

## Online Scholarship and Download Statistics – Background Information

Faculty scholarship is moving increasingly to the electronic model which creates the potential for a wider audience and more effective dissemination of research results. The speed and ease with which readers can locate these results, respond to the authors and build upon the findings in their own original research represents an ideal model and invigorates scholarly discourse.

As this trend toward electronic publication accelerates, it is obvious that multiple paths of discovery are developing for this electronic content. Among the most prominent are:

- SSRN/LSN – Social Science Research Network/Legal Scholarship Network, a database of primarily recent scholarly articles and working papers, with email dissemination of new content via both subject and institution-based email releases.
- bePress Legal Repository – a database of scholarly information that includes content from bePress-hosted institutional repositories (including BC Law content which appears in both the NELLCo Legal Scholarship Repository and Boston College’s digital commons initiative – eScholarship@BC) Customized email notification of new content by keyword or author is available.
- SmartCILP – the electronic version of the current-awareness tool, Current Index to Legal Periodicals – which links to newly published law review articles in both Lexis and Westlaw
- HeinOnline, a searchable resource that is quickly becoming the preferred source for both current and back issues of a significant and ever-growing amount of law review content.
- Blogs – Many legal blogs (“blawgs”) regularly cite to (or post title pages from) current issues of law reviews, taking readers to the actual articles posted on the parent institution’s website – see, for example, [this post](#) from the widely-read [Concurring Opinions](#) blog.

These multiple paths of discovery insure that this scholarly content achieves the widest possible exposure and impact. In a world where the Open Access movement is gaining momentum, it is no longer possible, practical or even desirable to establish a single gateway to electronic content.

There is a certain amount of controversy surrounding the decision of some content providers to track and compile access statistics for their content. SSRN displays “hits” on particular articles and numbers of download requests for particular articles, and supplies

rankings for authors who post on this site based on their total download requests. BePress currently provides monthly statistics via email to authors, but does not post them publicly or feature statistical “tournaments.”

Other electronic publishers do not collect or display access requests per specific article. Neither LexisNexis nor Westlaw report on the number of times that an individual author’s law review articles have been displayed or downloaded. Similarly, HeinOnline, now a preferred source for law review articles, does not collect or track these individual statistics.

There are academics who compile rankings of law reviews based on citation frequency in other sources; *see* Washington & Lee Law School’s “Law Journals: Submissions and Rankings” at <http://lawlib.wlu.edu/LJ/index.aspx>

And there are academics who compile rankings of law schools based on the quantity of the faculty’s scholarly output; *see* Brian Leiter’s law school rankings at <http://www.leiterrankings.com/>

It is important to step back and question what is being counted and to what end. If a faculty member contributes to a highly respected treatise title, that contribution will never be counted in an SSRN download count. But that contribution will be referenced by practitioners both new and experienced, cited in law reviews, cited in briefs filed in state and federal courts, and possibly cited in those courts’ subsequent opinions.

Here at Boston College Law School, Legal Information Librarians conduct twice-yearly searches for their assigned faculty contacts to report on sources citing to their scholarship. This service, known as “You’ve Been Cited,” demonstrates the reliance by other scholars and courts on that faculty member’s work within a particular timeframe.