Interactive Database to Search Judiciary Trends

A recently enhanced database that houses information about civil and criminal federal cases dating to 1970 is now available to researchers and the public on the Federal Judicial Center's website as part of a partnership with the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

The interactive database contains docket information from district, appellate, and bankruptcy court filings and terminations, including plaintiff and defendant names, filing date, termination date, disposition of the case, type of lawsuit, jurisdiction, and docket number. It excludes judges' names as a preventative measure against judge-shopping by plaintiffs.

Use of the database is free and it allows for multiyear data analyses. Data can be downloaded in annual and multi-year batches, or users can select their target cases using the database's interactive feature.

For several decades it has been a frequent tool for academic researchers studying workload trends in the federal Judiciary. For example, it's been used in the past to examine how plea bargaining and charging outcomes have changed over time in response to changes in sentencing laws and to analyze the market impacts of corporate lawsuits involving publicly traded companies.

It is also useful as a sort of "shopping list" for the PACER database, the federal Judiciary's online service that makes judicial opinions, motions, pleadings and other actual records of cases available to the public. Using the database on the FJC's site in conjunction with PACER can help users zero in on the types of records sought, saving unnecessary document downloads.

The revamped database adds in some data sets that were not in earlier versions: civil-case plaintiff and defendant names and docket numbers. It will also be updated with recent case information more frequently than in the past. A version of the database will continue to be housed at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan, where it has been available since the 1980s.

The Federal Judicial Center is the research and education arm of the federal Judiciary and often works in partnership with the AO, the Judiciary's administrative agency. The AO collects and supplies the records for the database.