

EISIL: A Gateway to International Legal Information on the Internet

Paper given by Amy B. Osborne, Foreign and Comparative Law Specialist at University of Kentucky College of Law Library at the BIALL Pre-Conference Seminar on Treaties and International Law, Harrogate, June 9, 2005. EISIL, the Electronic Information System for International Law was fully launched in September 2004. A project of the American Society of International Law, EISIL is designed to assist researchers both experienced and novice, who are looking for information within the realm of international law.

History

Sponsored by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Electronic Information System for International Law, EISIL, is a project of the American Society of International Law (ASIL). Founded in 1906, the mission of ASIL is to foster the study of international law and to promote the establishment and maintenance of international relations on the basis of law and justice. Through its publications and programs, ASIL seeks to advance international law scholarship and education.

Twelve librarians from across the United States were invited to become EISIL authors with each author being responsible for one category. Authors were given in-depth training at ASIL headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 2002 the database was ready to receive data and content building began. The first EISIL category to be built and launched was a large section covering the area of human rights authored by Marci Hoffman. Full launch of all 13 EISIL categories took place in September 2004. In August 2004 the International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) gave EISIL the 2004 Website Award.

Over five years ago ASIL began to explore ways in which the society could use its expertise and resources to improve access to international legal information on the web. Through workshops involving ASIL members, librarians, individuals from international organisations and institutes and the editors of the society's publications, the *American Journal of International Law* and *International Legal Materials*, discussions were held regarding what type of resource was needed. This group of international law experts agreed that a "one-stop shopping" site would be ideal. More precisely, they wanted a place where researchers could go for high quality information covering the broad spectrum of topics within the realm of international law. Furthermore, through these workshops it was decided that the three primary document types which researchers use consistently are: primary documents, research guides and high quality web sites. EISIL is the outcome of these workshops.



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EISIL project managers, Jill Watson and Marci Hoffman created the database structures, guidelines for selecting content, the scope of the database and the database standards. Northern Lights Internet Solutions, a database designer in Canada, worked with surveying audiences that generally mirror the typical ASIL member. This included individuals who practice, teach and study international law and international relations.

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Introduction

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The EISIL database can be approached in a variety of ways. Users may browse the 13 broad international law categories found on the main screen for an overview of general topics covered in the database. The 13 categories covered by the database are: general international law, states and groups of states, international organisations, individual groups, international air, space and water, international environmental law, international economic

law, international human rights, international criminal law, communication and transport, use of force, international dispute settlement, and private international law. Most of the main categories in EISIL start out with basic sources and continue with subcategories which cover the entire topic in more detail. For each category a description is provided which reveals the scope of that particular topic.

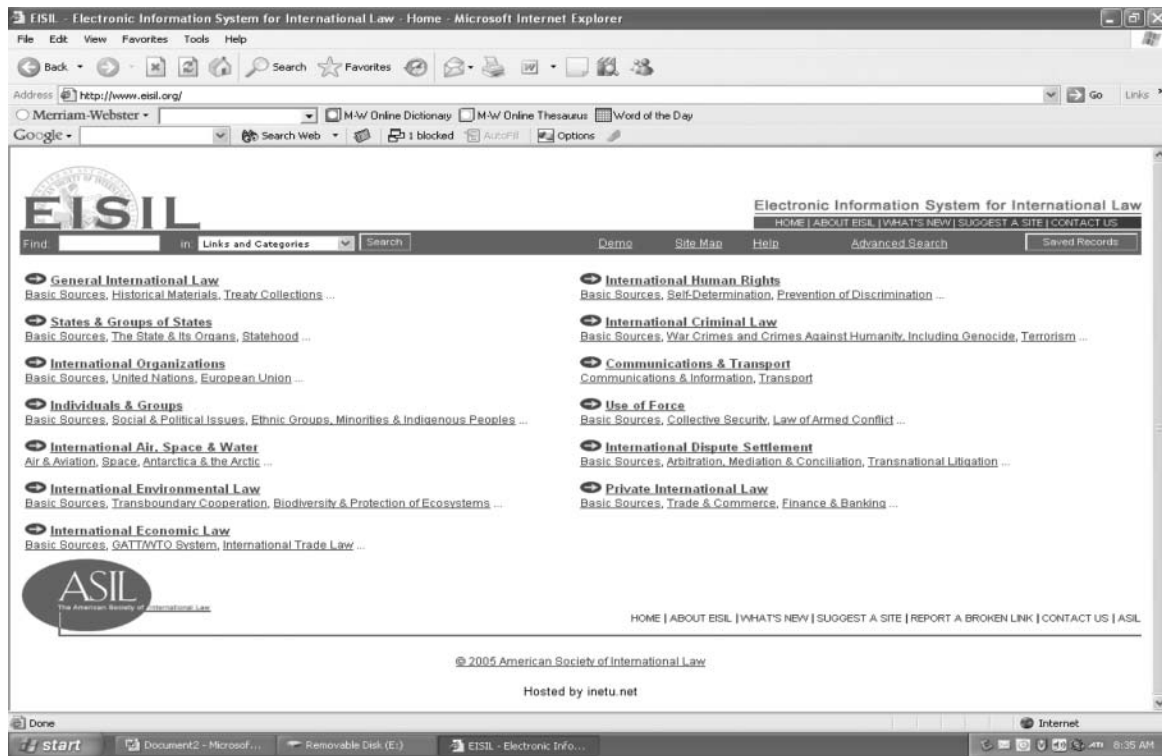


Figure 1. EISIL Home Page.

Searching the EISIL Database

Browsing the database can prove quite useful to those researchers who are not familiar with the full spectrum of topics covered within the area of international law. Each of the 13 broad categories is broken down into more specific subcategories. By clicking on any of the subcategory links researchers are taken directly to resources within that subcategory. When navigating through the database, the breadcrumb feature found in the top left area of the screen assists researchers in maintaining a sense of where they are within the database. All the resources are arranged by type leading off with primary documents, then web sites and research guides.

While the browsing feature can be valuable when beginning a research project, often searching the database will prove to be the preferred research method. For those who wish to word search, EISIL provides both a basic and an advanced search option, which may cover the entire database, or searches may be limited to a particular category such as states and groups of states. Additionally, searches may be limited to a

particular type of document such as primary documents only.

The basic search box found in the top left corner of the EISIL home page allows for word searching. However, as with most search mechanisms, this basic search option is not as precise as the advanced option. Acronyms and phrases such as “human rights” may return so many records that the search may be useless. The basic search option will allow searches to be limited to particular areas of the database such as to links in the current category or to links in sub-categories.

The advanced search option provides full Boolean search capabilities and includes several methods for limiting searches. In addition to providing standard advanced search options, (all words, exact phrase, any of the words, without the words), more precise searches may be performed by limiting searches in a variety of different ways. Searches may be limited to various fields such as title, keyword, description or citation with a date limitation search option also provided. Of particular interest to those researching international treaties and conventions is the option of searching by the entry into force or conclusion date of the document.

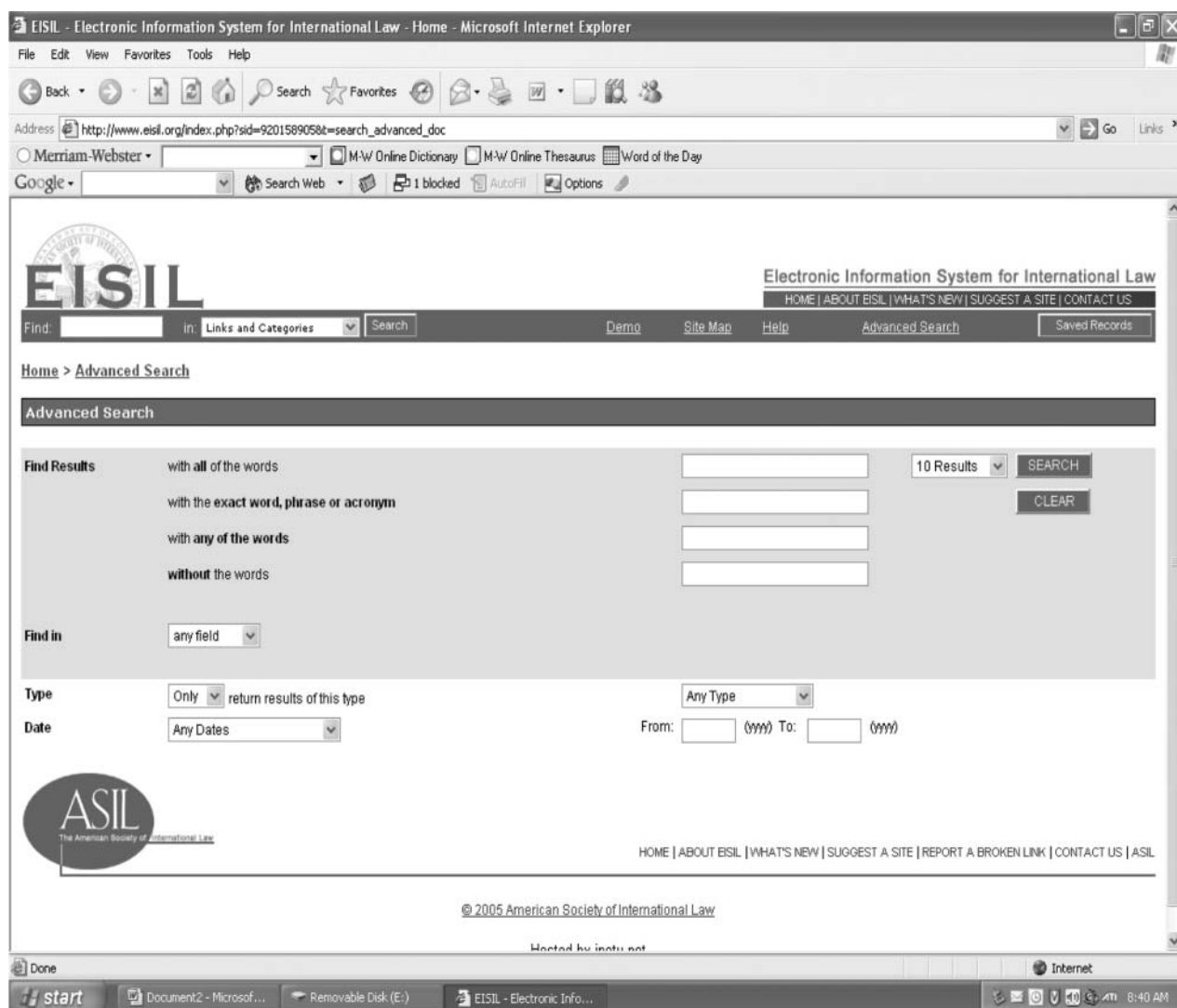


Figure 2. Searching the EISIL Database.

View Search Results

To assist EISIL users in organising their search results, results may be viewed and organised in a variety of ways. After conducting a search, a list of resources will appear, starting with primary documents, then web sites and research guides. In some instances search results will alert researchers to relevant subcategories. In the top right corner of the search results screen a “Show Description” box appears. By clicking on this box a description of each of the documents in the search results list will appear.

Under each document link in the search results list there appears a “More Information” option which contains a wealth of value-added information. This feature is unique to EISIL and sets it apart from other international law resources on the internet. Each record within the database contains additional information compiled by one of the 12 EISIL authors, each of whom is an information professional or international law expert.

When working with primary documents this “More Information” link will include the following information:

- The formal title of the document
- The link and an alternative link to accessing the document
- Conclusion date
- Entry-into-force date
- A brief description of the document
- An authoritative legal citation
- Document keywords which provide additional access points to the document
- The language(s) in which the document is available on the site
- A link to the EISIL record of the instrument(s) that amend(s) the primary document
- A link to the EISIL record of the earlier instrument(s) that the primary document amends.

Again, to further assist in creating the most precise results list, search results may be narrowed by limiting to a particular type of document such as a primary document, web site or research guide.

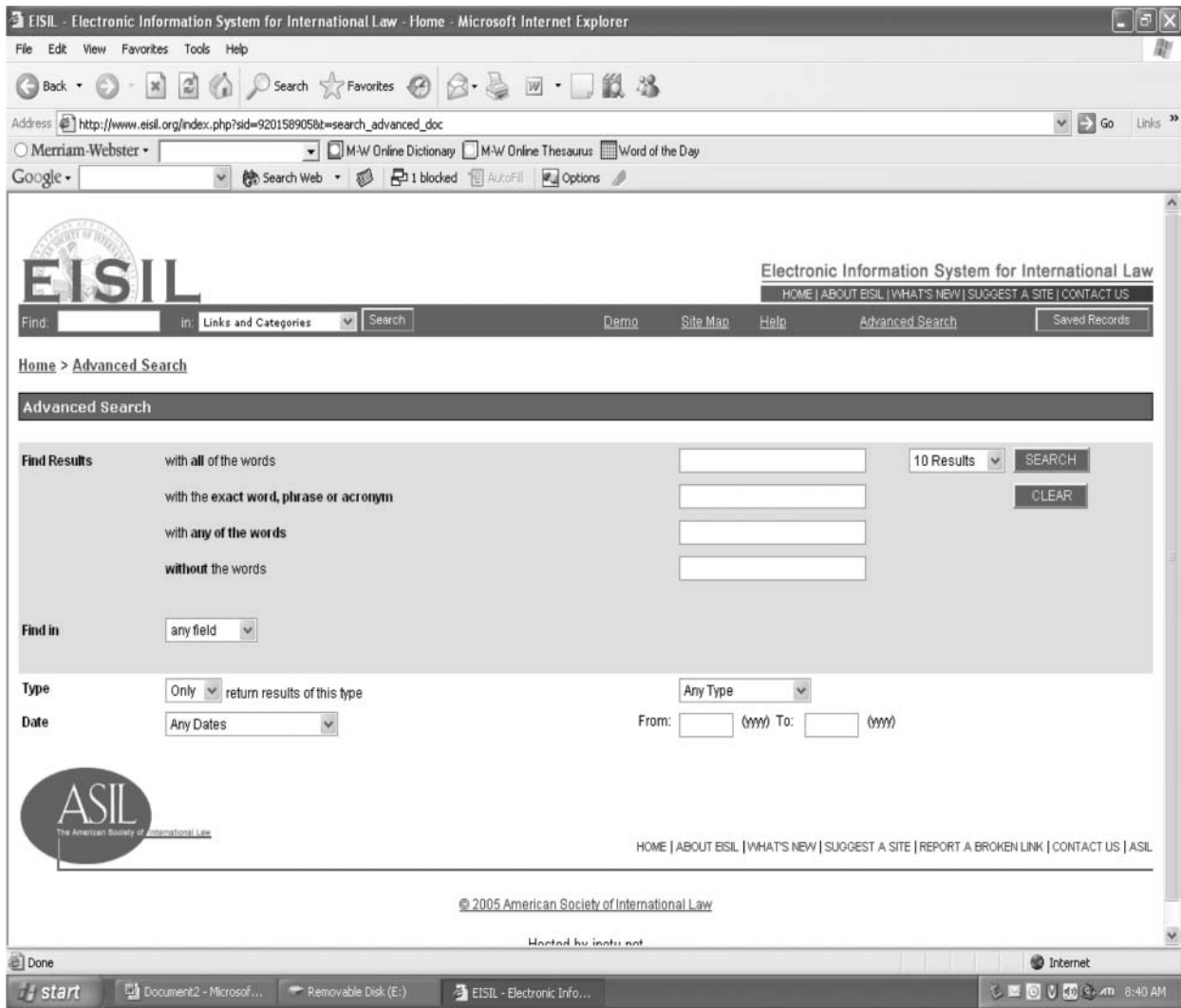


Figure 3. View search results.

Marking and Saving Records

For ongoing research projects the option to mark and save records can prove invaluable. After reviewing the “More Information” link associated with all EISIL documents, the record may be saved by clicking on the “Save Record” box. This option will create a list of records to review at a later date. Thereafter, each time a user accesses the database they can see their “Saved Records.” This is a good way to keep track of research. After records that have been saved are no longer needed, they may be deleted from the “Saved Records” list.

Why EISIL It rather than Google It?

As most information professionals know, Google has become the preferred search method for locating information on the web. In many instances Google can prove quite useful and efficient. However, with the advent of the “deep web”, much of the valuable content available

cannot be found using standard search engines such as Google and Alta Vista. Because the EISIL authors have a wealth of experience as information professionals, they are able to search the web for documents that might not otherwise be found. These hard to find documents are then added to the EISIL database for the convenience of all EISIL users. Also added are the legal citations to documents which are useful to individuals who are writing research papers and articles. Because of the international focus of the database, these citations do not follow the American Bluebook Citation format as not all EISIL users follow this citation guide. The database also provides quick links to documents which have amended a treaty or which a particular treaty amends. For example, when viewing the record on the Lateran Treaty which was concluded in 1929, the “More Information” page will provide the link to the “Agreement Between the Italian Government and the Holy See” signed in 1984, which amended the original treaty. With the addition of the conclusion and entry into force dates, EISIL provides much more information than other internet international law databases.

As an example of EISIL’s superior search mechanism, searching Google for the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights yields hundreds of search results while performing the same search in EISIL yields only six search results including the text of the document and five other relevant documents and web sites. It is the superior quality of the documents found in the EISIL database, together with the precise searching mechanism and the customisation of search results which makes EISIL the best place to go to find international law information and documents. Again, while standard web search engines may prove useful in some instances, no other international law research site provides the “value-added” information found in the EISIL database. EISIL truly is “one-stop shopping.”

Using EISIL in the Workplace

As a library reference tool, EISIL is unparalleled. As a starting point for research, the outlines for each category guide researchers through the wide array of international law topics. While many law librarians may be experts in the laws of their particular jurisdiction, not everyone works regularly within the area of international law. The database may be browsed to locate topics for research papers and articles as EISIL provides a quick and easy outline to the vast array of international law topics. Additionally, EISIL is a quick and easy way to locate treaties, dates of entry into force and citations for international legal documents. For those who do not have access to an extensive international law print collection, EISIL can be used to supplement print resources.

As a classroom and legal education tool, EISIL can assist students involved with international moot court teams. When these moot court students write briefs for competition, all of the information needed to include the treaty or convention in the brief can be found in the EISIL database including the text of the treaty, relevant dates and legal citations. To date, EISIL has been used by the Jessop Moot Court teams and by the International Moot Court team at the University of Kentucky. For students cite checking law journal articles EISIL can be helpful in not only locating difficult to find documents, but by also providing legal citations to documents. EISIL can be used in a variety of settings. As librarians move from the

reference desk to the lectern to provide formal training sessions, EISIL can be incorporated into the curriculum. Whether the audience consists of students, barristers and solicitors or law firm support staff, EISIL can be used as a topic for law school classes, law firm lunch sessions or newsletter articles. Additionally, EISIL can be incorporated into research guides and bibliographies.

Additional Help Features

Because the developers of the EISIL database have worked to set EISIL apart from other Internet international law resources, users of the database will find several helpful features. By clicking on the “Demo” link found at the top of the screen users are guided to an EISIL Demo Video. The “About EISIL” link also found at the top of the screen leads to other useful tools. From this page, those interested in incorporating EISIL into an international law presentation will find a ready made PowerPoint presentation on using the database as well as a one page hand-out on using EISIL. An additional hand-out titled, “Using EISIL to Find and Understand International Law on the Web” can also be found on the “About EISIL” page. Finally, to make it easy to link to EISIL from your website, the database developers have provided the HTML coding that allows the EISIL logo to be placed on any website with a link to the database.

Conclusion

As all areas of law become increasingly cross-jurisdictional, librarians are often asked to find documents relating to the myriad of areas upon which international law touches. From human rights to environmental law, the need for information from within the discipline of international law is growing. The EISIL database is truly a “one-stop shopping” site and should be the first place researchers turn to research the ever expanding topics of international law. So, the next time you need to locate an international law document or research an international law topic remember to “EISIL It.”

Biography

Amy Osborne is the Foreign and International Law Specialist at the University of Kentucky College of Law Library. Mrs Osborne received her B.A degree in Geography from Morehead State University and her M.S.L.S. from the University of Kentucky. Prior to joining the faculty of the law library she was Information Resources Administrator with the law firm of Landrum and Shouse. She is a frequent speaker on the topics of legal research and international and comparative law research. Mrs Osborne is a member of the American Association of Law Libraries, the International Association of Law Libraries and the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians. She is also co-author of the *Kentucky Legal Research Manual*.

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