

## **TTP289A-05: THE TRANSPORTATION-LAND USE CONNECTION**

### **Assignment 2: LexisNexis as a Research Tool**

**Due Date: 3/4**

The goal of this assignment is to increase your familiarity with the LexisNexis Academic database and its power as a research tool. In addition to legal, business, and medical databases, LexisNexis Academic includes a news database comprising full text articles from national and regional newspapers and magazines. The database lets you search for words or phrases in the title and/or body of an article, specify dates of interest, specify regions or particular sources of interest, and otherwise perform sophisticated searches. For a topic like transportation planning, where the problems affect our daily lives and communities throughout the U.S. and the world are searching for new solutions all the time, LexisNexis offers a unique research tool.

Using a little creativity, you can come up with lots of different ways to use LexisNexis in your research. Here are some of the ways I've used it:

- To search for examples of a particular phenomenon. In one project, I wanted to find examples of cities that had closed streets to through traffic in an effort to reduce crime. In another, I was looking for places where Walgreen's and other retailers had opened neighborhood-scale stores. This search is not exhaustive – you only find those ones that get written up in the paper – but it does give you examples you can describe and gives you a starting point for further research. Once I knew which cities had closed streets, I could then contact the city planning departments to find out more about their efforts.
- To track the use of a particular term over time. For a study on telecommuting in the early 1990s, I plugged in the term “telecommut\*” (to pick up “telecommuter” or “telecommuting” or “telecommute”) to find the number of articles that mentioned something about telecommuting in order to chart the growth in the use of this term over time. This analysis gave us a sense of the growing interest in the phenomenon – though not the growth in the numbers of people actually doing it. This type of analysis is a form of cultural analysis.
- To see all the different kinds of ways a particular term gets used. This one is a variation on the previous one. In one case, we were interested in looking at the public interest in issues like urban sprawl. We used LexisNexis to find all the articles for a particular period of time that included the word “sprawl” and found lots that had nothing to do with urban sprawl. This was also a cultural analysis of sorts.
- To track the interest in a particular issue over time or in different places. In another study, I was interested in seeing which transportation issues were of greatest concern to the public. One (imperfect) measure of this is how often the issue gets written about in the paper. Obviously, this is an indirect measure of what the public is thinking, and you

can't be sure if the number of articles reflects the public's concerns or influences them or both. Nevertheless, we counted the number of articles on different transportation issues (safety, equity, congestion or traffic, and environment or air quality) for different periods of time and for different regions. A second stage of the research involved an analysis of the content of a selection of these articles, to better understand the perspective that they portrayed of the issue. Lots of fields use content analysis as an essential research tool

- To find good quotes or fun statistics or interesting examples. These items are really nice to have for the introduction of your paper or for presentations. They are sometimes hard to find if you purposefully set out to do so, but I often come across them when I'm using LexisNexis for other purposes.

These are just a few of the ways that LexisNexis can be used as a research tool. Although I've used it in relatively informal ways, it can be a very formal part of a research project.

For your assignment, I'd like you to think up a use for LexisNexis that would contribute to your term paper research. If you can't think of something interesting to do that relates to your paper, you might choose a particular transportation issue or policy that you're interested in and search for places that are talking about the issue or policy. Look at my examples for ideas, but you are welcome to come up with another approach. One thing to be careful about is your search terms – you may have to play around with the best words or best combinations of words to get what you're looking for.

Your write up should be 2 to 3 double-spaced pages. Write this in the form of a memo to me that describes what you set out to do, the question that you wanted to answer. Then give the details of your work – what search terms you used, dates you specified, that sort of thing. Next give the results – examples you found, or statistics on the numbers of articles (better yet, a graph), etc. Finally, give your assessment of how your research project went, what worked and what didn't, whether the results were interesting or whether the whole thing was a waste of time, that sort of thing.

Hint: You get to LexisNexis Academic through the electronic resources at the library. The search tool is pretty straightforward, although if you want to go beyond the basic search, you may need to play around with it for a bit.