A typical requirement in college level courses is the research paper and the Honors section of World Civilization I with co-Professors Jess Levine and Laura Neitzel was no different. I have certainly had experience in research and writing in past courses, both in college and high school; however, I learned more during this process than in any other previous endeavor with respect to online research and, specifically, the available resources at Brookdale’s Bankier Library.

The first step in the process included the presentation of a thesis and an outline during a brainstorming session in which Professor Jeanne Vloyanetes from the Bankier Library was invited to assist our class in research strategies. I chose my topic based on a previous class assignment regarding the role of women in early Christianity and used the Karen Jo Torjesen article from that assignment as a springboard. The bulk of usable research was found after this class session in which Professor Vloyanetes prepared a guide to reference sources. This was an invaluable tool in conducting the research for this paper and I’m sure that it will be equally useful in the future.

For my research topic, I determined that the development of an organized Christian Church brought the dehumanization of women, which concurred with the ideas in Dan Brown’s novel *The DaVinci Code*, with a focus on the Bible’s depiction of women. Although *The DaVinci Code* is fiction, the sources on which it was based were the result of research on the part of Michael Baigent, among others, who believed that the role of women, especially Mary
Magdalene, were changed through the canonization of the Bible to eliminate their importance.
The Dan Brown novel was based on Baigent’s books, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, and *The Jesus Papers*.

In addition to basing a thesis in part on a fictional novel, I have to admit that I used Google for this topic before the class brainstorming session because the online search engine had been a traditional starting point for me since reenrolling in college. I am a returning college student with a family and a part-time job so online research has always been more convenient. Knowing full well that all of the information on the web is not trustworthy, I focused on websites that seemed most reliable based on the author and the content, and tried to focus on websites that ended with “org” thinking they would be more dependable. It was pointed out to me by Professor Neitzel, however, that many of the sites I found were biased because they were written by church organizations and were, therefore, not very useful or reliable. However, this online search did produce two helpful sources in the Karen King article from PBS.org that explained women’s crucial role in early Christianity and Arthur Maricle’s article which focused on the power of the Church in the political arena.

In addition to the two web articles, the traditional online search and Dan Brown’s novel provided a starting point to construct an outline that included Rome’s decline coupled with The Bible as a misogynistic source. With Professor Vloyanetes’ help, the focus was narrowed to Rome’s decline, specifically on Constantine the Great who was responsible for making Christianity the national religion of Rome.

Since I was focused on Constantine’s role, I found a book entitled *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and The Jews* which is in the Library’s collection. The book provided information
on the politics of Constantine and his role in uniting a failing Roman Empire in hopes of saving it. This point was extremely important as it explained how the organized Church had become so different than the teachings of Jesus because Constantine had blended Pagan religions with Christianity for wider acceptance. It also explained the strong connection between Church and State that continued to prominently influence Roman politics for centuries. As a matter of fact, from the information found within this book, my focus shifted from Constantine in particular to the coexistence of the Roman government with the Church.

My next phase of research included the online Bankier Library. I began by searching for background information through the Bankier Library’s online Facts on File using keywords such as “early Christianity,” “Constantine the Great,” and “the Council of Nicaea.” These three searches brought an abundance of information regarding the organization of the church and the ties to politics. In addition, this led to some of the early Church leaders, including Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine who were fundamental in shaping the views of the Church. After reading in depth about these early Church leaders, it became evident that the theology of the Church was becoming more dependent on celibacy in order to become more pure and closer to God. This, in turn, created a hatred of women as sexual predators who were attempting to lure men away from God. The thought that celibacy was crucial for spiritual well-being as the determining cause of women’s subjugation actually became the thesis of the final product because this explained the reasons for the dehumanization of women.

The most important discovery during my research process was the online database, J-STOR. This database was recommended by all three Professors involved in the assignment, and, prior to this research project, I had never even heard of J-STOR. The J-STOR search provided me with both Elaine Pagels’ and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s articles which clearly indicate how
women were subjugated through Christianity because of their perceived role in original sin. This certainly supports the early Church leaders’ position on women, God, and sex.

Even after submitting the paper, the research portion continued to be a learning process. I discovered through Professor Neitzel’s feedback that, because of the controversial nature of some of the statements, when using a secondary source, the source’s sources should also be examined and evidenced. I had always assumed that only the first source needed to be noted, but realized that, especially in a controversial statement, stronger evidence through the sources’ source can only help to support that statement.

It is very interesting how the research guided the direction of the final paper from an examination of the Bible to the fear of sex as a sinful act. This was an enlightening research project for me because of the depth of research involved and the use of the online database. Overall, the use of the Bankier Library’s resources which were previously unknown to me proved very valuable in researching and I am confident that I will be using the Library’s online databases again in the future. Professor Vloyanetes’ time and effort in creating a research guide was vital in helping me learn the resources available and how to use them appropriately.