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A LIBRARY USE STUDY OF DEPTFORD HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS'  
ENGLISH PAPER RESOURCES

By  
Anne Denning

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 1, 2003

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved May 8, 2003

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## ABSTRACT

Anne Denning  
A LIBRARY USE STUDY OF DEPTFORD HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS'  
ENGLISH PAPER RESOURCES  
2002/03  
Dr. Marilyn Shontz  
Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

The purpose of this study was to determine and compare the resources used by high school students enrolled in honors, college preparatory, and general English courses in the completion of their research papers. This applied research study was conducted with the use of a written questionnaire, which was administered to Deptford High School seniors of all academic levels in their English classes. The population and sample of this study were one and the same, 213 Deptford High School senior English students. All seniors attending English class on the day the survey was administered comprised the sample. No attempt was made to reach absentees. All data were tabulated by hand, entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and reported as percentages. The results showed that, as previous studies demonstrated, a large majority of students used books, the trend towards greater Internet use was continuing, and students continued to use interlibrary loan, although in smaller numbers than before. However, in contrast to previous studies, students were relying less on public, college, and even home libraries.

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## CHAPTER 1 - STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### **Problem Statement**

Recent advances in information technology have expanded resource options for high school students writing English research papers. While there was agreement among educators and library media specialists in the Deptford Township school district that the mission of the school library media center was to support student learning and the curriculum, there was no empirical evidence to measure either the extent to which students were using print sources, Internet sources, and online databases or their satisfaction with those sources. Previous studies had shown that students in other secondary schools often relied on public libraries and interlibrary loan to supplement materials available in their school libraries. Measuring student information use can be beneficial in establishing a collection development policy that is responsive to student use patterns.

### **Rationale**

Curriculum development and the evolution of information technology influence ever-changing student needs. School library media specialists must continually evaluate and reassess their collections and collection development policies to ensure that there is an optimal match between student needs and library resource materials. In an information-rich society, it is imperative to know which are the most useful of the new technologies and formats, which resources students use most frequently, and how the school library media center and local public libraries can support one another.

At Deptford High School, English students had been frequent and returning library users because they were required at every grade level to complete at least one research paper assignment. It was essential to examine how well the collection met the needs of these students, and to assess how library use might have been influenced by how students were tracked. The results of this study would be used to improve collection development in the Deptford High School Library Media Center as well resource sharing activities with local libraries.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine and compare the resources used by high school students enrolled in honors, college preparatory, and general English courses in the completion of their research papers. Questions to be addressed included:

- 1) Do students use mostly print sources, the Internet, or online databases?
- 2) Which do they find most useful?
- 3) Do the students use the school library media center or the public library or a college library for their independent research?
- 4) Do they use interlibrary loan? How often?

The independent variable in this study was the three levels of student tracking in English classes: Honors English 12, English 12 College Prep, and English 12 General. The dependent variables were the library use patterns of Deptford High School students and the topic categories. The results of this study would help provide the library media specialists direction for choosing the best resources to meet the needs of all English students, help them determine whether to reinforce existing patterns of library use by

acquiring more materials in the popular formats, or to teach students how to effectively use other formats.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Collection development:** “A process that requires knowing the *collection*, the *school*, the community, and the informational and instructional needs of the users. It encompasses more than the *acquisition* of materials, and it involves more than having a *selection policy*. The process includes formulating collection development policies to serve as guides for the *selection*, *acquisition*, and *evaluation* of *resources*” (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 41).

**High school student:** For the purpose of this study, this term is limited to seniors enrolled in Deptford High School during the 2002-2003 school year.

**Interlibrary loan (ILL):** “The *loan* of an item in one library’s *collection* to another *library* on request. Photocopies of requested items may also be provided. A fee for this transaction may or may not be charged” (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 99).

**English 12 Honors:** Admission to the Honors Program is a prerequisite for this five-credit course that fulfills the graduation requirements in the state of New Jersey.

**English 12 College Prep:** This five-credit course is offered to seniors who are college bound, not in the Honors Program, and fulfills the graduation requirements in the state of New Jersey.

**English 12 General:** This five-credit course is offered to seniors who are not in the Honors Program and fulfills the graduation requirements in the state of New Jersey.



**English research paper:** For the purpose of this study, an independently researched and formatted written paper on an individual topic by a high school senior student.

**Library media specialist/librarian:** A person who holds the required professional certification in librarianship from the state of New Jersey.

**Library use:** For the purpose of this paper, students finding resources in a variety of formats that can be used to write an English research paper.

**Public library:** “A publicly funded *library* that provides library services to all people in a community or city” (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 160).

**School library media center:** “An area in a *school* that contains varied formats of materials and equipment with programs and services provided by a *library media specialist* and additional staff as needed and as funds are available. It functions as a *learning* laboratory for students” (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 113); this term is used interchangeably in this report with *school library*.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

It was assumed that student responses to surveys were honest and that their memories were accurate. This study was limited to Deptford High School seniors because they had had the longest experience as school library media center users in the school. It was also limited to English research papers because that was the most frequently assigned independently completed research paper in the high school curriculum.

## References

McCain, M. M., & Merrill, M. (2001). *Dictionary for school library media specialists: A practical and comprehensive guide*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

## CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Collection development presents increasingly complex challenges for school library media specialists. With the continuing developments in technology for information retrieval, school library professionals must evaluate and select not only print but also Internet sources and online databases. After the careful acquisition of materials and information in a variety of formats, school library media specialists can benefit from knowing both the extent to which their patrons use those resources and their satisfaction with them. The importance of use studies cannot be overstated; their findings can affect many subsequent collection management decisions including weeding, budgeting, and collection development.

Some library use studies have focused on how students spend their time in the library media center, i.e., reading magazines, studying, researching, making photocopies. These studies have also frequently included survey questions about attitudinal issues regarding how students feel about their school libraries and which libraries they used. Older studies, like Mancall and Drott's in 1983, relied primarily on bibliometric data to determine use patterns among high school students. More recently, Clabo (2002) published the results of a survey identifying the library use patterns and attitudes of high school students. However, a review of the literature revealed that few library use studies have been conducted and reported in the last twenty years. Given a specific assignment, which of the abundant school library print, Internet and online database resources do students find most useful? Do they venture outside the school library media center walls

to carry out their research? Does a student's academic tracking influence his/her information retrieval habits? Although no single study has answered all of these questions, several studies have examined individual components of library use patterns among high school students.

### **Print Versus Internet Sources and Full Text Online Databases**

One early bibliometric study that looked at student use of print resources was completed by Mancall and Drott. It is important to note that although their findings were published in 1983, their research was done in 1979, significantly before the introduction of the Internet, CD-ROM, online databases, and other technologies on which library media specialists and their patrons have come to rely. They examined the bibliographies of 270 research papers written by college preparatory students in six different high schools. They discovered that students preferred to use books rather than other print sources like periodicals and encyclopedias. They also observed that currency was not a factor in the students' use of sources; many of the bibliography entries listed dated materials; students were as likely to reference older sources as current ones (Mancall & Drott, 1983, p.74).

In 2002, the findings of a study, "The Digital Disconnect: The Widening Gap between Internet-Savvy Students and Their Schools", conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project were published. This survey included focus groups made up of 136 students from 36 middle and high schools in three metropolitan areas – Washington D.C., Detroit, and San Diego. In addition to the focus groups, nearly 200 student volunteers responded to an online request for a 250-word narrative describing their Internet use. The surveys of the focus group respondents revealed that 78% preferred to use the Internet instead of

print materials for completing assignments. “In fact, they see it as a worthy replacement for a school or public library” (Minkel, 2002). Students saw the Internet not only as a shortcut to completing assignments but also “like a school issued textbook or a traditional library” (Levin & Arafeh, 2002, p.6).

Also according to the study:

- 94% of 12 to 17 year olds who reported using the Internet used it for school research
- 71% used the Internet as the main source for their most recent school project
- 58% used a website set up by school or a class
- 34% downloaded a study aid
- 17% created a Web page for a school project (Levin & Arafeh, 2002, p.1)

Students reported that the Internet had many advantages: it was available 24 hours a day; it offered current information; it was easier to print from the Internet than to check out books; and it eliminated the need for the librarian as intermediary (Levin & Arafeh, 2002, p.8). Significantly, students were unable to differentiate between the use of subscription databases and the discovery of information through an Internet search engine (Minkel, 2002).

### **Type of Library**

Mancall and Drott also administered a questionnaire to students to find out whether students relied on more than one library type to research their topics. They learned that 75% of the respondents used a public library, 59% used a home library, and a lower 16% used a college or university library. An overwhelming majority of students, 84%, used the school library (Mancall & Drott, 1983, p.26).

Other studies, before and since, have corroborated these findings and observed similar patterns of public and school library use among high school students. Ekcchukwu, in a 1972 study, revealed “almost twice as many students preferred to use the public library”(as cited in Clabo, 2002, p. 38). Fitzgibbons in 1982 reported that “two thirds of the respondents [expressed] dissatisfaction with the school library and half of the respondents [liked] everything about the public library” (as cited in Clabo, 2002, p.38). After interviewing Philadelphia high school seniors in 1981, Miller found that students did not believe high school libraries had the necessary resources to meet their needs (as cited in Clabo, 2002, p.37). Mancall and Deskins in a 1984 study noted that although students relied most heavily on the school library media center for research information, a majority of them also used home and public libraries (as cited in Callison & Daniels, 1988, p.179). Burks’ Texas study in 1991 also corroborated these findings when she surveyed 3,514 students from three high school English classes. “Students were asked where they usually found material needed for their school assignments. The most common answers (1,284 respondents or 36.5%) were the school library media center and the public library in about equal numbers. As for those who used one or the other library to obtain materials for assignments, more students preferred to use the public library than the school library media center” (Burks, 1996, p.146). As in previous studies, some students preferred to rely on materials from home to complete assignments.

Most recently, Clabo surveyed 130 eleventh graders in three East Tennessee counties. Her respondents “visited the school library much more frequently than they visited the public library. The largest percentage (63%) visited the school library between 3 and 12 times during the school year, while only 28.5% visited the public library this often.

Approximately half (46.9%) of the students did not visit the public library at all during the school year” (Clabo, 2002, p. 49). Even though these students were more likely to use the school library media center, they nevertheless acknowledged that they used more than one library when necessary to complete school assignments (2002, p.86). Based on these observations, Clabo recommended that school and public libraries work to share resources in order to maximize their effective use by high school students (2002, p. 95).

### **Interlibrary Loan Sources**

Walker also contended that “school library resources are often inadequate to support serious student research” (1983, p. 21). His study, conducted in 1981-1982 in Maryland’s Howard County Public Schools, noted some significant interlibrary loan borrowing patterns among high school students. Of 703 requests from the public schools, 273 were from high school students, by far the most frequent users, seeking information to complete classroom assignments (Walker, 1983, p.22) in “English/language arts, science, and social studies in that order” (1983, p.25). As in Mancall and Drott’s study, the Howard County students overwhelmingly preferred using books; 74.25% of the total student interlibrary loan requests were for books; there were only two serial requests (1983, p.24). Furthermore, in response to a user questionnaire, students said that if interlibrary loan had not been an option through their schools, they would have had to find another source for the information. The usefulness of the interlibrary loan system was corroborated in that “when a random sample of one hundred student requests was checked against a union list of the holdings of Howard County library media centers, none was found to exist in any Howard County school library media collection, providing some indication that requested materials were not those normally found in school library

media collections” (1983, p.26). Walker acknowledged that, in theory at least, school library media specialists should be able to adjust their collections by finding out which materials their students borrowed through interlibrary loan. However, his study also showed that most of the requests “were so diverse, and often esoteric, that they provide no clear direction in the selection of new books... The present data therefore suggest that it is not possible, or at least not likely, that local school library media collections will be able to satisfy fully the information needs of students and teachers without recourse to a large and sophisticated library network” (1983, p.27).

Later, in a 1986 study with forty-one juniors at Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana, Callison showed that students with access to online databases, in this case Wilsearch/Wilsonline, used a broader variety of periodicals and more recent periodicals than students without that access. In fact, the “Wilsearch group averaged one additional periodical source and one additional newspaper source per paper compared to the other group” (Callison, 1988, p.140). It is important to note that these databases provided indexing services only – no full text articles – so that students had to request materials they wanted through interlibrary loan.

The students in Callison’s study requested 46 books, although only 18 arrived in time to be used in the assignment, and 138 articles, of which 115 were actually sent to the students. Significantly, a bibliometric examination revealed that the book use rate was .722, while the periodical use rate was only .243 (Callison, 1998, p.141). Callison’s subsequent interviews with students who participated in the study corroborated Mancall and Drott’s conclusions that students preferred books; they considered articles to be



supplementary sources and often claimed to have sufficient information to write their papers without using all the articles they had requested (p.142).

When surveyed, however, more than half of these same students acknowledged that using Wilsearch/Wilsonline was a “fast and efficient way to locate materials” (Callison & Daniels, 1988, p. 177), and “Wilsearch ranked second only to the school library media center in location of some or a great deal of useful information” (Callison & Daniels, 1988, p.179). Callison and Daniels also concluded that an examination of the materials students found through Wilsearch/Wilsonline and acquired through interlibrary loan pointed to the areas of the Carmel High School library media center collection that needed additional titles (p.180).

### **Academic Tracks**

A study entitled “Tenth Graders’ Search Knowledge and Use of the Web” by Vansickle surveyed 136 students from technical (40), academic (52), and honors (44) Language Arts classes to learn how well they knew and navigated the Web. Although 56% of the students surveyed used the Internet to complete assignments at least several times a week, 44% either never or rarely used it. Most important, “the statistical analysis indicated that across the three academic tracks, students are very similar in terms of [search knowledge]. However, [general knowledge] skills of the students in the technical track varied significantly from those of students in the college prep and honors tracks combined” (Vansickle, 2002, p.35). In other words, the students in the technical track were able to search for information successfully (although 72% of all the respondents used Yahoo exclusively as a search engine), but they were less adept at skills like e-mail, bookmarking, and downloading video/audio files and images.

## **Summary**

In conclusion, a review of the literature examining the library use patterns of high school students indicated that in the past

- high school students preferred books to periodicals,
- students have relied heavily on the public library to supplement their research,
- high school students preferred researching on the Internet,
- high school students used interlibrary loan when it was available to supplement their research, and
- student placement in honors, college preparatory or general English classes did not seem to affect successful information retrieval.

Many of the library use studies were too old to be useful as collection development tools for the Deptford High School Library Media Center. And although studies conducted since the advent of the Internet showed that the library use patterns of high school students had changed as new technologies for information retrieval were developed, there were no comprehensive studies that examined the extent to which high school students use print, Internet and online database resources or that measured their satisfaction with those resources.

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## CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

### **Design and Justification**

This applied research study was conducted with the use of a written questionnaire, which was administered to Deptford High School seniors of all academic levels (honors, college prep, general) in their English classes in order to identify and compare their library use patterns when investigating research paper topics. This method of data collection was chosen for the following reasons:

- Distributing the questionnaire through classroom teachers, not by the researcher, assured anonymity and increased the likelihood of honest responses.
- Each respondent received an identical questionnaire that was carefully designed to eliminate bias, improving the probability of honest, reliable responses.
- The questionnaire, constructed so that only three checklist type questions were asked on a single sheet of paper, assured easy collection and analysis of data.
- Administering this questionnaire on one day in English classes guaranteed that data could be collected in a short period of time from all respondents.
- Providing a blank envelope in which students could place and seal their completed questionnaires assured an additional layer of confidentiality.
- The convenience of administering the questionnaire in English classes

during the school day improved the rate of response.

- Administering the questionnaire in English classes reduced the cost of conducting the study (Powell, 1997, p. 90-91).

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to determine and compare the resources used by high school students enrolled in honors, college preparatory, and general English courses in the completion of their English research papers. Questions to be addressed included:

- 1) Do students use mostly print sources, the Internet, or online databases?
- 2) Which do they find most useful?
- 3) Do the students use the school library media center or the public library or a college library for their independent research?
- 4) Do they use interlibrary loan?

### **Population and Sample**

The population and sample of this study were one and the same, 213 Deptford High School senior English students. This population/sample was selected because these students would have researched at least four English paper topics, a minimum of one for each year of high school, and would arguably be the most familiar with library media center resources. All seniors attending English class on the day the survey was administered comprised the sample. No attempt was made to reach absentees.

### **Variables**

The independent variable in this study (the three academic tracking levels for English classes: honors, college prep, and general) was selected to increase the usefulness of the results. This design provided the researcher with more precise data on the

dependent variables, i.e., student library use patterns and topic categories, and allowed for the results to be used to tailor collection development to specific student needs.

### **Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire used in this study was designed by the researcher. A copy is found in Appendix A. The first question was an open-ended question asking respondents to write the topic/title of their senior English paper. The second question was a checklist of four possible types of libraries students might have used to conduct their research; they were asked to check all that applied. Number three listed seven types of resources and asked respondents to check all those they had used in their research. Number four asked respondents to rank the three resources they found to be the most useful for the completion of their research papers.

### **Data Collection**

The master teaching schedule was reviewed to identify the class periods during which seniors were in English class. To guarantee standard survey administration and reduce disruptions to class, the four senior English teachers were sent one sample student survey and written instructions for administering the survey (Appendix B) one week in advance. The questionnaires and envelopes were delivered to teachers on February 11, 2003 and distributed to students the following day. A cover letter for students (Appendix C) explaining the purpose of the study and assuring confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and availability of results was attached to the student surveys.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Assurances for reliability and validity were incorporated into the design of this study in the following ways:

- Questionnaires were printed in three different colors, blue for honors students, green for college prep students, and white for general students.
- Respondents returned questionnaires in blank envelopes that they themselves sealed.
- An instruction sheet was provided to teachers to ensure standard questionnaire distribution and collection.
- The questionnaire was pre-tested by 10 randomly selected Deptford High School juniors who visited the library media center during their lunch/study hall periods and by colleagues enrolled in Graduate Thesis in Library Services at Rowan University in fall 2002.
- The instrument/data collection techniques were designed so that the study can be replicated with similar results.

## References

Powell. R. R. (1997). *Basic research methods for librarians*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex.



## CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS OF DATA

### **Response Rate**

On Wednesday, February 12, 2003, two hundred thirteen Deptford High School seniors completed library use surveys for this study in their English classes. This number represented all senior students present in class on that day: 40 honors students, 82 college prep students, and 91 general students. Eighteen of the completed surveys from the general students were unusable; therefore, the results of this study were based on 195 returned and completed surveys.

### **Procedures/Methods Used**

This applied research study was conducted with the use of a written questionnaire which was designed by the researcher. The master teaching schedule was reviewed to identify the class periods during which seniors were in English class. To guarantee standard survey administration and reduce disruptions to class, the four senior English teachers were sent one sample student survey and written instructions for administering the survey (Appendix B) one week in advance; student surveys were delivered to the teachers on Tuesday, February 11, 2003. The English teachers distributed the questionnaires and envelopes in one day to all senior English classes. A cover letter (Appendix C) explaining the purpose of the study and assuring confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and availability of results was attached to the student surveys.

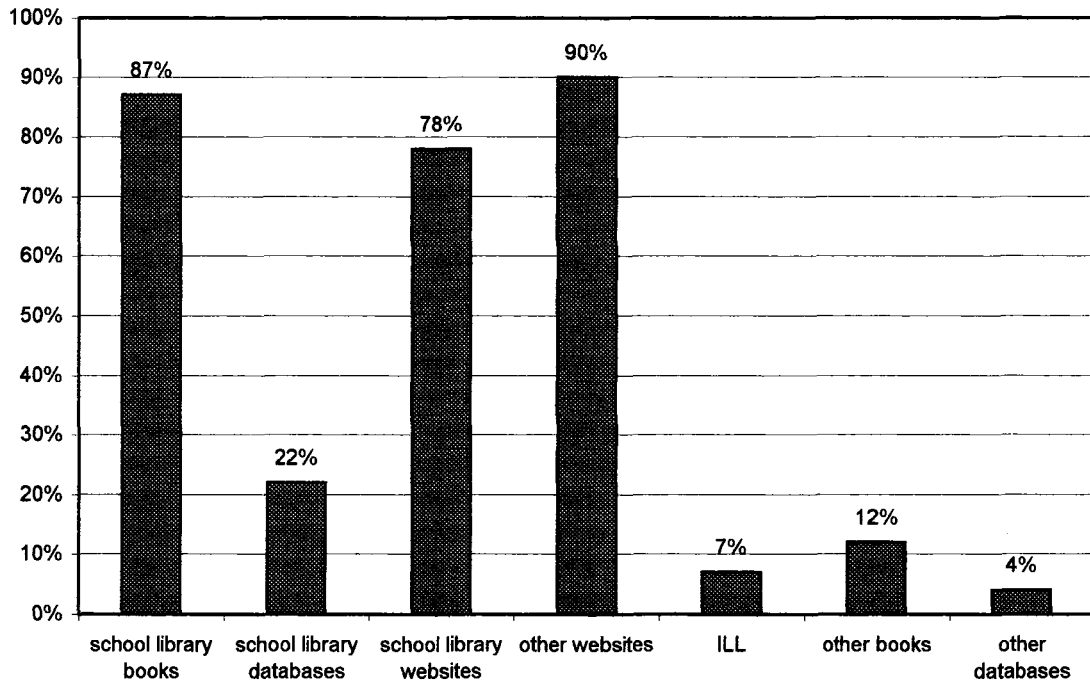
The first survey question asked students to provide the topic or title of the research paper they wrote for English class. The responses to that first question were used to sort the questionnaires into four categories: literature, media, health, and careers. All data were tabulated by hand and then entered into an Excel spreadsheet; the resulting graphs on the following pages represent the breakdown of that data.

## **Presentation of Results**

### *Research Question One*

The first research question sought to determine whether students used mostly print sources, the Internet, or online databases (see Figure 1). A majority of students, 176 respondents (90%), used Internet sources that they found through search engines like Google or Yahoo to research information for their senior English papers. One hundred fifty-two respondents (78%) used websites they found through links on the school library web page. However, a similarly large number, 170 students (87%), answered that they used books from the school library. Also, 43 students (22%) used school library databases (Facts on File, EbscoHost, SIRS Knowledge Source, and COIN<sup>3</sup> – a career database). Significantly fewer students used resources at other libraries: 23 students (12%) used books and 7 students (4%) used databases at either public or college libraries. Finally, only 14 students (7%) used books requested from interlibrary loan.

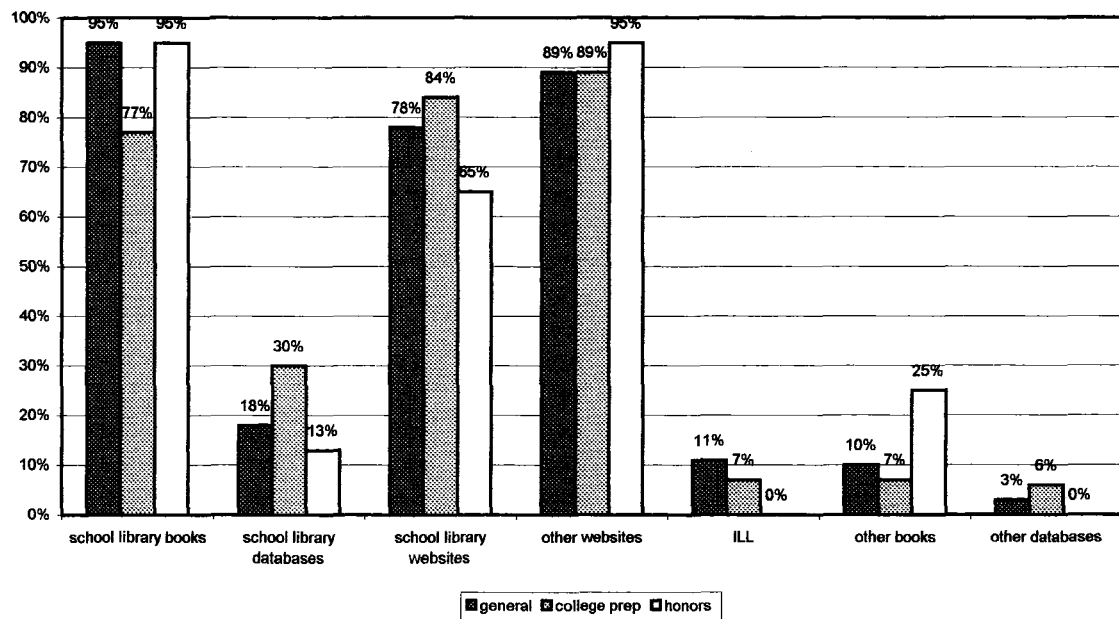
**Figure 1 - Resources Used by All Respondents (n=195)**



A closer examination of the survey responses revealed that the results varied to some degree when student tracking levels were taken into consideration (see Figure 2). For example, honors students, who researched literary topics exclusively, used no databases at other libraries and used no interlibrary loan books; they also used fewer school library linked websites than college prep and general level students. Ninety-five percent of both honors students and general students used school library books; college prep students, of whom 55% researched media topics, used the fewest school library books (77%). Twenty-five percent of honors students used library books from other libraries, significantly more than the other students. A large majority of students at all tracking levels used websites found through search engines: ninety-five percent of honors students

and 89% of both college prep and general level students. Also, 30% of college prep students used school library databases, many more than students at other tracking levels; again, this may have been a reflection of their assigned topics.

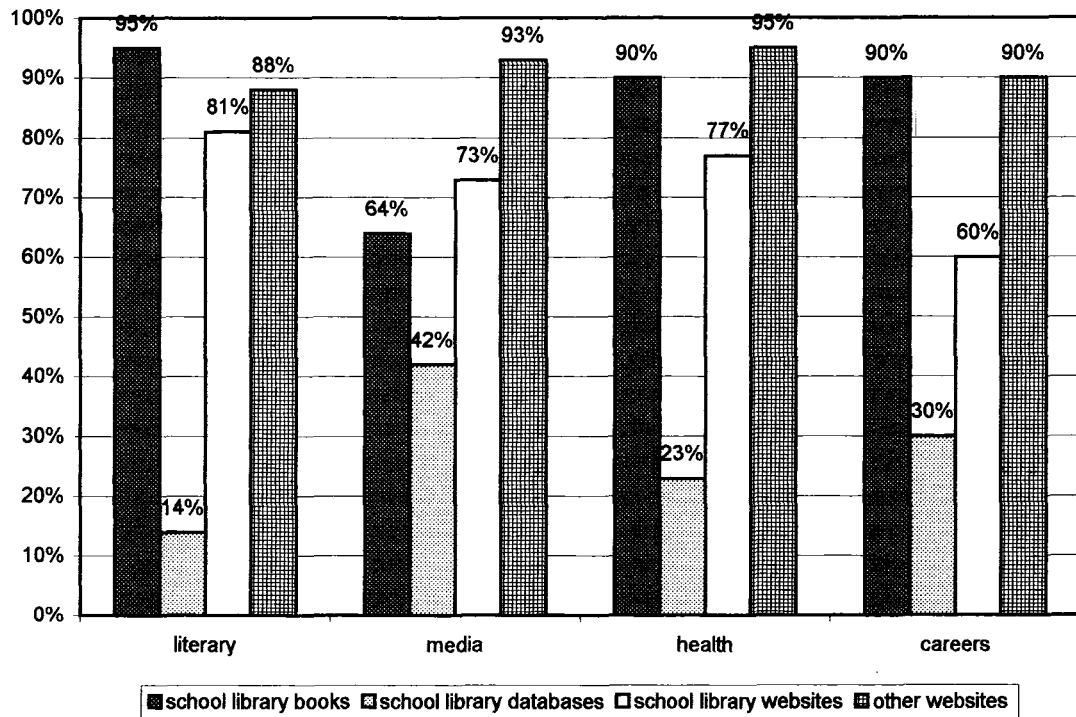
**Figure 2 - Resources Used by Tracking Level (n=195)**



Another meaningful way to examine these survey results was to chart the resources students used according to the topics they were assigned (see Figure 3). One hundred eighteen students researched literary topics, 45 students were assigned media topics, 22 students researched health topics, and only 10 listed career topics. For all topics, the pattern indicated that students used more websites found through search engines (88% to 95%) than those linked on the school library web page (60% to 81%). Also, with the exception of students researching media topics, of whom only 64% used school library books, all other students used a high percentage of school library books (90%-95%).

School library databases were used the least by students researching literary topics (14%). The other students used these databases as follows: media topics 42%, health topics 23%, and career topics 30%.

**Figure 3 - Most Used Resources by Topic (n=195)**



Also among the findings were that only two students researching career topics used books borrowed from interlibrary loan. Sixteen students (14%) who researched literary topics and three students (14%) who researched health topics used books at other libraries. Only one student (10%) researched a career topic in another library database.

## **Research Question Two**

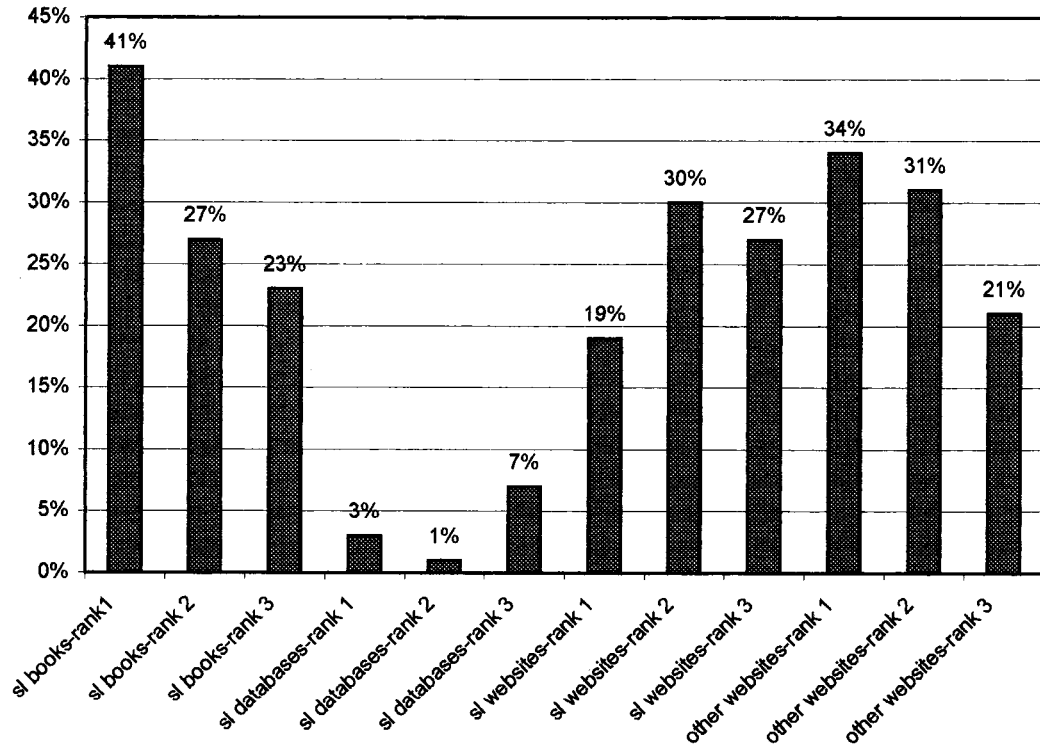
After asking students which resources they used for their research, the questionnaire went on to ask which resources they found most useful; respondents rated their top three most useful resources in rank order. The responses of forty-nine students were unusable for this survey question because they either checked instead of numbered their responses, or they rated all seven choices. There were 146 usable responses to this question; however, since only 10 respondents researched career topics and 22 researched health topics, there was insufficient information to gather meaningful statistics from the remaining usable surveys about the resources preferred in those subject areas. Therefore, this study examined the usable 96 surveys of those students who researched literary topics and the 30 usable surveys of those who researched media topics.

Also, this study focused on the ranking of the four most heavily used resources: school library books, school library databases, school library linked websites, and other websites found through search engines.

The 96 usable questionnaires of the students who researched literary topics (see Figure 4) clearly indicated that school library books and websites found through search engines were the most useful resources for completing senior English papers. Forty-one percent of students indicated that school library books were their most useful resource, 27% ranked them second, and 23% ranked them third. Websites found through search engines were ranked first by 34% of respondents, second by 31%, and third by 21%. Although many students used school library linked websites, only 19% listed them as their most useful resource, 30% as their second, and 27% as their third most useful resource. School

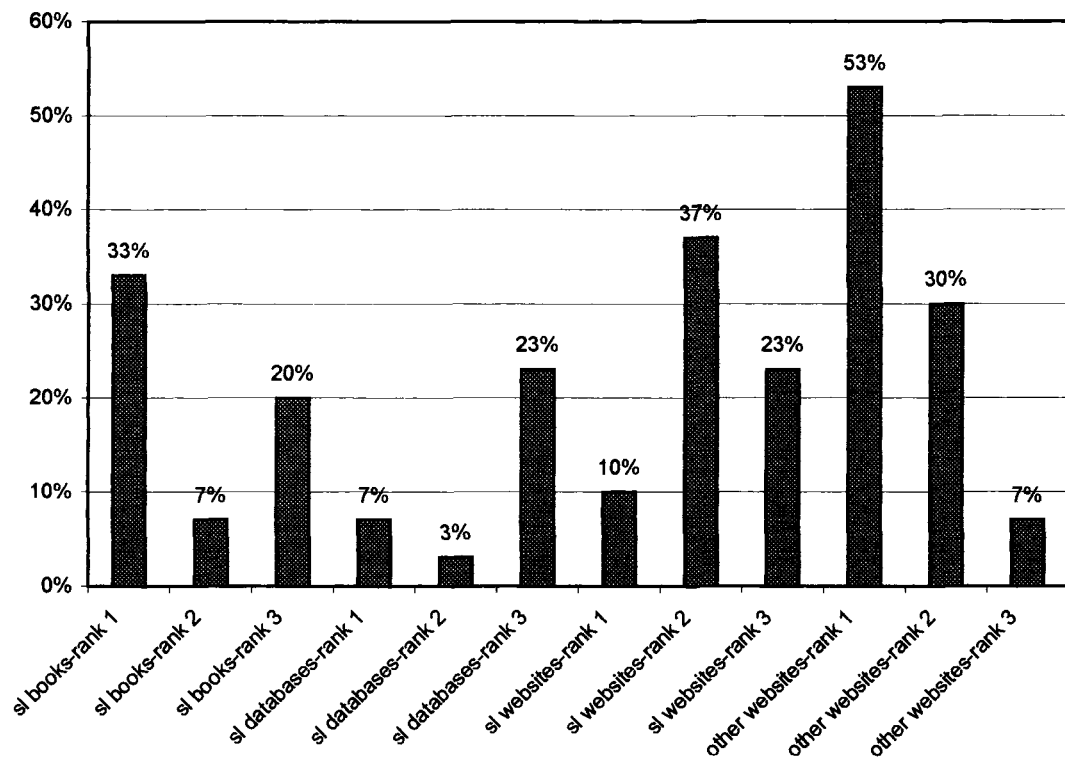
library databases were the least useful of these resources with 3% of students ranking them first, 1% ranking them second, and 7% ranking them third.

**Figure 4 - Ranking of Resources Used for Literary Topics (n=96)**



Of the thirty usable surveys of the students who researched media topics, an overwhelming majority ranked websites found through search engines as their most useful resources (see Figure 5). Fifty-three percent ranked these first, and 30% ranked them second. In contrast to the students who researched literary topics, only 33% of these students found school library books to be their most useful resource, 7% their second, and 20% third most useful. Only 10% of students ranked school library linked websites first, but 37% ranked them second, and 23% ranked them third. Although school library databases were still ranked lowest, with 7% of students ranking them first and 3% ranking them second, a significant 23% ranked them third.

**Figure 5 - Resources Ranked for Media Topics (n=30)**

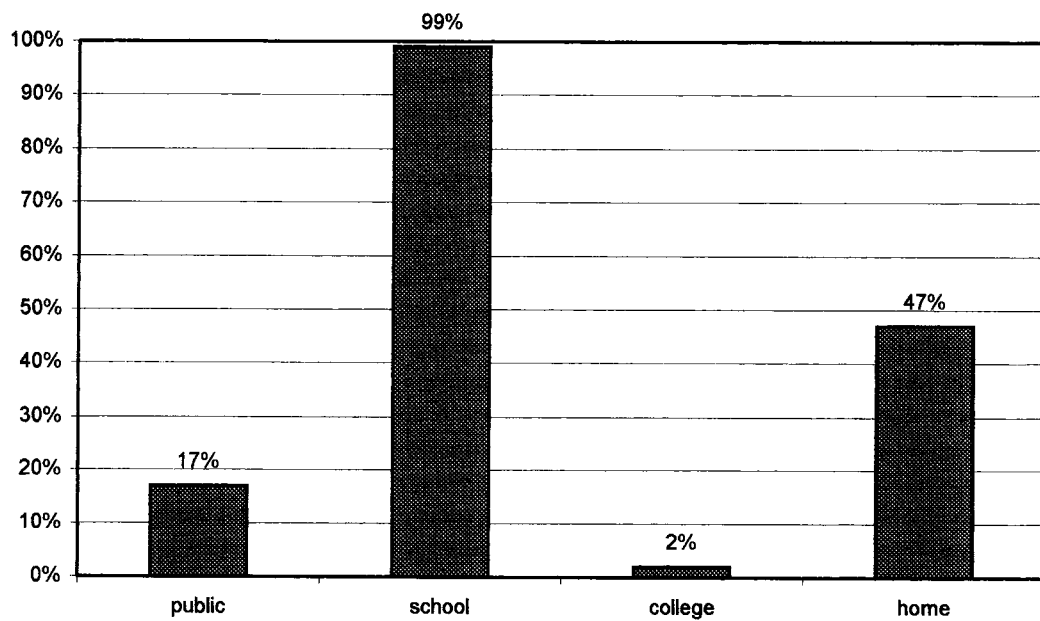




### Research Question Three

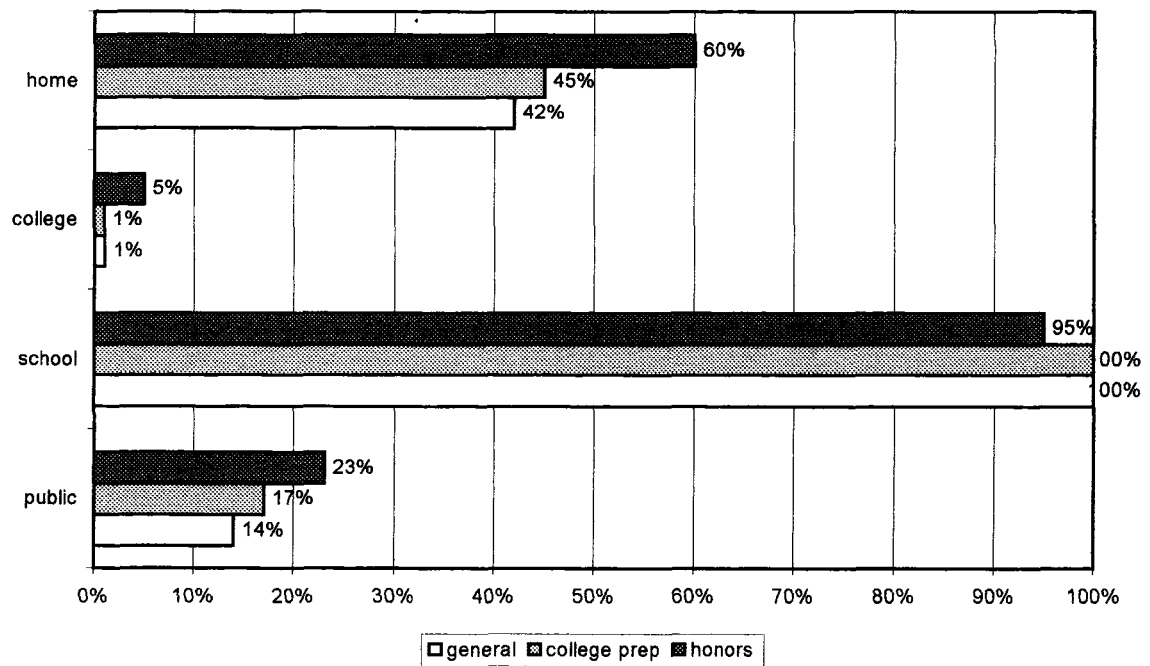
In addition to the types of resources students used, this study examined to what extent students used the school library media center, public libraries, college libraries, or home resources (see Figure 6). All but two students responded that they used the school library media center, while 92 students (47%) used home resources; thirty-three students (17%) used a public library, and only four (2%) used a college library.

**Figure 6 - Libraries Used by All Students (n=195)**



When these results were separated by student tracking levels, a pattern emerged (see Figure 7). Honors students had the highest use of home and public library use, and general students had the least. Sixty percent of honors students used home resources, 45% of college prep students used them, and 42% of general students did. Twenty-three percent of honors students used public libraries, 17% of college prep students used them, and 14% of general students did. Five percent of honors students used a college library, but only one percent of college prep and general students used one. The school library media center, which was used by 100% of college prep and general students, was used by ninety-five percent of honors students.

Figure 7 - Library Use Patterns by Tracking (n=195)



### **Research Question Four**

In examining library use patterns of high school students, this study also looked at interlibrary loan use. Fourteen of the 195 respondents (7%) indicated they had used interlibrary loan. Eight general level students (11%) used interlibrary loan, four students researching literary topics, two students researching health topics, and another two students researching career topics. Six college prep students (7%) used interlibrary loan, two researching literary topics, and two researching media topics. Finally, no honors students responded that they had used interlibrary loan. No students ranked interlibrary loan books as either first or second in usefulness; however four general level students (one who researched a literary topic, two who researched a career topic, and one who researched a health topic) ranked interlibrary loan books as their third most useful resource.

### **Summary**

The results of this study showed that Deptford Township High School seniors are heavily dependent on their school library media center to conduct research for the completion of their English papers. Ninety-nine percent of students used the school library media center resources and less than half that number (47%) also used home resources. Honors students were most likely to use other libraries and general students were least likely.

In terms of specific resources, not only did students depend on search engines to find useful websites more often than they used the extensive links on the school library web page, but many also reported that they found those other websites the most useful resources. Also, a large majority of students used books from the school library media

center collection. Although some students, especially those researching media topics, used school library databases, very few used databases at other libraries; databases at other libraries were the least used resource. And finally, students were also much less likely to use interlibrary loan than other resources – and less likely to rank it as one of their most useful resources.

## CHAPTER 5 - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine and compare the resources used by Deptford High School students enrolled in honors, college preparatory, and general English courses in the completion of their senior research papers. The results showed that, as previous studies demonstrated, a large majority of students used books, the trend towards Internet use was growing, and students continued to use interlibrary loan, although in smaller numbers than before. However, in contrast to previous studies, students relied less on public, college, and even home libraries.

### **Conclusions**

Several patterns emerged in this study from which conclusions can be drawn. For example, although there is nearly 100% use of the school library media center by students researching senior English paper topics, this did not necessarily indicate a student preference. Classroom teachers who scheduled time in the library indirectly promoted its use and easy accessibility; providing time during the school day for students to conduct research also reduced the amount of independent research students must do outside school. Also, the fact that only 47% of students responded that they used home resources may indicate that some families did not have home libraries or computers. Another significant observation was that honors students were more likely to use public or college libraries; this in itself may account for their not using interlibrary loan. In addition, since college prep students used public or college libraries more than general students

(although a little less than honors students), the school library media center collection should perhaps accommodate the specific needs of those in the lower tracking levels. Those students depended almost exclusively on the school library.

There were indications that when school library databases offered information relevant to assigned research paper topics students used them. Students who researched media, health, and career topics were more likely to use these databases and also more likely to rank them as useful. Since Deptford High School does not subscribe to literary databases, students assigned literary topics logically used more books. Library media specialists might consider offering additional instruction to introduce these databases when appropriate and subscribing to additional literary databases.

The high use of Internet websites found through search engines indicated that students had a comfort level or familiarity with that search method. Although many of the links on the school library web page would likely have been useful for students conducting research, it was obvious that students preferred to rely on search engines like Yahoo. This presents library media specialists with an opportunity for better marketing of current library resources.

Since the resources that were used most frequently were also reported to be the most useful, library media specialists could maximize the use of the collection by highlighting and promoting useful resources with which students are less familiar. In the end, this would also benefit students and teachers.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

One of the surprising findings of this study was the extraordinarily high use of school library books used for the completion of senior English research papers. However, it

would be important to know why students chose books. Did teachers or library media specialists influence their choices? Did teachers perhaps require that a specific number of print sources be used as reference? The answers to these questions would help library media specialists with instructional planning and collection development.

It would also be important to know why more than half the students did not use home resources. If these respondents did not have access to books or computers at home, that information would help library media specialists to prioritize and budget technology funds.

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Appendix A  
Student Questionnaire

## How Do You Use Your Library?

1. What was the topic or title of the research paper you wrote for English class this year?

---

2. Which libraries did you use to find information on your research paper topic? Check all that apply.

\_\_\_\_\_ Public                      \_\_\_\_\_ School                      \_\_\_\_\_ College                      \_\_\_\_\_ Home

3. Which sources contained information you were able to use in your paper? Check all that apply.

\_\_\_\_\_ books you borrowed from or used in the school library

\_\_\_\_\_ articles from EBSCOhost or Facts on File you found using computers in the school library

\_\_\_\_\_ websites you found linked from the school library web page

\_\_\_\_\_ websites you found through a search engine like Yahoo or Google

\_\_\_\_\_ books you borrowed through the school library's interlibrary loan system

\_\_\_\_\_ books you borrowed or used in a public or college library

\_\_\_\_\_ articles from a database like EBSCOhost you found using computers in a public or college library

4. Which sources contained most of the information you were able to use in your paper? Mark the best three sources 1, 2, 3 (with 1 being your top choice)

\_\_\_\_\_ books you borrowed from or used in the school library

\_\_\_\_\_ articles from EBSCOhost or Facts on File you found using computers in the school library

\_\_\_\_\_ websites you found linked from the library web page

\_\_\_\_\_ websites you found through a search engine like Yahoo or Google

\_\_\_\_\_ books you borrowed through the school library's interlibrary loan system

\_\_\_\_\_ books you borrowed or used in a public or college library

\_\_\_\_\_ articles from a database like EBSCOhost you found using computers in a public or college library

Thank you for your time and assistance.

**Appendix B**  
**Teacher Instructions**

January 31, 2003

Dear

As part of the research I am conducting for my master's thesis at Rowan University, I am gathering information about Deptford High School students' library use patterns. I am asking for your help in distributing and collecting surveys (see attached) to your senior English classes.

I will deliver these surveys, along with envelopes, to you on Tuesday, February 11, 2003. Seniors should complete the surveys during class on Wednesday, February 12, 2003. I will come to your classrooms at the end of the day to collect all materials.

Honors students will receive blue surveys; college prep students will receive green surveys; and general students will receive white surveys. Students should place completed surveys in envelopes for you to collect.

Students who have yet to complete the research process may respond using last year's research paper topic.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Anne Denning

Appendix C

Student Cover Letter

# Deptford Township High School

575 Fox Run Road • Deptford, New Jersey 08096  
Phone 232-2713 • Fax 374-9145



February 2003

Dear DHS student,

Your library needs your help! We would like to know more about how you use libraries to research information for your senior English papers. The attached questionnaire asks about which libraries students use and which resources they find most useful. This research is being completed for my master's thesis at Rowan University.

Participation in this study is voluntary. All responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. You need not respond to all questions. Your grade will not be affected whether or not you participate.

Please do not write your name on the survey. When you have completed the survey, place it in the blank envelope provided, seal the envelope, and return it to your English teacher.

A copy of the results of this study will be available from me in the library media center after May 15, 2003.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Denning". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "D" and "N".

A. Denning  
Librarian  
Deptford High School  
denning.a@deptford.k12.nj.us