences. The terminal CRT displays the number of documents satisfying these requirements, and also the number of points of incidence of the search words in the documents.

Once this numbered set of documents is established, the user can then retrieve any one item from this set. This is done by simply calling for the first item in the set, or calling for a list of the citations of all documents in the set. An item can then be called for by number.

The searcher can also ask for a KWIC display of a document. This is a key-word-in-context where the search words and a specific number of words on either side of them are displayed. This helps the searcher see if his key words do in fact call up the type of document in which he is interested.

Another important manipulation available in JURIS is the capability to call for the key words on the full text page of a document. When the searcher calls up an item, he can see how many screen pages the document contains, as this is indicated in the upper right hand corner of the screen. If he then calls for the key word on a page, the next full text screen page containing his search terms is displayed; this may be a hundred screen pages into the document. The searcher, then, is saved going from page to page through the full text to locate his search words. He does have that option, though; he can go through any item page by page either forward or backward. The search words do not necessarily have to be nouns or

¹ George Boole, a 19th century logician and mathematician, developed symbolic logic using algebraic signs; his binary logic is the basis of modern computer systems.

verbs, either. The user may remember a judge's name or a numerical citation. Using these as search terms will still compile a set of documents with those unique characteristics.

The computer, then, compiles sets of items. If the searcher wishes to modify his search strategy, he merely types in new terms. Another set of documents is compiled, separate from the first. Likewise, if the user decides to branch off, he can go to a third or fourth set of items.

It is at this point that JURIS is unique. At any time the whole search history can be displayed on the terminal, with all the sets of documents listed. At any time the user can go back to an earlier set without erasing those sets compiled later. Other systems allow a searcher to modify his tactics from level to level, but at any point, if he retraces his steps, all information collected beyond the point to which he returns is lost. The JURIS searcher may at any time return to an earlier set and then return to the last set of items compiled without losing any data.

The sets of items compiled by JURIS are also able to be manipulated in other ways. Two sets may be combined to form a unique third set. In other words, instead of typing in all the key words from set one and all the key words from set two, the user simply indicates "set one and set two" and a third set of items with the restrictions of both sets is created. This capability is extremely useful in creating sets of synonyms. The searcher merely types in all the synonyms for a particular concept, and at any

time may combine this set with any others down the line to make sure that he is not missing a document only because it contains a synonym of his search word. Likewise, this capability is useful in solving spelling problems.

Thus the search strategy used at the terminal is different than that of other systems. Instead of modifying the search in one direction only, either narrowing or expanding it, the JURIS user is able to create a search "tree." By displaying the search history, he is able to see which branches he has taken and retrace his strategy or simply start off on a new tangent, without fear of losing the sets of items he has already compiled.

The search history is kept until the user signs off. At that time, the user has the option to retain his search history. In addition, a high speed printer at the terminal provides hard copy of any screen display so the user may retain any data for further analysis.

JURIS, then, provides a flexible system for document searching. By tailoring the system to a very specific group of users with clear-cut information needs, the Department of Justice has developed an effective information tool. This system provides not only a legal research capability, but also, by having departmental policy, rules, and regulations on-line, provides other important information services to the personnel in the Department. When fully operational in the spring, with new terminals and a solid case law file once again in the data base, JURIS should be quite an impressive system.