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A look at computer classes offered at selected South Jersey public libraries

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A LOOK AT COMPUTER CLASSES OFFERED AT SELECTED SOUTH JERSEY
PUBLIC LIBRARIES

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Public libraries offer computer classes, training, and computer facilities to their patrons. Many patrons, who lack access to computers elsewhere, are able to learn computer skills at a public library. The offering of computer courses by public libraries helps to close the "Digital Divide" between those who have easy access to computer technology and skills and those who have little or no access to computers and lack computer skills. Previous studies have shown that public libraries do much to assist those who do not have computer training but wish to obtain it. The issue of lack of access to computers has been documented for many years. The term "Digital Divide" became widely used in the 1990s to refer to *"technological inequality"* (Moe, p. 227). Funding has been put into closing this gap, including enormous sums from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This foundation was begun in 1997 in order "to bring computers and Internet access to public libraries in low-income communities in the United States and Canada" (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current state of public libraries'

computer class offerings and resources in South Jersey. For the purpose of this study,

South Jersey included the following counties: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May,

Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem. Selected public library staff were asked what they

were doing to assist patrons in developing computer skills. More specifically, they were

asked the following:

- Describe the computer class facilities available.

- What are the names and content of the computer classes taught?

- Who teaches the computer classes?

- What are the characteristics of the students who attend the computer classes, such as

  race/ethnicity, speaking a first language other than English, age, socio-economic

  status?

- How are the computer classes funded?

- What are the most popular computer classes?

- Are there more or less students now than five years ago?

- Are students ever put on a waiting list to attend classes?

Definitions

The Online Dictionary of Library and Information (Reitz, 2007) defined the following terms:

Public libraries-"A library or library system that provides unrestricted access to library resources and services free of charge to *all* the residents of a given community, district, or geographic region, supported wholly or in part by public funds."

Librarians-"A professionally trained person responsible for the care of a library and its contents, including the selection, processing, and organization of materials and the delivery of information, instruction, and loan services to meet the needs of its users."

Computer literacy-"The skills required to retrieve information efficiently and communicate effectively using computer hardware and software, based on a conceptual understanding of computer technology and how it can be used to accomplish specific tasks, including an awareness of its inherent limitations, as well as its advantages."

Training-"Instruction designed to teach a person or group of people (*trainees*) a specific skill or set of skills."

Patron-"Any person who uses the resources and services of a library."

Technophobe-"A person who has an irrational fear of using electronic equipment, particularly computers and their peripheral devices."

Digital Divide-"A term coined by former Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Telecommunication and Communication Larry Irving, Jr., to focus public awareness on the gap in access to information resources and services between those with the means to

purchase the computer hardware and software necessary to connect to the Internet and low-income families and communities that cannot afford network access."

Work station-"An area within a workplace equipped with a personal computer and high-resolution monitor for accomplishing tasks that require the use of information in digital format (especially graphics), usually furnished with a desk, chair, and specially designed table to accommodate the PC and any peripheral equipment."

Other definitions:

Computer-"an electronic device designed to accept data, perform prescribed mathematical and logical operations at high speed, and display the results of these operations" (Dictionary.com).

Class-"A group of students who meet at a regularly scheduled time to study the same subject"(American Heritage Dictionary).

Student-"One who is enrolled or attends classes at a school, college, or university" (American Heritage Dictionary).

Instructor-"One who instructs; a teacher" (American Heritage Dictionary).

Limitations and Assumptions

This study was limited to several selected public libraries within the region of South Jersey. The researcher also assumed that the librarians would be truthful and accurate when describing the computer classes at their public libraries.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The subject of computers and their use in public libraries has been given considerable attention and research over the past decade. Many have written about the various uses of computers in public libraries and the attitudes of patrons towards the presence of computers in their public library. Surveys have been conducted dealing with who is using the public library computers, including the socio-economic status and ethnic/racial background of persons making use of the public library computer facilities. In addition, the numbers of computers available in different public libraries has been analyzed. Furthermore, the sources of funding for computer technology, with special attention to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grants have been looked at. Studies and articles discussing the chronology, amounts, and effectiveness of the Gates Foundation funds in reducing the Digital Divide have been conducted more than once. Finally, other issues relating to the subject of computer technology use in public libraries, such as how to instruct adults in computer skills and concerns over the library staff's role in maintaining the availability of the computers to the public have been looked at.

Research Studies

One study, authored by Tammi Moe, the Senior Research Analyst at the Library Research Service in Colorado, surveyed nearly 2,000 public library patrons in Colorado in March, 2002. One of the findings of this survey dealt with how those patrons used the computers in the public libraries. The results showed "the most widely engaged activities" for using the computers were:

69%--look for information on a specific topic

56%--email

46%--surfing the Web

36%--looking for a job

29%--seeking educational opportunities (Moe, p. 230).

While these results indicated how the computers were used, the wording of the questions was vague, especially "seeking educational opportunities." Did this refer to computer classes or simply looking at education-related Web sites? While there was no mention of computer classes, the author concluded that, "online searching was the skill most likely to be learned or improved in public libraries"(Moe, p. 228).

This study also showed a highly favorable attitude of patrons towards having computers in the library. The author noted that 82% of the patrons responding to the survey "indicated that the availability of computers in the library was one of the reasons for visiting the library that day" (Moe, p.228).

Yet another segment of Moe's large research survey focused on both income

levels and race/ethnicity as they related to patron use of public library computers. For

example, Moe found that among the respondents, "27% below poverty improved their

word processing skills vs. 13% of those making over $50,000" (Moe, p. 229). Regarding

race, she reported that 55% of Hispanics improved email skills. Among Afro-Americans,

21% of Afro-Americans improved "Web development skills," a rate "more than three

times higher than whites" (Moe p. 228). Furthermore, "33% of Afro-Americans

improved word processing skills, twice the number of white recipients" (Moe, p. 228).

Thus, the Colorado study of 2002 supported the assertion that the Digital Divide

negatively impacts those with lower incomes as well as Hispanics and Afro-Americans

and that public libraries could make a big difference towards lessening the Digital Divide.

Further evidence of how both low income persons as well as the two minority

groups mentioned, Afro-Americans and Hispanics, were affected came from the

summary of 23 research studies conducted by the Public Access Computing Project

(P.A.C.P.) at the University of Washington. The P.A.C.P. study was conducted in order

to determine the value of the United States Library Program funded by the Bill and

Melinda Gates Foundation. P.A.C.P.'s findings showed that reliance on public libraries

to access computers varied on ethnic/racial lines, with over 25% of both Hispanics and

Afro-Americans needing public libraries for computer access while less than 5% of

Caucasians did.(Public Access Computing Project). This report summary also

highlighted the importance of public libraries for learning and practicing computer skills

by noting that 33% of patrons used public library computers to "learn/practice computer

skills" (Public Access Computing Project). Again, unfortunately, like the Colorado

study, this study also used vague terminology, this time when referring to "computer skills." It was not mentioned what specific types of computer skills were developed.

The P.A.C.P. summary also noted the favorable impression that computer access at public libraries had on patrons. It stated that "most Americans (76 percent) believe that computers and Internet access offered by public libraries is helping to bridge the nation's digital divide" (Public Access Computing Project). Regarding poorer persons, the summary stated that "57% of low-income people (those earning less than $15,000 per year) used the library in 2001, up from 34%in 2000" (Public Access Computing Project). In addition, the summary claimed that "patrons using computers visit libraries twice as often and stay twice as long" (Public Access Computing Project).

One of the 23 reports issued by the P.A.C.P., entitled "It's Working: People from Low-Income Families Disproportionately Use Library Computers" was written in September, 2002, and focused on the use of public library computers by patrons of differing income levels. This report was based on a massive survey of over 7,500 public library patrons in 18 states. It heavily praised the Gates Foundation, claiming that "the Gates United States Library Program is having substantial impacts by providing computer access for low-income people in the United States"(Moore, p.1). Special compliments were given to the Foundation regarding its decision to first dispense funding to public libraries in the four overall poorest states—Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi—in the first of four "rounds," and then donating to the other, increasingly less impoverished 14 states in 3 more rounds over a four year period. The authors noted that "the evidence mounts that the decision to place computers initially in the poorest states was a wise one, and that the computers are being used for the intended tasks"

(Moore, p.18). These "intended tasks" included school and work tasks such as "getting info for homework," "finding job training," and "writing or print a resume" (Moore, p.18).

That lower income persons were more reliant on public libraries for computer access was the main focus of The Foundation, and the findings of the survey repeatedly showed this to be true. For example, the report noted that "although people with a wide range of incomes visited the library, a disproportionately large percentage report incomes below $25,000" (Moore, p.7). More specifically, among respondents, 51% of computer uses in public libraries were people with incomes of less than $25,000 while only 20% "of the general adult population in these states" (Moore, p.7) earned less than $25,000. The report reiterated that "it is the people with lower incomes who are most likely to be library computer users and as income increases, the patrons are less likely to use those computers" (Moore,p.8). The authors speculated that "presumably because of other access" the higher income patrons were less likely to use computers at the library (Moore, p.8).

Not all of the studies concerning the use of computers for patrons in public libraries have been completely positive, however. In the summary article entitled "Public Libraries Struggle to Meet Internet Demand: New Study Shows Libraries Need Support to Sustain Online Services", authors Bertot, McClure, and Jaeger discussed some of the negative findings of a large 2004 study conducted by the Information Use Management and Policy Institute at Florida State University. The article summarized the *Public Libraries and the Internet 2004: Survey Results and Findings*, which included among its goals "the ways in which public libraries meet the technology needs of their local

communities" (Bertot, p.78) and "the sources of funding for information technology in public libraries" (Bertot, p.78). One positive finding of the survey was that 98.9% of the public libraries that responded to the survey gave the public access to the Internet in 2004, which was higher than the 98.7% that did so in 2002 (Bertot, p.78). Unfortunately, this was still not always satisfactory for library patrons, as the article stated that "only 14.1% of public library outlets report that there are always sufficient terminals to meet patron needs"(Bertot,p.79), while "70.2% have insufficient terminals to meet patrons' needs at certain times of the day" (Bertot, p.79). Therefore, it appears from this that while nearly all public libraries have been connected to the Internet, there still were not enough computer terminals available for public use as of 2004.

Another problem brought up in this 2004 survey was that public libraries needed "ongoing support to sustain public access computing"(Bertot, p.79). The authors noted that "13.3% of libraries reported a decrease in their budgets for technology in the previous year, and 50.6% indicated that their technology budgets stayed the same with no increase for inflation or demand for services" (Bertot, p.79). Furthermore, "in 7.6% of libraries, the total hours the library computers were available decreased in the previous year, while nearly 12% of urban libraries" (Bertot, p.79) had done the same.

Finally, the authors of this article pointed out that the lack of planning for future use computer technology in public libraries suggested more problems posed by having computers. The authors of the study stated that "Most libraries do not have plans for keeping systems running. Nearly 70% of libraries have no set upgrade schedule for hardware, 77.4% have no set schedule for software, and 96.4% have no set schedule for

connection speed"(Bertot,79). The implication was that public libraries will continue to have problems maintaining public access computing.

Annual Surveys

The American Library Association (A.L.A.) and Information Use Management and Policy Institute in the College of Information at Florida State University conducts an annual survey of public library computer use and resources. The survey is known as the National Survey of Public Library and Internet Access. It has been conducted since 1994 and retrieves much data from public libraries regarding their computers, such as Internet connectivity and funding. More specifically, the 2006 survey asked the following:

Please indicate the number and age of the public Internet workstations provided
Please identify the three most significant impacts of the library's patron information technology training on the community.
Are there plans to replace or upgrade existing public Internet workstations or laptops at this library branch during the next year? (College of Information, 2006, p.2, 3, 6)

The survey also asked about expenditures on computers, including "providing technology-related training to library staff or the public" (Col. of Information). That such a national survey of public libraries computer resources is conducted annually emphasizes the role that public libraries have in providing such access. The 2006 survey

of public libraries found "the highest percentages of library systems do not offer

information technology training for patrons in Arkansas (39.6%), Louisiana (48.7%), and

Mississippi (40.7%)" (Bertot, p. 93). Therefore, even in these three states, the majority

of public libraries did in fact offer technology training for patrons. The results of this

study did not provide data about technology training staff.

Articles

Along with studies of patron use of public library computers, the researcher

located articles which discussed the issue. One article, titled "New Computers Bring

New Patrons" by Margaret Gordon, Andrew Gordon, and Elizabeth Moore was written in

February of 2001 in *Library Journal*. This article noted that there were both positive and

negative aspects to the availability of computers to patrons in public libraries. One

positive aspect of having computers was that the libraries had experienced an increase in

the number of patrons. The authors stated that "once they are in the libraries, the

majority of these computer users say they are also checking out books and using all the

other library resources" (Gordon, p.134). Thus the presence of computers was a big

attraction for people to visit the public library.

In addition, this article also credited the Gates' United States Library Program

with helping to "bridge the digital divide between the technology haves and have

nots"(Gordon, p.134), in the poorest four states which were the first to receive the funds.

As mentioned before, these states are Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. It

noted that the Gates awards were especially helpful, since they provided "regional

training labs, second rounds of training, and software updates"(Gordon, p.134) and the

inclusion of training and technological support "distinguishes the Gates awards from

other computer donations" (Gordon, p.134).

Despite these benefits provided by the presence of computers for patrons of the

public libraries, the article did note some negative aspects of their presence as well. First,

the authors stated that "many librarians report increased workloads and stress" (Gordon,

p.136). Furthermore, some library staff "question whether it should be part of their jobs

to teach about word processing, games, and email" (Gordon, p.135).

Another issue for public libraries concerning the acquisition of computers was

how to continue their availability to the public over time. According to the authors, in

order "to qualify for a library program award, a library must have a plan for sustaining

public access computing after the three years of program support" (Gordon, p.138).

Unfortunately, according to the authors, many library staff members were "concerned

about how their libraries are going to sustain the public-access computers" and that "their

training did not prepare them for fundraising or development" (Gordon, p.138). Thus,

while computers have brought benefits to public libraries they also created new problems

as well.

Another article which discussed some of the difficulties of keeping computers

available to patrons was written by Joy Huebert in 2002. The title of this article was

"Bridging the Digital Divide in Public Libraries." Huebert gave the example of the

Castlegar District Public Library in British Columbia which had received eight computers

and two printers from the Gates Foundation. While claiming that this was "an example

of a library that has been very fortunate in being able to develop its technology resources" (Huebert, p.106), she stated that there have been many problems with sustaining their availability. She notes that "running computer networks, writing web sites, fixing hardware, learning software, and training the public all take considerable expertise beyond that which was needed before technology played such a large role in libraries" (Huebert, p.106). In addition to the time and expense the presence of computers posed to public libraries, Huebert stated they were also "faced with the challenge of dealing with vandalism, inappropriate use of computers, hackers, and viruses"(Huebert, 106). This article was another example of the mixed blessing of computers for public libraries.

In spite of the funding of public libraries from the Gates Foundation and others, the Digital Divide still exists. In her article "The Digital Divide & Public Libraries: A First Hand View," library school professor Denise E. Agosto discussed the disparity of computer resources between libraries that service rich and poor communities. In the summer of 2005, she visited ten branch libraries of an unnamed United States urban library system and noted that she was "stunned at the degree of variance in quality and quantity of digital resources" (Agosto, p.23). She contrasted a middle-class suburban branch library which served 4,800 people with a low-income urban library which served 45,000 people within the same public library system and found that while the suburban library had six computers available to patrons, the urban library had only one older computer (Agosto, p.24). According to Agosto, "the libraries serving the neighborhoods with the most economic strength seem to get the best quality and greatest number of resources" (Agosto, p.24) since they have more corporate support and "community

lobbying power" (Agosto, p.24). She also added the example of her own public library, which she referred to as a "privileged suburban area" (Agosto, p.25) and noted that it had 50 computers. She summed up her article by saying "with respect to public libraries, the digital divide means that the people who most need access are the least likely to be able to get it at their public library" (Agosto, p.27).

In the area of computer instruction, Linda E. Masek wrote the article "Advice for Teaching Hands-On Computer Classes to Adult Professionals" in *Computers in Libraries*. Masek, a reference and education librarian, first stated that the instructor should "know some of the basic methods of education" (Masek, p.32). These include finding out the students' prior computer knowledge and experience, keeping the teacher-student ratio to a reasonable level, giving out handouts for students to look at after class, and allowing time for questions. She also insisted that "the teacher must try to guarantee that failure does not occur" and that "the students feel a measure of success" (Masek, p.34).

In summation, the research shows that computers are playing an increasingly larger role in public libraries. The addition of computer work stations for public library patrons has helped increase access to technology for persons who otherwise would not have such access. However, public libraries often struggle to maintain such access for their patrons.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

The methodology of this study was applied research. The instrument used was a descriptive volunteer interview format. The use of live in-person interviews was chosen because it allowed first hand assessment of the computer activities and resources available at various South Jersey public libraries. It also included observation of the public libraries.

The data for this study were collected through the use of recorded cassette tape live interviews. The interviews were recorded with permission being granted by the interviewees. It was decided to collect data by live interviews for several reasons. One reason was that a small number of public libraries were included in the study, providing a small total sample and population. Another reason for using live interviews was the need for a higher response rate given the small number of public libraries that were participating. A third reason for using live interviews was the variety of library staff who were interviewed. The variety of persons who were interviewed about the computer classes made a written survey questionnaire less appropriate. Finally, an interview format was chosen since it made it possible for the interviewees to spend longer time

giving their answers, allowed them to give more full answers, and lessened the opportunity for the respondents to misunderstand the questions.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to investigate the current state of selected public libraries' computer class offerings and resources in South Jersey. The following questions were asked at each of the public libraries included in the study:

Describe the computer class facilities are available.

What are the names and content of the computer classes taught?

Who teaches the computer classes?

What are the characteristics of the students attending public library computer classes—race/ethnicity, age, English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) learners, socio-economic status?

How are the computer classes funded?

What are the most popular classes?

Are there more or less students attending computer classes than five years ago?

Are students ever put on waiting lists to attend classes?

Sample and Population

A sample of seven South Jersey public libraries was chosen from Atlantic,

Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, and Gloucester counties. The public

libraries that volunteered themselves to be included in the study was also the population

group. Thus, the sample and population of this study were the same.

Variables

The study included the following independent variables:

Number of computers

Who taught computer classes

Number of students attending classes

Description of students—race, E.S.L., age

Names of classes taught

Frequency of classes

Total number of classes

Size of community served by library

Socio-economic status of community served by library

Data Collection

In order to collect the data for the study, information about the community served

by each public library was researched online. Next, each of the seven libraries was

telephoned and given information about the study. Respondents were asked if the researcher could perform live interviews with library personnel concerning their computer class offerings. In addition, permission to perform a live cassette taped interview was requested from the library director. An appointment was made for a cassette taped interview with a staff member of those libraries that agreed to be included in this study. The purpose of using a cassette recorder was to ensure the accuracy of the responses from the persons being interviewed. Next, a staff member involved with instruction and/or management of the computer facilities was interviewed using the identical list of questions for all interviews and the interview tape recorded on cassette. Only one member from each of the selected public libraries was interviewed. Finally, additional data about the public libraries and communities was collected.

Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure validity, a list of interview questions was created based on their relevance to the topic of computer classes in public libraries. Reliability was ensured by the use of a specific list of interview questions that were asked in the same sequence. In addition, the same interviewer was used for all of the interviews. Finally, the interview questions were pretested at a public library in Gloucester County. A librarian who teaches computer classes at this public library was given a live tape recorded interview.

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CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Procedure/Methods

The researcher conducted tape recorded interviews of selected library staff at six different public libraries from February 14 through March 6, 2008. In addition, the researcher sent the same eight interview questions to Library #7 via standard mail and received written responses to each of the questions on March 5, 2008. Thus, there were seven respondents in all (See Appendix A).

The data were collected from Libraries #1-6 using tape recorded interviews which were then transcribed (Appendix B). The researcher also took notes during the live interviews. From the transcriptions of the tape recorded interviews and the notes taken during the interviews, the researcher created several tables to illustrate the collected data. In addition, these transcriptions and notes were used by the researcher to summarize the data. Furthermore, some of the respondents provided the researcher with handouts about their computer classes. The researcher also found out about some computer classes on the libraries' Web sites. For Library #7, the data were collected in the form of written answers sent by the respondent through the mail.

Presentation of Results

For question #1, Describe the computer class facilities available, the number of student computer stations in each computer lab was graphed. As shown in Figure 1, the number of student computer stations ranged from six in Library #2 to 20 in Library #3.

Figure 1: Number of Computers in Teaching Lab
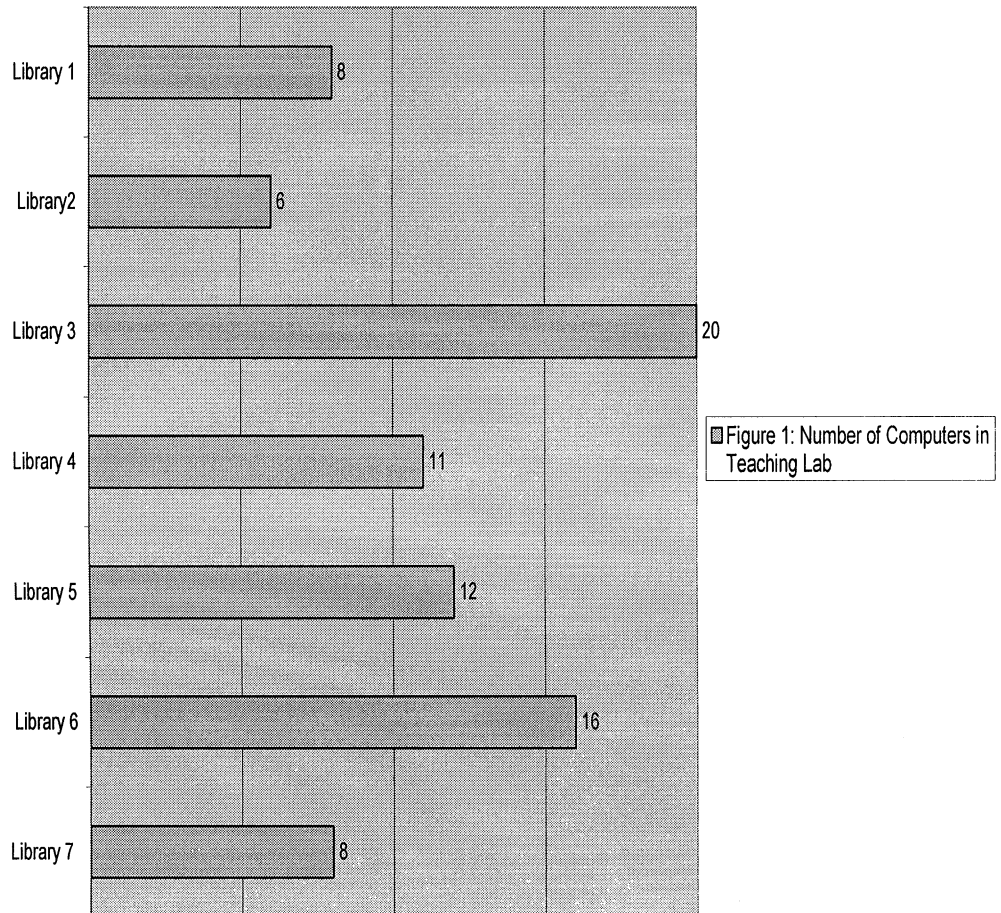
Table 1

The responses to questions #2, What are the names and content of the

computer classes taught? and #6, What are the most popular classes? are shown in the

following table.

Table 1: Names of Computer Classes Offered and Most Popular Classes

Library #	Names of computer classes offered	Most popular classes (*)
Library 1	Basic Power Point	
	Basic Word	
	Basic E-Mail	
	Basic Excel	
	Basic Computer	*
	Basic Internet	
	Intermediate Word	
	Intermediate Microsoft Excel	
	Ancestry Class	
	One on One Internet Class	
Library 2	Online Catalogue for Beginners	
	Word for Beginners	*
	One on One Computer Help	
	Introduction to the Internet	*
	Intermediate Internet	*
Library 3	Basic Mouse and Keyboard Skills	*
	Introduction to Yahoo E-Mail	
	Introduction to Windows XP	
	Windows XP - Level 2	
	Working with Files and Folders in Windows	
	Microsoft Word 2003 - Level 1	
	Microsoft Word 2003 - Level 2	
	Microsoft Word 2003 - Level 3	
	Introduction to the Internet	*

Library 4	Introduction to the Internet	*
	Introduction to Word	*
	Computer Basics	*
	Generations Online for Seniors	*
Library 5	Getting Started With Computers	*
	Welcome to the Web	
	Intro to E-Mail	
	Microsoft Word Beginning	
	Microsoft Word Intermediate	
	Intro to Microsoft Excel	*
	Intro to Microsoft Excel II	
	Mouse Basics	
	Microsoft PowerPoint	
	Microsoft PowerPoint II	
Library 6	Introduction to Word	*
	Intermediate Word	
	Genealogy Online	
	Keyboard Shortcuts	
	Introduction to Excel	
	Introduction to the Internet	
	Beginning Typing with Mavis Beacon	
	Introduction to Microsoft Windows Parts I & II	
	What Computers Can Do For You	*
Library 7	My First Computer Class	*
	Software or "How Does It Do That?"	
	Library Catalogue Essentials	
	Web 1.0	
	Hotmail 101	
	Introduction to EBSCOhost	
	Introduction to MS Word 2003	
	Introduction to MS Word 2007	
	Intermediate MS Word 2003	
	Intermediate MS Word 2007	
	Introducing MS PowerPoint 2003	
	Introducing MS PowerPoint 2007	
	Windows XP Basics	
	Windows Vista Basics	
	Working With Files in Windows XP	
	Working With Files in Windows Vista	

For question #3, Who teaches the computer classes? the results are shown in

Table 2.

Table 2: Computer Class Instructors

Library #	Who teaches computer classes
Library 1	Librarians
	Information Technology Department person
	Librarian assistant
Library 2	Librarians
Library 3	Reference Librarians
	Computer Lab Employee
	Volunteers
Library 4	Librarian Assistants
Library 5	Reference Librarians
	Information Technology Department person
Library 6	Volunteers
	Reference Librarians
Library 7	Technology Education Center Coordinator
	Tech. Ed. Center assistant

Regarding question #4, What are the characteristics of the students attending public library classes based on race/ethnicity, age, English as a Second Language learners, and socioeconomic status?, library respondents provided a variety of answers.

Race/Ethnicity   Library# 7 noted that they did not collect information about the race or ethnicity of the students. Libraries #1-#6 stated that the computer class students were racially/ethnically mixed.

Age   All seven public libraries reported large numbers of retirees and senior citizens taking classes. In addition, there were many non-retired persons over age 40 that were taking classes to upgrade their computer skills in order to re-enter the workforce. None of the public libraries reported any persons under age 18 taking computer classes.

English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) Learners

Libraries #1 and #2 reported having few E.S.L. students attending computer classes while Libraries #3--#6 reported that there were many such students. Library #3 noted that many of the E.S.L. computer students were of Chinese or Russian background. Library #4 mentioned that there were various groups of E.S.L. students. Library #5 reported that most of their E.S.L. computer students were Asian, and Library #6 noted

that most of the E.S.L. students were Spanish speakers. Library #7 did not answer whether or not there were English as a Second Language students attending the computer classes.

Socioeconomic status

Regarding the socioeconomic status of the computer class students, most of the libraries were unable to give a clear answer. Only Library#2, which reported "an even mix" of income levels, and Library #5, which stated that students were "mostly lower income" answered this part of question #4. The other five libraries did not give a specific answer or seemed uncertain of the answer.

For question #5, How are the computer classes funded?, all of the seven public libraries reported that the computer classes were part of the overall general library budget. While Library #6 stated that the computer lab had been originally funded by a grant, Library #6 also funded its computer classes as part of the general library budget. Thus, in none of the seven libraries studied were the computer classes budgeted separately.

Question #7 asked "Are there more or less students attending computer classes than five years ago?" Libraries #2, #3, and #5 responded that they had increased numbers of students attending the computer classes. However, the respondent at Library #2 noted that she had been employed for only the past two years and stated that the increase had occurred in that shorter period of time. Both Libraries #4 and #7 responded

that the enrollment of students in the computer classes was about the same as it was five years ago but the respondent at Library #4 noted that the classes had only started three years ago so she, too, was responding to a shorter time frame. Libraries #1 and #7 had lower enrollment in their computer classes than five years ago but for very different reasons. In Library #1, the numbers of students taking classes had dropped over the period while at Library #7 the enrollment had been heavy and consistent until recently, when half of the computers were not working and therefore not available for use during computer classes.

The last question was number #8, which asked "Are students ever put on waiting lists to attend classes?" Libraries #2, #3, #4, #6, and #7 responded that waiting lists were commonly used for people desiring to attend computer classes. Library #1 responded that they did not use waiting lists "anymore" while Library #5 did not use waiting lists because "they were too much trouble."

In summary, the current status of computer classes offered varied greatly in each of the selected public libraries that were researched. There was a wide range in the number of computers available and the number of computer classes taught. Also, each of the public libraries included in the study showed variations in the characteristics of the students they taught, with some of the public libraries having English as a Second Language students attending computer classes while others not having E.S.L. learners attending computer classes. In contrast to these variations of numbers of computers available, computer classes taught, and whether or not there are E.S.L. students taking

computer classes, the selected public libraries were consistent with serving a large proportion of older patrons.

Finally, while the selected public libraries were offering many opportunities for patrons to improve their computer literacy, the fact that most of the libraries had full enrollments as well as waiting lists to sign up for classes was evidence that even more computer classes and workstations might need to be offered in order to fulfill the demand.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A research study was done to investigate the current state of public libraries' computer class offerings and resources in South Jersey. The researcher performed six cassette tape recorded live interviews in selected public libraries in order to find out about the computer classes offered in each, as well as the characteristics of the students attending the classes. In addition, the researcher sent a copy of the eight question interview via mail to a seventh public library computer class instructor. This instructor then mailed back written answers to the eight questions. The answers to the eight interview questions provided important data about selected South Jersey public libraries' current computer class offerings.

Conclusions

Computer class facilities

The data in Figure 1 show a fairly wide range in the number of computers available for classes, with six computers in Library #2 being the fewest and twenty computers in Library #3 being the greatest number of computers used for instruction. Library #4 had the median number of instructional computers with eleven.

Computer classes

Table 1 illustrates both the quantities and names of the computer classes taught at the public libraries included in the study. Library #4 offered the fewest number of different classes with four while Library #7 offered the highest number of different classes with sixteen. Furthermore, the median number of different classes offered was nine at Libraries #1, #3, and #6.

The researcher also found that all seven of the studied public libraries offered classes for students who had little or no experience using computers and needed to learn the most basic aspects about computers, such as learning the names of the parts of the computer and how to operate a mouse. In addition, all seven of the public libraries had at least one class that dealt with a version of Microsoft Word. Interestingly, Library #7 offered classes in several different versions of Microsoft Word, including the most recent version, Microsoft 2007. Also noteworthy was the fact that all seven of the researched libraries offered introductory classes for learning how to use the Internet.

Who teaches the computer classes

Table 3 in Chapter 4 details which public library personnel taught the computer classes. In all but two of the public libraries studied, librarians were involved in teaching computer classes. In Library #4 there were no professional staff teaching the computer classes. Instead, the Library Assistants taught the classes. The Technology Education Center Coordinator and Tech. Education Center Assistant taught them in Library #7. Only in Libraries #3 and #6 were volunteers used to teach computer classes.

Characteristics of students attending computer classes

With the exception of Library #7, which did not answer this part of the survey, the researched libraries were found to have a mixture of students attending computer classes based on race and ethnicity. Thus, no one ethnic or racial group was alone in being served at any of the public libraries #1-#6. At the same time, the results were inconclusive as to whether public libraries were assisting minority groups to a greater degree in helping to reduce the Digital Divide between African-Americans and Hispanics on one side, and whites on the other. The only definitive way that it could be determined if minorities gained a disproportional benefit from the public libraries' computer classes would be for the libraries to keep records of the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the students attending the classes.

In addition, all of the studied libraries reported a larger proportion of older age students. Therefore, it appeared that the selected public libraries were providing much assistance to older members of the population, a group that often lacks even basic computer knowledge. In fact, Library #4 offered a class specifically for senior citizens entitled "Generations Online for Seniors."

Four of the seven public libraries noted that they had sizeable numbers of English as a Second Language Learners as students, further emphasizing the fact that at least some public libraries in South Jersey were helping those with limited English skills. In addition, it was found that students from several backgrounds were among the E.S.L. population, including Chinese, Russian, and Spanish speakers.

Five of the seven libraries were not able to give an answer about the socioeconomic status of the computer class students. Only Library #5 noted that mostly

lower income persons were attending the computer classes and Library #2 reported that various socioeconomic level persons attended classes.

Funding for the computer classes

All seven of the public libraries studied reported that all their computer classes were funded from the regular budget.

Most popular classes

Table 3 shows the most popular computer classes at each of the studied public libraries. Overall, the most popular classes were those aimed at students with very limited computer knowledge and skills—so called "beginner" classes. As with the category of race and ethnicity, the only sure way to obtain precise results about the socioeconomic status of the computer class students would be to request the students provide such information. In addition, the public libraries would then need to verify this information by checking tax records or pay stubs. Thus, it would be difficult to determine the socioeconomic levels of computer class students without an intrusive approach. Perhaps a study could be done to determine the socioeconomic backgrounds of students in a way that maintains the person's anonymity, but that is a topic for further study and is beyond the reach of this researcher.

More or less students in past 5 years

The answers to this question from the studied libraries showed mixed results. Two of the seven libraries, libraries #1 and #6, showed a decline in the number of students currently attending computer classes. However, it must be noted that Library #6 had until recently been enrolling sizeable numbers of students but then had to limit class sizes due to broken computers. Therefore, only Library #1 reported a drop in computer

class enrollment due to fewer students signing up.   Libraries #2, #3, and #5 reported increased numbers of students attending such classes. Two libraries, libraries #4 and #7 reported consistent or similar numbers of students over the past 5 years.

Waiting lists

Five of the seven libraries reported using waiting lists for students wishing to sign up of classes. Two libraries, #1 and #5, did not make use of waiting lists. The fact that most of the public libraries in the study needed to use a waiting list for persons wishing to attend classes clearly shows a strong demand among their patrons for public library computer classes.

Recommendations

This researcher found many positive aspects of the computer class offerings in the public libraries included in the study. All of the interviewees showed much interest and enthusiasm for teaching computer skills to patrons. Also, all of the public libraries offered the computer classes to anyone free of charge. Two of the Libraries, #3, and #6, even offered classes in different languages with Library #3 giving a class in Chinese and Library #6 giving a class in Spanish. This researcher believed that the selected public libraries were working hard to help many South Jersey patrons gain more computer knowledge.

One improvement that could be made was the use of a suggestion box or survey of patrons in order to determine which computer skills were most desired by patrons. In

addition, public libraries could also take surveys of those who did attend existing classes to find out the level of satisfaction with the computer classes. Finally, public libraries could make a stronger effort to recruit volunteers to teach computer classes. Most of the studied public libraries reported that they experienced a high enrollment and needed to put people on a waiting list, making it apparent that some libraries needed to add more classes to their schedules or make more computers available to patrons. By recruiting volunteers who have computer skills, such as high school students or retirees, the public libraries could augment the numbers of computer classes offered. This would have the effect of further narrowing the Digital Divide as even more patrons could then enroll in computer classes at the public libraries in South Jersey.

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APPENDIX A

List of Selected Public Libraries

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List of Selected Public Libraries

Library #1   Mullica Hill Public Library

Library #2   Evesham Township Public Library

Library #3   Cherry Hill Public Library

Library #4   Pleasantville Public Library

Library #5   M. Allan Vogelson Regional Branch Public
                          Library—Voorhees

Library #6   Vineland Public Library

Library #7   Cape May County Public Library—Technology
                          Education Center—Cape May

APPENDIX B

Transcripts of Interviews

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Transcripts of Interviews

Interview #1   Mullica Hill Public Library   2-14-08

Interviewer: Can you describe what computer class facilities are here?

Respondent: Well, we have a computer lab, a training room. It has eight PC's in it. We use that for the classes. At our branches we also have facilities, computer room facilities for the classes that they teach there.

Interviewer: What classes, what are the names of the classes and content?

Respondent: Okay, there's Basic Computers, and that really is an overview of the hardware and the software, mostly the Microsoft Windows and the Microsoft programs that come with Microsoft Office. We introduce all of those and we also introduce the Internet and I usually introduce email as well. We have additional classes in all those specific programs. This is for the Basic, that's an introductory and then if someone's interested in, say, Microsoft Word, we can teach that as well, and teach a Basic and an Intermediate class.

Interviewer: Okay.

Respondent: Okay, we also do Excel, and a Basic and an Intermediate for that.

Interviewer: I think I took the Intermediate, with—is it Pat? Back in December, maybe November.

Respondent: He's in our IT department so he's a good one to teach.

Interviewer: Yeah, he helped me a lot and taught me a lot of stuff and I stayed, maybe 40 minutes. Yeah, it was good. I think the classes are an hour?

Respondent: They're an hour, the classes, yeah.

Interviewer: Who teaches the computer classes?

Respondent: Do you want specific names?

Interviewer: Um, I guess what position?

Respondent: Let's see. Two of them are Librarians. Robin and Flo are Librarians and they teach, and Pat Milburn is in the IT department, and he teaches a number of the classes. I actually do the inter-library loans and I teach the Microsoft Word classes and the Basic Computer classes.

Interviewer: Um—now this is more about the students who go—what are the characteristics of the students who attend the classes, like, just offhand—by race/ethnicity, or age, any English as a Second Language learners. Are they wealthy, poor? Can you tell?

Respondent: Most of them are older. We get quite a few seniors who received computers for Christmas gifts and things like that and their children don't have the patience to show them how to work it so they end up coming here, trying how to learn how to use their Christmas gifts.

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: A lot of them are also middle-age people learning how to update their job skills. Sometimes they are changing careers and they need to have some more computer skills and this is going to help them on their way. Very few young people. I mean they

are usually very good with the computer. As far as ethnic group, it really goes the whole range.

Interviewer: No one group stands out?

Respondent: No, no. Not in that sense, no.

Interviewer: People that are learning English, that speak another language?

Respondent: Once in a while we have people that are coming that are struggling with English but it's rare. Very few.

Interviewer: How are these classes funded? Is it the Bill Gates Library Program?

Respondent: At the Greenwich site, they did get a grant for the computers themselves, but as far as the classes, we're just—the staff handles the teaching the classes so there isn't any funding specifically for them. We don't have a special funding, no. We may get some funding for the actual computers and I know they did use some of the money from the Friends of the Library—they do a fundraising for the library—and they do furnish some of the tables and things, the computer tables in our training lab.

Interviewer: So as far as the budget, it's just added in? It's not like a separate computer class--?

Respondent: No, I don't believe there is a separate line for that.

Interviewer: Okay, what is the most popular class?

Respondent: I think it's the Basic Computer class. It's the one that we teach twice in the month. All the other classes we only teach once a month.

Interviewer: Are there more or less students attending these classes than five years ago?

Respondent: This particular site—less. When we first started them about, maybe ten years ago we were filling the whole registration with people on standby, people calling to

see if there were cancellations, but now, after so many years we have far less. I think

people are—

Interviewer: They know it?

Respondent: —they know it, and, at least in this area, maybe we've saturated some of the

learning needs in this area. We've made our impact.

Interviewer: Sure! It sounds like it. That kind of leads to my last question. Are students

ever put on waiting lists?

Respondent: Not anymore. Some of the other branches have a little bit more interest and

they may actually have a waiting list but at this particular branch we don't.

Interview #2   Evesham Township Public Library
                                2-20-08

Interviewer: Can you describe the computer class facilities here?

Respondent: Uh, do you mean the actual lab?

Interviewer: Yeah, how many computers? Is it a room?

Respondent: Our lab is pretty small, actually, compared to what they have at our

headquarters and our Maple Shade branch. We have a very narrow room.

There's six computers side by side on a counter but there's enough space for

people to sit and spread out and they're all against one wall, I should say, so a lot

of times when its, you know, there's nothing on the opposite side too so there's

plenty of room to walk around in.

Interviewer: Um, question two. What are the names and content of the computer classes taught here?

Respondent: Um, we offer quite a few, actually. There are the two that get repeated. Actually, I should say the three that get repeated most often. They are done at least every other month. Uh, Introduction to the Internet—it's sort of a half-and-half class—the first half of the class is spent familiarizing any students that need it with the mouse, and it starts out with, you know, "this is the mouse, here's how you use it", and maybe some exercises to get them familiar with it. The second half is the actual introduction where it's started with how to get around the Internet, how to plug in URL's, what a URL is, how to plug it in, into a browser, what a browser is. You know how to—when they hear on the radio—how to get information, you know, www.cnn.com. It's to show them how to find those, you know, where to put those to get there. And we show them how to find websites that they don't know what the actual address is, so using Google or Yahoo or whatever they prefer. Google's usually the one.

Interviewer: Okay. You said there's some other classes.

Respondent: Yes, actually every month there is a one-on-one computer help session. It's like one day a month. There's three or four slots, half hour slots left open for when people can come in and have specific questions answered.

Interviewer: Oh, so it's not really a class?

Respondent: No, they sign up. They give a clue as to what they really need. We don't actually do a full email class here because my personal feeling is email

should be done more one-on one to tailor it to the student. So we'll book a half hour session to teach them how to use their email.

Interviewer: Who teaches the classes?

Respondent: I teach most of the computer classes. Lori, one of the other librarians, also teaches, um, Genealogy Databases. That's her bag.

Interviewer: So you're both librarians, then? It's not done by, say, assistants?

Respondent: No, it's done by librarians.

Interviewer: What are the characteristics of the students who attend the classes—by race, age, English as a Second Language learners, socio-economic status? Is there any group that stands out?

Respondent: Very, very mixed. My largest group tends to be seniors. I should say "retired" instead of "seniors." I do get a variety. I do adults, and it's also in the mornings so kids are usually in school.

Interviewer: Okay, so a lot of retired people. Not too many E.S.L.?

Respondent: I actually have a regular, Amy. She's an English as a Second Language learner. She comes to anything and everything she can to learn as much as possible.

Interviewer: You don't know where she's from, offhand?

Respondent: I think she's from—they call it Myanamar but it's also called—

Interviewer: Burma?

Respondent: Burma. Yes, that's where she's originally from.

Interviewer: Socio-economic status—is there any way to know? Are they middle-class? Upper-middle? Lower-middle?

Respondent: Kind of an even mix. I have a lot of ,um, I get a lot of women, I guess, going back to, going back into careers. Getting back into jobs, you know, they're ready to back into the workforce. They brush up on their computer skills to be a little more viable.

Interviewer: Okay, thanks. Number five, how are these classes funded? Is it part of the overall budget? Part of the Gates—

Respondent: We don't have an extra funding. It's a service. None that I'm aware of. I'm a regular employee, and so is Lori. We're regular 40 hour, or in our case 35 hour plus five hour for professional reading and research. You know, full-time librarians and it's part of our job description. Part of my job description is computer instruction.

Interviewer: As far as the funding, is it, do you know, the budget, is it a separate section?

Respondent: I don't know how it's handled. You can probably give Sue, uh, ask her about that. It's part of my salary and it's not like a full-time thing. I don't really do it more than once a week.

Interviewer: What are the most popular classes?

Respondent: The three that I mentioned before always fill up very fast. The Introduction to the Internet almost always fills up. Everyone wants to learn how to use their computer. Like I said, a lot of my retired patrons, or students, I should say, they say, "My son or grandson or someone has given me a laptop for Christmas and what do I do with this thing?" So that's why I started doing a sort of social laptop club, informal thing with some of them, and to help them get

more use for their laptops and what, actually, the laptops can do for them. A lot of them just want to know how to get started on them. Introduction to Word is a very popular one. I don't do that every other month but I do that every few months.

Interviewer: All right. Are there more or less students attending these classes than five years ago?

Respondent: You know, I couldn't really tell you. I'm a "baby librarian." I've only been a librarian since I graduated in 2006, so that summer.

Interviewer: Okay, so not even two years.

Respondent: Since I started, I usually always got them for those two but since I've been offering more things I've gotten more and more students in that short time.

Interviewer: Okay. I think you kind of answered the last one already. Are they ever put on waiting lists to attend classes?

Respondent: Yes. I do take a waiting list.

Interviewer: Is it for the ones you said—Intro to the Internet?

Respondent: I make sure I have a waiting list set up for all of them. Some of them don't fill up like the first time I offered the Beginner Blog or Blogs for Beginners, I only got a couple people signed up but I think I got to a waiting list with the second, most recent time I offered it. I changed it where to show you how to read them, what they're all about and not just doing them, and I got a lot more interest. So I offer waiting lists for all the classes if they want to be put on a waiting list. And I generally try to call because sometimes they sign up way ahead of time, like a month or two months ahead of time. So as a service to them

I'll call a day or two days even before, and say, "Hi, this is your friendly

reminder" and they'll say, "Oh, yeah! Can I reschedule?" and then I'll go to the

waiting list.

Interviewer: So, any class can have a waiting list?

Respondent: Any of my classes.

Interviewer: And do they fill up? Has it happened a lot where somebody--?

Respondent: Yeah. A lot of times. Especially for my Intro to the Internet, and

my Intermediate, and for the one-on-one I'll have at least two people on the

waiting list. What I'll try to do is, with the students signed up, I'll try to set up

another one later on to get them in, especially if it's the Intro to Intermediate

because that's every other month so I'll make a note to put them first on the list.

Interviewer: Intro to Intermediate?

Respondent: Introduction to the Internet, sorry, and then the second is

Intermediate Internet.

Interviewer: Okay, Intermediate Internet.

Respondent: The librarian before me, she did something slightly different. She

called it, I think she called it "Internet Searching" but I kind of broadened it

because I do a little bit of basic searching in the Introduction class and I do more

specific searching in Google—it's sort of a smattering of what's out there and

how to use the tools. How to get directions, how to make reservations, how to

find book reviews, how to buy books on the Internet, you know, just everything

they can go and check out. Google is the first tool we teach them to use, in

Introduction. But we go into more specific, like exact phrase, and that kind of

searching. If you have the chance to take Database Searching, or something similar, that's always a good class!

Interview #3   Cherry Hill Public Library   2-26-08

Interviewer: Can you describe the computer class facilities available here?

Respondent: Okay. We have a computer lab with twenty computers. Halfway between, to separate ten and ten we have a divider we can put up if we have a small class and have the rest of the lab available for people to use.

Interviewer: What are names and content of the computer classes taught here?

Respondent: It's a long list. I will give you a copy of this, here. In addition to this they added an Internet class taught in Chinese, because we have a lot of people that speak Chinese in the area.

Interviewer: Are they students, like, grad students?

Respondent: They are, because we have a lot of E.S.L. students.

Interviewer: That leads to number four! I'll get to that. For number three, who teachers the computer classes here?

Respondent: It's a combination of, I'd say about half of them are taught by reference librarians, a few are taught by one of the people that work in our computer lab who is a part-time person, and then several are taught by volunteers that live in the community and have a computer background.

Interviewer: So it's not just one group?

Respondent: No, at least half are taught by the reference librarians.

Interviewer: For number four, what are the characteristics of the students that attend these classes in the public library, in general, like, by ethnicity or race, E.S.L. learners, or socio-economic status?

Respondent: I'd say most of them are, uh, about half of them at least are senior citizens and then the other half are, let's say, middle-aged people who feel like they need to brush up on their computer skills.

Interviewer: Okay, when you say middle-aged, is that, like, around fifty?

Respondent: I'm going to say forties, fifties—almost never anybody young, unless they are in some of the advanced level classes which I don't teach. I don't see them but then I teach the beginners classes, and I've sat in on the email and Internet classes.

Interviewer: As far as E.S.L., are there a lot whose first language is not English?

Respondent: I would say in every class I teach I get one person who doesn't speak English as their primary language.

Interviewer: Is it Chinese, like you said, or Spanish speaking?

Respondent: Chinese, not so much Spanish, some Russian—there's a lot of Russian immigrants.

Interviewer: And maybe by socio-economic status? Is it possible to even tell that?

Respondent: It's hard to say. It almost depends on the age group. Most of the retirees are well-to-do Cherry Hill residents who just want to learn about computers but we also take people from other towns. We get a lot of Pennsauken residents.

Interviewer: You don't have to be a resident of Cherry Hill to come here?

Respondent: No. You sign up and Cherry Hill residents get first pick. If the class is not filled then we open it up to everybody else.

Interviewer: How are these classes funded? Are they just part of the regular budget?

Respondent: As far as I know they're just part of our regular budget. That's one of the problems. We are always running short staffed, and then we have to have a librarian going off the desk to go teach a class and some of the classes we end up with two people down there. Some of the beginner classes we really need one person kind of instructing it and another person kind of running around so it would be really nice if there were grants available.

Interviewer: What are the most popular classes here?

Respondent: Mine are probably the most popular. I teach the very beginner class—Basic Mouse and Keyboard. I have probably taught it every month for five years, maybe more. It always fills up because I'll have people that take it several times to get the hang of it.

Interviewer: Keyboarding, typing--?

Respondent: Basically. It's not even so much typing but "where is the space bar, the enter key." It's amazing how many people don't know how to make a capital letter. It's a lot of senior citizens who just never learned.

Interviewer: They never needed to.

Respondent: Right. They never learned to type because they were going to get married. Many didn't learn to type because their secretaries were going to do it.

Interviewer: Okay. Besides that is there another class that is popular?

Respondent: I know the beginning Internet class is popular, and I believe the Microsoft Word class.

Interviewer: Are there more or less students taking these classes than five years ago?

Respondent: Just as many. We've been in this building for about four years. It's actually more because when we were in another building we didn't have as much space. So definitely more. I try to limit my classes to ten but I always have extra people showing up, especially for the beginners because they need so much help.

Interviewer: Last question—students ever put on waiting lists?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Absolutely. Is that often?

Respondent: Often. Every month. In fact, they want us to open more classes. I'm going to something at Camden County about Publisher. We just started a genealogy class. People just keep demanding more and more.

Interviewer: And these are free?

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: And you go about an hour?

Respondent: Two hours. I'll talk for an hour and a half and then I'll let them practice for half an hour and I'll walk around the room. That's pretty much what they do in the other classes as well.

Interview #4   Pleasantville Public Library   2-27-08

Interviewer: Can you describe the computer class facilities that are available here?

Respondent: We have a computer lab. The computers were here from the Gates Foundation. We use that for our classes.

Interviewer: What are the names and content of the computer classes taught here?

Respondent: There's four classes—Introduction to the Internet, Introduction to Microsoft Word, Computer Basics, and then there's one called Generations Online. It's geared toward introducing the Internet to senior citizens because they're so intimidated by it. We help them get their first email.

Interviewer: Ok, for number 3, who teachers these classes?

Respondent: Me and Dianne Hemmus(sp.?)

Interviewer: Ok, is she also a Librarian Assistant?

Respondent: She's a Librarian Assistant.

Interviewer: For number 4, what are the characteristics of the students who take the classes—by race/ethnicity, age, English as a Second Language learners, and socio-economic status?

Respondent: We serve different races. We have various ages. Most of them are above 35 to 40, above 40. Half of them use English as a Second Language.

Interviewer: Half of them, ok. Is there a particular group?

Respondent: No, it's always different. The majority is senior citizens.

Interviewer: The majority are senior citizens?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And socio-economic status? Can you sort of tell?

Respondent: No, I can't.

Interviewer: I think you kind of told me number 5—how they're funded? Is that also the current funding? I know you said they were donated? The Gates U.S. Library Program?

Respondent: The computers were donated. The classes are self--

Interviewer: There's no separate item in the budget?

Respondent: There's not. It's free.

Interviewer: So classes are free to everybody? Just part of the overall--

Respondent: --activities in the library.

Interviewer: For number 6, what are the most popular classes?

Respondent: All 4 of them are in demand.

Interviewer: Have you noticed, for number 7, are there more or less students attending the computer classes than 5 years ago?

Respondent: Well, we didn't have these classes 5 years ago. We just started maybe 2 years ago. Two or three years ago and it's been going strong ever since. I mean, we do the basics of each class—Microsoft Word, Introduction to the Internet. We do the most basic instructions. We have the Introduction to the Internet, and then we have the other three classes and then its time to have Introduction to the Internet again. We might have these people back in this class again because they don't have time everyday to come out here and to practice so they keep coming to the classes.

Interviewer: How many computers in the lab?

Respondent: Eleven.

Interviewer: Do the classes typically have eleven?

Respondent: It varies. We usually have ten on our list and we have five for a backup list.

Interviewer: Okay, that's number eight—are they ever put on a waiting list?

Respondent: Yes, they are.

Interviewer: Is that common?

Respondent: Yes. Yes it is. Especially in the winter. Some people can't come but then others take their place. There was a few times we overbooked and the people were nice enough to share the computers.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you ever have times where somebody is difficult? It's not on here but it came up in another interview so I thought I'd add it.

Respondent: No. If that was to happen I would have to cut it short for the sake of the others. You know, try to keep them focused on what they're here for but it doesn't come up.

Interviewer: How long is a class? An hour?

Respondent: One hour.

Respondent: In the winter time, there's people that come in—stragglers. They ask to sit and watch.

Interviewer: To watch—not be part of it.

Respondent: To be part of it.

Interviewer: Do you have kids?

Respondent: No, the children could teach us! In fact they do.

Interviewer: Here's the question that popped into my head. Is this open to anybody? Do you have to be a resident of Pleasantville?

Respondent: No, you don't. You don't even have to have a library card with us at the moment. Open to all.

Interviewer: Can you describe the computer class facilities here?

Respondent: Yes. We have one computer lab on our third floor. It has twelve computers.
It has an instructor station at the front, and we have an overhead projector that can project
onto a screen in the front of the room.

Interviewer: What are the names and content of the computer classes taught here?

Respondent: We have quite a few. We start with Mouse Basics. We have Getting
Started With Computers, Welcome to the Web. We have Yahoo Email I and Yahoo
Email II. We have Microsoft Word I and II. We have Microsoft Excel I and II and
PowerPoint I and II.

Interviewer: And who teaches them?

Respondent: Reference librarians teach most of them. I teach quite a few and I have a
few other librarians that share responsibility for them.

Interviewer: Is it just the librarians or could it be someone else?

Respondent: Well, for the Excel we do have someone who works in IT that teaches that
class.

Interviewer: For number four, what are the characteristics of the students attending these
computer classes, based on age, race/ethnicity/ English as a Second Language, and socio-
economic status?

Respondent: It depends on the class. The Basics and the Getting Started and the Welcome to the Web tend to be older, senior citizens. I think the Office classes—PowerPoint, they tend to be more middle-aged.

Interviewer: Is that forties, fifties?

Respondent: I would say forties, fifties. They might have lost their job or they are looking to go back into the workforce. I have a lot of African-Americans that come in. Quite a few English as a Second Language people as well.

Interviewer: Are they from any particular group?

Respondent: We get a lot of Asian—Korean, Chinese. Some aren't too proficient in English yet.

Interviewer: How are these computer classes funded? Is there a separate budget?

Respondent: No, they're free and its just part of our job.

Interviewer: Are they open to anybody or is it based on residence in the county?

Respondent: Open to anybody. You don't even have to have a library card.

Interviewer: For number six, what are the most popular classes?

Respondent: It's hard to say. Believe it or not, the Getting Started With Computers classes are still very popular. We usually try to offer two sessions a month because they always fill up and there's people wanting to come in. There still is that population of people that need that beginner stuff. The Excel classes are very popular. Those classes always fill up very fast.

Interviewer: How many are typically in the class?

Respondent: We always take twelve. We don't do waiting lists. Most of the time are able to get a spot if someone doesn't show up but we don't have waiting lists or write names down. It's just too complicated.

Interviewer: Are there more or less students taking computer classes than five years ago?

Respondent: I think there's more probably because we're offering more classes. There's so many people that want to learn the Office classes for work or for finding jobs. A lot of the older people are getting hand-me-down computers from their kids.

Interviewer: Like reverse hand-me-downs!

Respondent: Yeah, right. They want to learn how to use those computers. I think they're more popular.

Interviewer: Good. So it makes an impact then?

Respondent: Yes. You see a lot of the same people and they are welcome to take the same classes over again.

Interviewer: I didn't really ask for number four, socio-economic status, can you tell? Is it lower income?

Respondent: I think so except for the older people it's hard to tell. With the people in the Office classes I would say lower income people who can't afford to take classes at the colleges.

Interviewer: Overall, Voorhees is affluent?

Respondent: Yes. It's not cheap to live here.

Interview #6　　　　Vineland Public Library 3-06-08

Interviewer: Can you describe the computer class facilities here?

Respondent: We are fortunate to have a computer lab with sixteen stations plus an instructor station. We have an overhead projector and a screen so it's large enough for people to see in the room.

Interviewer: What are names and content of the computer classes taught here?

Respondent: One is called What Computers Can Do For You which meets in two sections. In it we introduce students to hardware and all the peripherals. We introduce them to specific programs for a short exposure, 20-40 minutes of usually three or four programs--a word processing program, a spreadsheet program, the Internet, and sometimes databases. There's quite a range. I can give you handouts later.

Interviewer: How long are the classes? Is there a specific time period?

Respondent: Typically about two hours.

Interviewer: Who teaches the classes here?

Respondent: Mostly volunteers. Occasionally some classes are taught by reference librarians.

Interviewer: What are the characteristics of the students attending the public library computer classes based on race/ethnicity, age, English as a Second Language Learners, and socioeconomic status?

Respondent: It's of all ages. In fact, in a class that finished last week, I had an 84 year-old student. I have a lot of retired students. Some students are middle year students. People who have been out of the workforce for a while, usually raising

families, and come to upgrade their skills. Sometimes younger people, but mostly its middle to older. Often grandchildren try to help grandparents but don't take time to instruct and just do it for them and they don't get it. They also want to be able to contact them on the Internet and do things with pictures. They want to be in the 21st century.

Interviewer: Yes. Now by race/ethnicity?

Respondent: Always mixed. We sometimes have some of the courses in Spanish.

Interviewer: That leads to my next question. E.S.L. students—do you have a lot of them?

Respondent: Oh yes. Many of them Spanish but also some other languages.

Interviewer: And socioeconomic status?

Respondent: I think is varied but I can't really tell.

Interviewer: Let me go to number five. How are the computer classes funded? Is there a separate line in the budget for it?

Respondent: There was a grant that produced a lot. The grant was designed by a young man who is no longer with us, unfortunately. Originally we had no lab and taught our classes at the public access computers. We gave weekly seminars which were basically demonstrations where the Art Room is now. He designed a proposal to get funds to create a lab. The equipment would all be owned by the school board and housed in the library.

Interviewer: Are they funded now? Is it part of the budget?

Respondent: There's a near zero cost. It's housed in the library anyway. We are all volunteers except for one person who is paid out of a separate fund.

Interviewer: So the library itself doesn't have a separate budget for the class instruction?

Respondent: Right.

Interviewer: What are the most popular classes?

Respondent: What Computers Can Do For You, Introduction to Word and Introduction to the Internet always fill up pretty quickly.

Interviewer: Are there more or less students attending computer classes here than five years ago?

Respondent: The number has been constant until recently because we've had half of our computers down.

Interviewer: Before then it was constant, when you had all of them?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: What about number eight—are students ever put on waiting lists to attend classes?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Is that frequent?

Respondent: Yes, even when we had all sixteen stations.

Interviewer: It's not on here but are the classes open to anyone?

Respondent: Everybody can come.

Interviewer: And they're free?

Respondent: Nobody's cheaper than free!

Interviewer: You can't beat free!