My educational experiences at Brookdale Community College have profoundly redefined my understanding of the research process. I previously considered research to consist of somewhat random searches of commonly available internet resources and some printed materials. That naive assumption was corrected by Professor Donna Flinn, during an intense semester of research writing. Professor Flinn introduced me to a thorough, systematic approach to research that took full advantage of the wealth of information available at Brookdale’s Bankier Library, as well as other resources. I was exposed to research through the use of printed media, library databases, microfiche, personal interviews, and surveys. The final project for Professor Flinn’s English-122 course was a free-choice research essay. The most prominent resources used in my project were those derived from the Bankier Library Online Databases.

The subject that I chose for my essay was public school funding in New Jersey. I reached that decision after the class was directed to choose an issue that was both current and controversial. I was aware that Governor Corzine was in the process of reviewing school funding formulas and proposing changes to them. I also heard that many heavily subsidized school districts were preparing to go to court to prevent the Governor from reducing their funding. Believing that few issues were more important than the education of children, my decision was made and I enthusiastically began work on the project.

Understanding that New Jersey’s system of funding education was a controversial, time-sensitive, and well reported issue specific to the state, the first
resources I chose to consult were the Star Ledger and New York Times. I accessed these newspapers via LexisNexis and immediately faced the challenge of choosing the appropriate search keywords. I quickly learned that the phrases such as “public school funding in New Jersey” provided negative results and that more specific terms were needed. I consulted with a helpful librarian who directed me to focus on terms that would be common only among articles regarding my subject matter, such as “Abbott district”. My refined search presented me with nearly one-hundred articles that I was then able to filter, through the use of additional qualifying terms. I chose two relevant articles from the New York Times that contained background information on the topic as well as figures and statistics that were needed for my project. I also referred to other articles in the databases as a means of corroborating the accuracy of the information that my chosen articles contained. As I reviewed and journalized the articles, I was shocked to learn the disparity in state subsidization between Abbott districts such as Newark and lower income non-Abbott school districts such as Carteret. I determined that the premise of my paper would not just be to discuss proposed changes in educational funding, but instead centered around the lack of parity in educational funding. My subsequent research was focused on that theme.

My search for information was not limited to virtual newsprint. I also utilized other library databases (such as CQ Researcher and the EBSCO Host) and found that the logical configuration and remote access capabilities of the library’s database system truly encouraged the user to utilize a wide range of sources. I was familiar with the EBSCO Host from previous projects and assumed that my search there would be as successful as it was in LexisNexis. However after reviewing the source databases and attempting some
limited searches, I found that EBSCO Host was not the ideal data source for the subject matter. I also checked CQ Researcher, expecting negative results (because my subject was state specific), but was surprised to stumble across an informative piece that I chose to include in my project. The CQ Researcher piece did not provide the specific statistics and figures that I found in most of my other sources and it was not limited to New Jersey. However, after perusing the work, I decided that it was valuable due to the fact that it provided valuable insight into the history of school funding issues and a glimpse of some of the alternative plans that are being considered around the country.

Required to explore a variety of informational resources, I also obtained two pieces through conventional internet searches. One was an article from NJ Monthly Magazine and the other was a statement on the subject issued by NJ State Senator Robert Singer (on his NJ Senate webpage). In addition, I utilized information from a personal interview which I conducted and also data from a survey that I compiled. The latter two methods of research were taught and practiced in class. I found that the personal interview was especially challenging due to the fact that I had to determine the scope of the information that I was attempting to gather, prepare questions that would reasonably elicit the information, and manage the interview in an effective manner.

After assembling and reviewing all of the data that I collected, I constructed a rough draft of my paper utilizing structural guidelines that Professor Flinn offered in class. As the draft developed, it became clear to me that the City of Newark had the most heavily subsidized school district in the state. I wished to further stress this fact through a mathematical demonstration, but did not have crucial figures that I needed to do so. Determined to achieve my goal, I returned to research mode and tapped the LexisNexis
database. I located a Star Ledger article that provided the specific figures that I was looking for and synthesized the information into my final draft.

The final project that I submitted was not just merely a measure of my hard work or my dedication to successfully completing a college course. It demonstrated my personal growth as a student of research. It was a transformation that was facilitated by the assets that Brookdale Community College offered to me. I consider myself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to take advantage of excellent classroom instruction, the knowledgeable library staff, and the nearly unlimited resources offered by the Bankier Library. The combination of these human and technological resources provided me with an educational experience that I will always treasure.