

**Columbia University Libraries' Digital Collections.** Access: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/>.

Columbia University Libraries has assembled a group of fascinating digital collections that span a wide range of subjects. These include 18 online exhibitions that highlight their collections in a way that provides a comprehensive look into American and World history.

The digital collections on this site provide a broad variety of digitized images, videos, manuscripts, publications, ephemera, oral histories, e-books, reports, and architectural designs. The presentation of so many different formats provides unique access to a wide range of subjects in which Columbia Universities Libraries has collected throughout the years.

An example comes from the New York Real Estate Brochure Collection. Here you have access to a searchable database housing thousands of brochures, floor plans, and price lists from residential and commercial real estate development in New York City from the 1920s to the 1970s. The results lists provide an easy-to-use viewer that allows the researcher to see in incredible detail each item in this digital collection.

Another example showcasing the wide range of digital collections located on this site comes from Chinese Paper Gods collection. This digital collection provides an online visual catalog of more than 200 woodcuts used in folk religious practices in Beijing and other parts of China in the 1930s.

The Online Exhibitions page is another resource for a researcher using the Columbia University Libraries Web site. The difference between the online exhibits and digital collections is that the exhibits are HTML-based,

with scanned items embedded within them as opposed to digital collections which individual items are in searchable databases (with a search box) or indexes. A link to these exhibitions has been added to the top of the Digital Collections page. Users can view exhibits rich in America and World history ranging from the New York Russian Jewish immigrant community to William Shakespeare's 17th-century folios.

The Columbia University Libraries Web site's overall design is pretty straightforward. There are two navigation bars at the top of each page along with a tabs list. These navigation devices allow the user to move around the Web site in an intuitive way. Thus, the Digital Collections' Web page provides user-friendly access to a wide range of unique resources pertaining to American and World history.—  
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**Food Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.** Access: <http://www.fao.org>.

The mission of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations is to lead international efforts to defeat hunger. The FAO's Web site offers a massive collection of reports, statistics, photos, news items, and announcements, and the site is available in six languages.

For casual visitors, the site may be both fascinating and intimidating. Many paths originate at the homepage: the center column provides links to major news stories, programs, issues, photos, and media sections, while graphics along the right side tempt the viewer with statistics, upcoming events, and donation opportunities. A navigation bar on the left keeps one oriented to seven major categories, including "Knowledge Forum," "Publications," "Statistics," "Countries," and "Topics."

The information under these categories overlap each other, so unstructured browsing exposes the visitor to a good sample of FAO's resources.

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“Knowledge Forum” attempts to fill FAO’s goals of “providing a meeting place” and “bringing knowledge to the field.” This section includes “Ask FAO” with a list of FAQs and a Webform to query the experts. It also contains “Best Practices” and “Knowledge Networks” to match seekers with the best source of information for their needs.

“Publications” section includes links to the FAO library and a directory to various catalogs, document depositories, and databases hosted by FAO or provided in partnership with other agencies. The other main sections lead to similar content, but organize it differently, allowing one to browse information by country, global issue, type of statistic, or documents related to FAO policy and governance.

The FAO Web site serves as a portal to vast quantities of information. Unfortunately, the Google custom search box that appears throughout the site does not easily allow one to drill down. Page loading was sometimes slow, and my efforts to contact the FAO about several Web site problems via the “contact us” Webform were fruitless. However, the site would be a good access point for high school and college-level students, as well as for anyone conducting preliminary research on global food and agricultural issues and their intersection with politics, culture, and technology.—*Lia Vella, Colorado School of Mines, lvella@mines.edu*

### **National Criminal Justice Reference Service.**

*Access:* <http://www.ncjrs.gov>.

The National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) was established in 1972 and is a “federally funded resource offering justice and substance abuse information” available to anyone. New users should click on the “New to NCJRS:” button under the “About NCJRS,” which provides information on what is available and how to view resources. Numerous sources on a variety of criminal justice-related materials make NCJRS an excellent and easy to use resource for academic and armchair enthusiasts.

The “Search Q & A” tab along the top provides answers to hundreds of questions

on numerous topics in the NCJRS knowledge database. Searches can be performed by keyword or users can browse the Q & A by topic. Also, researchers can e-mail their questions to a specialist.

The Topics section provides outstanding resources with an A-Z topical index. Nine main subjects are presented and include “Corrections,” “Courts,” “Crime,” “Crime Prevention,” “Drugs,” “Justice System,” “Juvenile Justice,” “Law Enforcement,” and “Victims.” Each subject is broken into sub-areas. For example, “Drugs” provides links to “Illegal Substances,” “Legal Substances,” “Prevention and Education,” etc. For all of these topical areas, the site provides a Q & A section, Publications, and Related Links.

The “A-Z Publications/Products” tab provides a list of resources, which can be sorted alphabetically, by publication date, or date added to the database. Searching is available by keyword. Articles are available in various formats.

The “Library/Abstracts” tab provides access to “one of the largest criminal and juvenile justice libraries and databases in the world.” It includes summaries of more than 205,000 United States and worldwide resources (reports, articles, statistics, congressional hearings, training materials, etc.) available from the early 1970s to the present. An online thesaurus allows selection of terms for searching. Interlibrary loan, photocopying, and a weekly accession list are also available.

The site supplies links to online federal resources, including the Bureau of Prisons library, FEDSTATS, Uniform Crime Report, and more. Funding opportunities and Justice Events add additional information to the Web site. Free registration is available for JUSTINFO, a biweekly newsletter, which contains pertinent updates and news.

Although the homepage is a bit overwhelming with information about conferences, journals, funding and newsletters, this site is one of the best for locating pertinent information on an array of criminal justice issues.—*Karen Evans, Indiana State University, karen.evans@indstate.edu* 