Finding Statutes using Print Volumes

While requirements statutory research using printed volumes are getting rarer and rarer, it does happen. This tutorial will give you a very brief overview of how to find statutes in books.

If you have a citation, using it is simple to use print resources to find the provision in question. Use the library catalogue to find where the state or federal code you are looking for is shelved. Then identify the volume you need using the title number or name from the citation. The sections are then organized in alphabetical order.

So if you were looking for 42 U.S.C.A. § 12181, this would be the volume to use. The large number indicates the Title and the smaller numbers identify the range of Sections covered in the volume.

If you know the name of the law, you can use a Popular Name Table, just as you can online. Not all federal statutes have popular names, but many do. The Popular Name Table lists named statutes alphabetically, and gives you the citation to where the law appears in the U.S. Code. Remember: a single statute may have been broken up into many different sections of the code, even scattered among different titles, if the statute deals with diverse subjects. In that case, the popular name table will list all of the different sections that contain parts of that statute. Look for the volumes at or near the end of the code’s volume set.

If you don’t have a citation or a popular name, you will need to use the index. Most indexes to codes are located in a separate volume or volumes at the end of the set. To use the index, look for words that describe the topic to find the citations to the sections of the code that deal with that topic. The trick can be to figure out which keywords to use. It’s always good to do a little brainstorming beforehand.

Additionally, a good index will cross reference synonyms and related topics, so even if you don’t have the exact term the statute is listed under, you will hopefully get some assistance to get to that correct term.