

**Thesis Portfolio**

Virginia Courts Project  
(Technical Report)

Effect of Online Court Records  
(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Engineering and Applied Science  
University of Virginia • Charlottesville, Virginia

In Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Science, School of Engineering

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## **Sociotechnical Synthesis**

The connection between my STS thesis and Technical project is that they both pertain to publicly accessible criminal records. My technical project involves creating an easily navigated court record database. First, we take cases from public court records online in Virginia and eventually other states, anonymize the defendants and plaintiffs in cases i.e. remove their names, and add the records to our own database at UVA. We are also creating a public facing website that allows people to easily extract all data from specific dates, localities, or other relevant data from the database we created. The site will be mainly targeted for researchers at UVA, and more specifically help researchers easily uncover inequities in the criminal justice system.

As for my STS thesis, it looks into the benefits and drawbacks of these online court records that I am using in my technical project. The paper examines specific difficulties people with public criminal records have faced, as well as the societal benefits of these records such as safer neighborhoods, jobs, and increased governmental transparency and accountability. Even though court records have been available for over a century, the public court system was designed in a time when it was necessary to physically enter the courthouse in order to access the information-- not in a world where we can get information through a few clicks in the comfort of our own homes. This change has had profound consequences, and the thesis looks at how these changes have affected various social groups.

My STS paper enhances my technical project by looking at the potential social ramification of it and other similar systems. Through this examination was able to see potential pitfalls in my project and try to address them. For example, through the analysis showed that making it even easier to look up someone's criminal record could potentially have long term

consequences. Therefore, one thing that we will be doing in the technical project is anonymizing court records. In addition, my technical project gave me insights that were beneficial when writing my STS thesis. The technical projects let me know what exactly is shared in online public records. Also, I was able to see just how easy it is to find someone's criminal records in Virginia. These insights helped me better understand how the public court record system worked letting my STS thesis paper be more accurate. Overall, concurrently working on each project enhanced both, allowing me to create a better final product.