This summer I made extensive use of the University of Arizona Libraries for conducting research on access to environmental information on endangered species in Mexico. Because I was to conduct legal research on a country that does not operate under common law, I had to first focus on gaining an understanding of the differences between civil and common law countries.

Legal research on the laws of foreign countries like Mexico requires different procedures. I specifically relied on the University of Arizona’s Daniel F. Cracchiolo Law Library to obtain basic knowledge of Mexico’s legal system. This particular research guide and the excerpt were so useful that I utilized and cited it in my own research project. Additionally, it provided very succinct descriptions of the political history of the country.

Thanks to this guide I learned that in order to study and interpret Mexico’s laws, and the laws of any civil law country, one must follow three steps. First, one must identify which code applies generally to the area of law in question. Then one must look at the existing legal doctrine on the particular issue. Lastly, one must turn to any “jurisprudencia” or “tesis sobresalientes” that were persuasive decisions but non-binding in nature.

Additionally, I contacted a law librarian about getting access to the case database in order to conduct preemption checks on the relevant laws. We spoke extensively about other resources that I could gain access to as the law library did not have recent translations or most updated original copies of the laws in question.

I also utilized the University of Arizona’s Main Library to obtain sufficient literature on the general topic of access to information through the various “articles and databases” search engines like JSTOR and Academic Search Complete/EBSCOHOST. Most of the articles that I obtained came from these two engines.

In the past, I’ve successfully utilized the same “articles and databases” feature to obtain academic sources for all the academic papers I’ve had to write as an undergraduate. For this particular topic, I initially had a hard time trying to find articles that would be most closely related to my specific topic. I thought I was not using the right keywords because I would get the dreaded “no results found” message. Later, I realized that this was an indication that virtually no literature existed on the topic at the time.

It later dawned on me that I should also conduct searches for the same topic in Spanish. I had better luck with Spanish publications and was able to double-check the procedures I was utilizing to conduct my legal research based off the legal framework that other scholars had already set out. These articles were extremely helpful because they guided me in ensuring that I was looking at the relevant laws from the start. Without the ease and accessibility of these resources, I would have had a very difficult time finding scholarly materials to help guide my research.