



News from Project Information Literacy

Steep Learning Curve for Most First-Year Students Conducting College Research

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There is a striking disparity between the Google-centric search skills that many first-year students bring from high school and the competencies they need to meet the far higher research expectations in college, according to a new national [research study](#) released today.

Moreover, there are gaping holes in their understanding of how libraries—and the vast array of digital resources academic libraries provided—can best meet their needs, especially when it came to sifting out the trusted information first-year students needed and wanted.

The report, "Learning the Ropes: How Freshmen Conduct Course Research Once They Enter College," is the seventh report from [Project Information Literacy](#) (PIL), an ongoing national study about college students in the digital age, based in the [University of Washington's Information School](#) and conducted in affiliation with [Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society](#).

PIL's latest study investigated the challenges today's first-year students face, and the information-seeking strategies they develop, use, and adapt as they make the transition from high school to college and begin to complete college research assignments.

"There's an important lesson to be learned from our results," Lead researcher Alison J. Head said, "even though many of today's first-year students may have grown up with the Internet, most know little about how to best leverage formal channels of information that are available through high schools or college."

Findings are based on a comparative analysis of library resources in 30 US high schools and 6 colleges and universities; interviews with 35 first-term freshmen from 6 colleges and universities, and an online survey with 1,941 US high school and college student respondents.

Interviews with first-year college students occurred at Harvard, Ohio State University; Newark; Belmont University (TN), California Maritime Academy, Santa Rosa Junior College (CA), and Mesa Community College (AZ).

A [findings video](#) (2:40 minutes) accompanied the report's release.

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