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HIGH SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER WEB SITES: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

by
Debra Ann Cathcart

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of School and Public Librarianship Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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Approved by _____

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ABSTRACT

Debra Ann Cathcart
HIGH SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER WEB SITES: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
2008/09
Dr. Marilyn Shontz
Master of School and Public Librarianship

The purpose of this research investigation was to determine what was considered essential for a high school media center's Web page. A content analysis research method using high school media center Web pages was performed to verify contents and functionality, as well as similarities and differentiations. The results of this study indicated that some elements were considered essential for high school media center Web pages, such as online magazines and/or encyclopedias, databases, and information and/or resources on bibliographies and citations. The research also provided elements considered tentative in regards to level of essentialism for these Web pages, such as links to resources for teachers/staff, library mission/goals, and information about current school projects. Finally, the results of the study provided insight into elements not considered essential for high school media center Web pages, including parent resources, available equipment, and staff biography information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research, thoughts, and time utilized to create and write the Thesis paper *High School Media Center Web Sites: Essential Elements* would have been minimal if it were not for the assistance and encouragement of Rowan University's Dr. Marilyn Shontz. Dr. Shontz provided constant advice, suggestions, and support during both courses Thesis I and Thesis II. She also performed timeless editing and offered ideal suggestions for final revisions. Dr. Shontz is a model for librarianship. She has a wealth of knowledge in information, education, and technology. To add to her attributes, her warm personality and contagious smile make her classrooms a glorious learning environment. With all of these elements contributed by Dr. Shontz, this Thesis paper became an enjoyable assignment and perfect ending to the Master's degree of School and Public Librarianship at Rowan University.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND IMPORTANCE

In the age of technology and information access, the high school library media center can capitalize on such dynamics and provide contemporary resources to its audience within the school. However, due to the pressure of standardized tests and the constant constraints of time, students are often limited in their physical access to school media centers and these resources. Nevertheless, they still possess a need for the information and resource tools provided by media centers. Therefore, high school media centers need to provide a multi-functional Web page that incorporates the needs of the students, as well as the teachers and staff. A multi-functional Web page allows great flexibility to its audience as well as 24 hour remote access.

High school library media center Web pages offer a wide range of information and resource tools to students, teachers, and staff. Many Web pages incorporate operational facts, including media center hours, library media specialist contact information, and additional staff reference data. Resource tools range from electronic databases and online catalogs to reference links and proper research format guidelines. There are library media center Web pages that also provide interactive forums, such as blog areas and chat rooms. Another popular section of library media center Web pages includes promotion of activities and events within the library media center. Due to the nature of schools and

personalities, all high school media centers' Web pages will contain similarities as well as differences, in regards to content.

Purpose of the Study

Although every high school media center Web page differs in character and format, there are common threads. The purpose of this study was to determine what was considered essential for a high school media center's Web page. A content analysis research method using high school media center Web pages was performed to verify contents and functionality, as well as similarities and differentiations. The results of this study can determine the current fundamental elements of a high school library media center's Web page.

Hypothesis

This researcher believed that all high school media center's Web pages have more elements in common than not. These elements included, but were not limited to, the following: online catalog, electronic databases, operational details, activities/events promotions, curriculum links, and research format guidelines.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were a few assumptions and limitations that applied to this particular study. The research was performed on a random selection of high school media centers' Web pages. Web pages were randomly chosen based on a list compiled from School-Libraries.net (H.W. Wilson Company). Schools were researched on the Internet and

included only if they maintained a self-sufficient library media center Web page—that is, a functioning Web page.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were all obtained from *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (ODLIS) online:

Internet

The high-speed fiber-optic network of networks that uses TCP/IP protocols to interconnect computer networks around the world, enabling users to communicate via emails, transfer data and program files via FTP, find information on the World Wide Web, and access remote computer systems such as online catalogs and electronic databases easily and effortlessly, using an innovative technique called packet switching.

Library media specialist

A librarian trained to deliver library services to students in a school library media center on a walk-in basis or at the request of the classroom teacher. In addition to managing daily operations, the library media specialist supports the curriculum through collection development, teacher research and library skills appropriate to grade level, assists students with reading selections appropriate to reading level, helps classroom teachers integrate library services and multimedia materials into instructional programs,

establishes standards of behavior for the library, and assists students in developing information-seeking skills and habits needed for lifelong-learning.

Online catalog

A library catalog consisting of a collection of bibliographic records in machine-readable format, maintained on a dedicated computer server that provides uninterrupted interactive access via terminals or workstations in direct, continuous communication with the central computer. Although the software used in online catalogs is proprietary and not standardized, most online catalogs are searchable by author, title, subject headings, and keywords, and most public and academic libraries in the United States provide free public access, usually through a Web-based graphical user interface (synonymous with OPAC).

OPAC

An acronym for *online public access catalog*, a database composed of bibliographic records describing the books and other materials owned by a library or library system, accessible via public terminals or workstations usually concentrated near the reference desk to make it easy for users to request the assistance of a trained reference desk to make it easy for users to request the assistance of a trained reference librarian.

School library

A library in a public or private elementary or secondary school that serves the information needs of its students and the curriculum needs of its teachers and staff,

usually managed by a school librarian or media specialist. A school library collection usually contains books, periodicals, and educational media suitable for the grade levels served. This particular study focuses on high school media centers.

Web page

An electronic document written in HTML script, stored on a Web server and accessible using Web browser software at a unique Internet address (URL), usually one of a group of related, interlinked files that together comprise a Web site. A Web page may include formatted text, graphic material, audio and/or video elements, and links to other files on the Internet.

Web site

A group of related, interlinked Web pages installed on a Web server and accessible 24 hours a day to Internet users equipped with browser software. Most Web sites are created to represent the online presence of a company, organization, or institution or are the work of a group or individual. The main page or welcome screen, called the homepage, usually displays the title of the site, the name of the person (or persons) responsible for creating and maintaining it, and date of last update.

References

H.W. Wilson Company. (2008). *School-libraries.net*. Retrieved October 13, 2008,
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Online dictionary for library and information science. Retrieved October 13, 2008,
from <http://lu.com/odlis/index.cfm>

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of research related to high school media center Web sites was found to be relatively small. Most research was based on all levels of school, including elementary, middle/intermediate, high school, and a combination of schools. Some of the research was dated in regards to the topic of technology. Other forms of research were correlated, based on each other to expand on results as well as discover new findings. Overall, the research proved to be similar in regards to features of school media center Web sites.

Studies that focused on school library Web sites were often aimed at identifying the characteristics and features of Web pages and the type of information that media centers provided to users. Clyde (2004) investigated 50 school library home pages in 1996 and then revisited the same sites in 1999 and 2002 to determine content analysis as well as change and development. Clyde based this study on school library Web sites identified using two international directories based in the United States: those of Peter Millbury (“Network of School Librarian Web Pages”) and Linda Bertland (“School Libraries on the Web”). The selected Web sites were subjected to a simple content analysis that identified and listed the content and other features of each Web site. A chart was created to illustrate the change in content and features from 1996 to 1999 to 2002. The results proved that schools ranged in content and features. For instance, there was a

positive increase in percentage change for the following content/features: links to online indexing, links to OPAC, links to other library catalogues, links to reference works, and links to recreation resources. On the other hand, there was a negative decrease in percentage change for the following content/feature: mission/goals of the library, classroom-library projects non-Internet based, information and links for parents, and distance learning. Clyde also determined the current “state of the art” of school library Web sites. On the one end of the spectrum, there were a few school library Web sites that consisted of just one page to basically claim a Web presence with limited usefulness. At the other end, a few school library Web pages existed that included advanced features, such as “virtual tours” and Webcams. However, most school library Web pages fell between both extremes to include the following: information about the school library, collections of evaluated links, links to OPAC, links to commercial online information services, and information about creating biographies (Clyde, 2004).

A follow up study to Clyde’s research included a narrowly-based sample of 127 Texas school library Web pages. In this study, Simpson found the following results in regards to resources: 65% had links for students, 47.2% indicated access to at least one online database, 21.3% had links for teachers, 16% had links to library catalogs, 11% had links for the librarian, and 11% offered information on research skills. Along with these data, Simpson also determined many of the Web pages had the following “housekeeping” details: 30% had a photo of the library, 23.6% informed patrons of library on-goings, 20% assisted students with citation skills, and 17.3% included library skills. Simpson’s thorough research also examined missing details of the Texas school library Web pages. According to the study, the following information was not included on some of the Web

pages: 62.2% had no links to search engines, 50% had no email contact information for the library, 50% did not have a link to their own school's home page, 47% contained no information about the library (programs, hours, collection, location), and 10% did not have the name of the school or library (Simpson, 2001).

Another form of research conducted on school media center Web pages was directed towards the views and opinions of school media center specialists. In this particular study conducted by Jurkowski, a 54 question survey was placed online at http://faculty.cmsu.edu/jurkowski/library_survey.htm. A message placed on the LM_NET email list directed individuals to visit the site to participate. The results provided information from 278 participants. Librarians were asked to indicate the basic features that were generally found on media center Web pages, regardless of the school level or age of student. The results included the following percentages: email address of librarian 90%, phone number of library 76%, hours open/closed 72%, and date Web site last updated: 69%. Another question was directed to library-specific Web site features, and data included: class resources 74%, databases 70%, OPAC 39%, print journal list 17%. Another series of questions targeted links that school library Web sites often contain with the following percentages found: simple list of links 82%, search engines 78%, reference 70%, fun sites 47%, and weather 25% (Jurkowski, 2006).

A study in 2004 conducted by Baumbach was based on the Clyde study tallies features found on school library Web sites as well as provided an aggregate total for each feature. A total of 100 working school library media Web sites were selected at random from the School-Libraries.net (<http://www.school-libraries.net/>) list, a registry of Web pages created and maintained by school library media specialists. Again, all school

levels were included, ranging from elementary and middle school to high school and in some rare cases, a combination of schools. This study produced a large list of features within its results, including the following: links from main page 70%, links to search engines 68%, OPAC 41%, LMC hours/policies/procedures 40%, new materials 12% and library media forms 8% (Baumbach, 2005).

Among the four studies, there was a commonality of features and content for high school media center Web pages. Some of the more frequent elements for these studies included databases, links, and contact information. Features and contents that were insignificant to minor existence included parent or information/resources and book information (reviews, fairs, clubs). It should be noted that these studies took place in 2001, 2004, 2005, and 2006. The current study was performed in 2008-2009. The results took into consideration the difference in time to reflect on the possibility of changes incurred by technology, Web 2.0, and other factors relevant to high school library media centers.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research for the proposed study on high school media center Web pages was in the form of a content analysis for descriptive methodology. According to Powell (2004) in *Basic Research Methods for Librarians* content analysis is “the analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material through a classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect” (Powell). Restated, content analysis is “essentially a systematic analysis of the occurrence of words, phrases, concepts, and so on in books, films, and other kinds of materials” (Powell). Content analysis was utilized to examine a variety of high school media center Web pages with the purpose of gaining insight on proposed essential elements.

Although every high school media center Web page differs in character and format, there were common threads. The purpose of this study was to determine what Web page builders considered essential for a high school media center’s Web page. A content analysis research method using high school media center Web pages was performed to verify contents and functionality, as well as similarities and differentiations. The results of this study can be used to ultimately determine the current fundamental elements of a high school library media center’s Web page.

The sample and population were chosen based on a random selection of school library media center Web sites from the School-Libraries.net list. Only public high schools within the United States of grade levels 9 through 12 were used in the study. The following states were included in the research: Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. In total, 64 Web sites were selected in order to reach 50 working sites. During the selection process, 14 sites were non-accessible and therefore removed from the study.

A checklist was created by the researcher to identify specific Web page elements for each high school media center analyzed. The initial checklist was reflective of the lists used by both Clyde and Baumbach in their past studies (see Table 1). The checklist included spaces to write the name of the school, the html address, the location of the school, and the grade levels of the school. A section followed to list all variables in categorical order. There were 30 different variables listed under the following six categories: School Information, Library Information, Resources, Research Paper Guidelines, Student Resources and Interactions, and Miscellaneous. This allowed for ease of examination when collecting data for the study. Further features and contents were added as they appeared during the analysis of Web sites. A simple method of “checking” the content or feature on the list was utilized to illustrate the existence of that element of the Web page.

The research applied to the 50 Web pages ensured both validity and reliability. A pretest was performed using the checklist by five different individuals to reach a high

level of reliability. After each pretest, minor adjustments were made to the official checklist to ultimately generate the final, official copy of the checklist. Validity of the

TABLE 1: WEB PAGE RESEARCH CHECKLIST

School name: _____
SLMC Web site address: _____
Date accessed: _____

Existence Key: Y (yes), N (no), NW (exists, but not working)

Feature	Existence (Y, N, NW)
School Information	
Name of school	
Link to school home page	
Address of school/library	
Links to school activities/clubs/etc	
Library Information	
Name of library	
Staff bio information	
Information about library (operational)	
Email/phone contact information	
Photograph of library	
News about the library/activities	
Library rules	
Library mission/goals	
Calendar/Schedule	
Resources	
OPAC	
Databases	
Online magazines/encyclopedias	
Links to Internet search engines	
Links to resources for teachers/staff	
Parent resources	
Research Paper Guidelines	
Research skills information	
Info/resources on bibliographies/citations	
Student Connections/Interactions	
Information about current school projects	
Book reviews, book recommendations	
Student writing/projects	
Miscellaneous	
Local links	
Webmaster information	
Available equipment	
Information about Internet/computer use	
Date of last update of the page	
Counter	

research was a reflection of the variables listed within lists generated by Clyde and Baumbach in previous studies, as discussed in Chapter II.

References

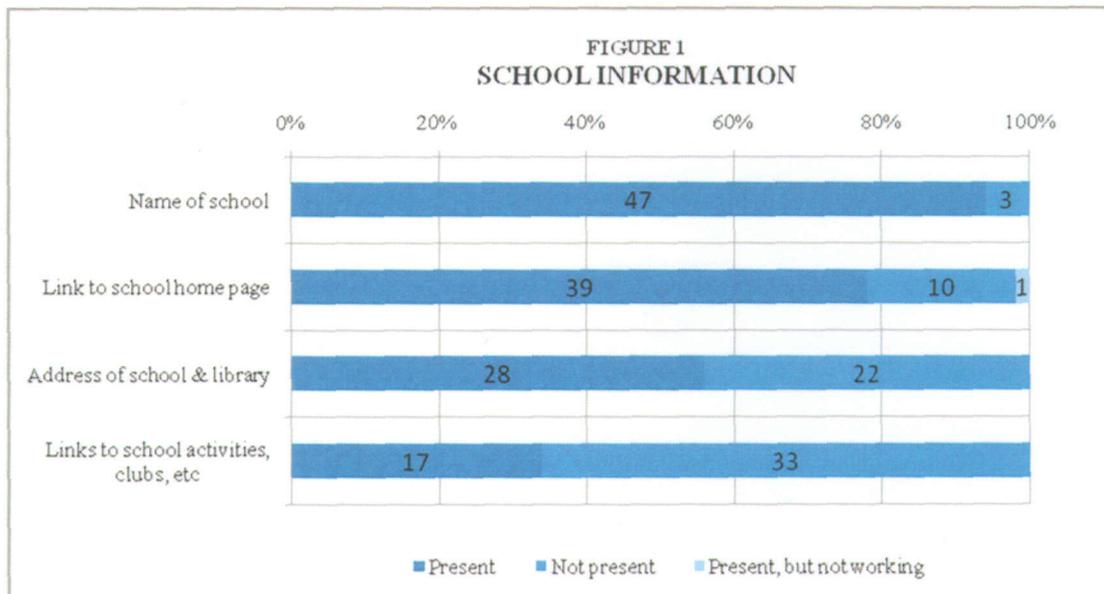
Powell, R. (2004). *Basic research methods for librarians*. 4th ed. Libraries Unlimited.

CHAPTER IV

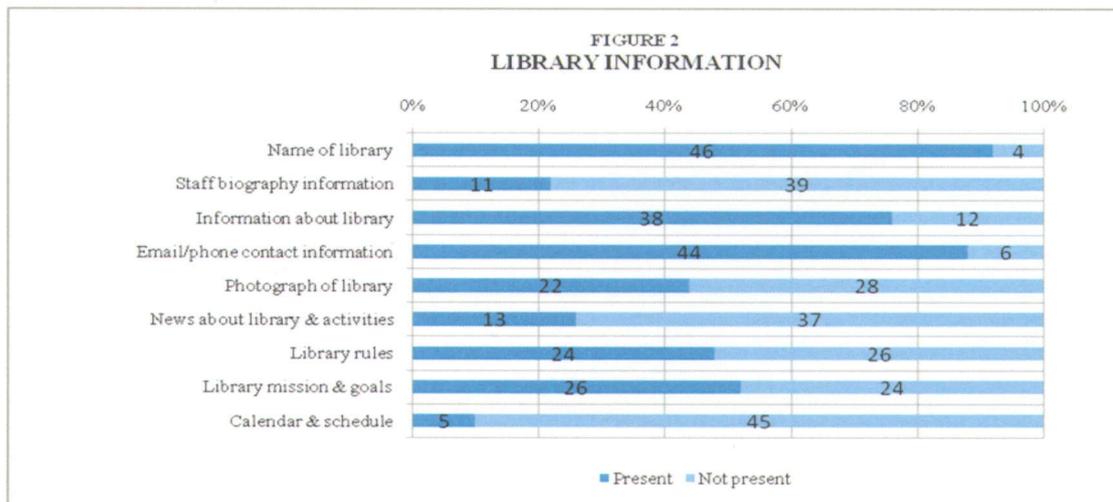
ANALYSIS OF DATA

A comprehensive analysis was performed on the 50 high school media center Web pages. Each site was accessed and evaluated with the detailed checklist (see Table 1) to determine if variables were (1) present, (2) not present, or (3) present, but not working. Other variables not listed on the checklist were noted in a separate section for further examination. After all Web sites were researched, a tally was performed to ensure a complete assessment had been achieved.

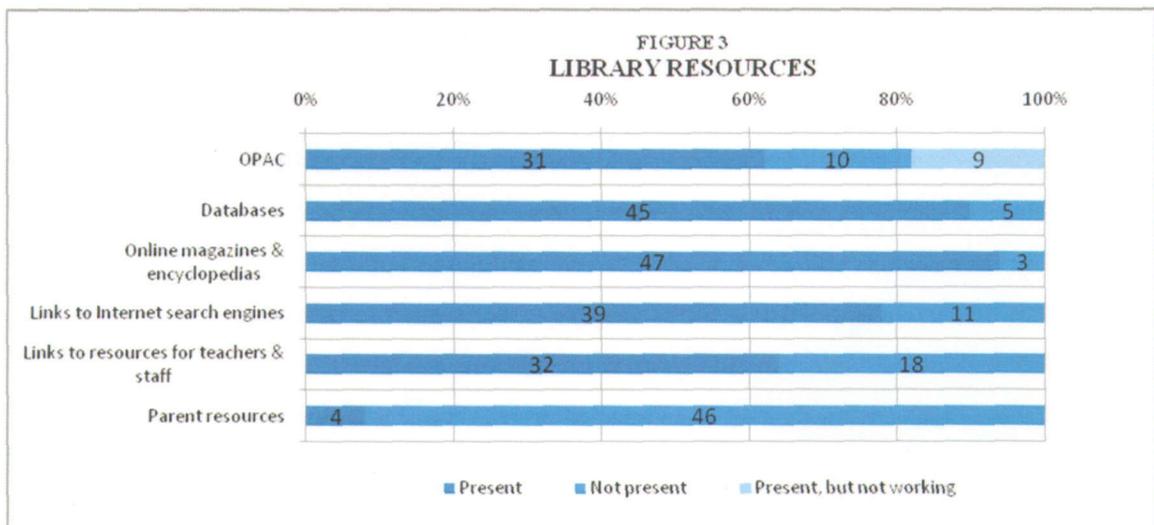
There were four variables grouped with School Information: (1) name of school, (2) link to school home page, (3) address of school and/or library, and (4) links to school activities, clubs, etc. Of the 50 high school media center Web pages accessed, 47 of them provided the name of the school and 39 included a link to the school's home page. Both numbers were significantly high, proving that the majority of high school media centers perceived the need for the name of the school and a link to the school's home page as important elements of their Web page. Approximately half the Web pages researched (28) included the address of the school and/or library and less than half (17) provided links to school activities, clubs, and other functions. These results indicated that half of the high school media centers identified the school/library's mailing address as necessary and less than half recognized the need to include additional links to factors within the school. Overall, all four variables in this section rated high in presence on the 50 Web pages accessed and thus, proved to be of high priority to high school media center Web pages.



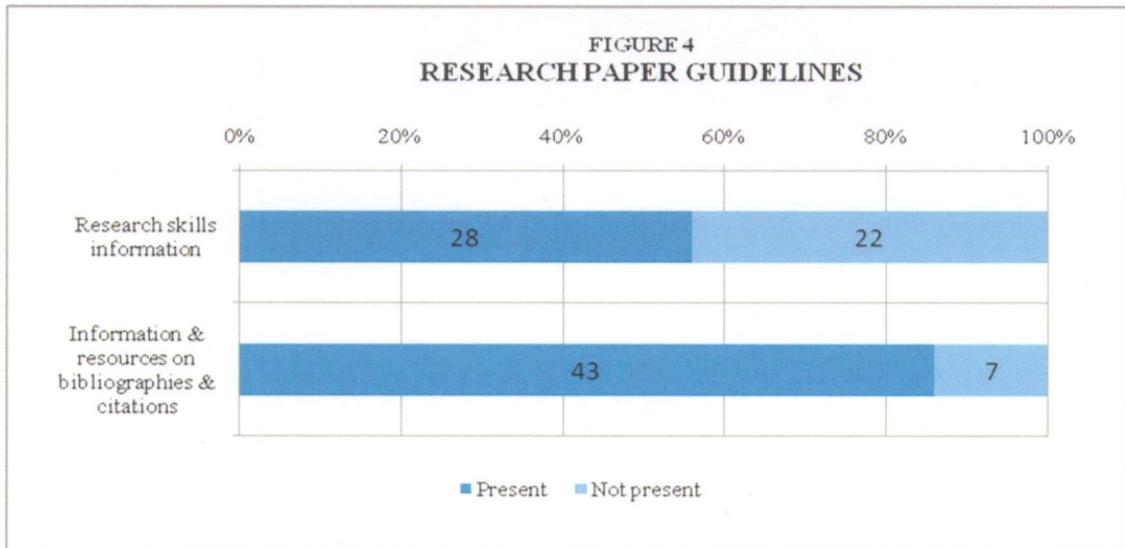
In the second section, Library Information, all variables were related to information in regards to the school's media center. These nine factors included: (1) name of library, (2) staff biography information, (3) information about library (operational), (4) email and/or phone contact information, (5) photograph of library, (6) news about the library and activities, (7) library rules, (8) library mission and goals, and (9) calendar and/or schedule. Out of the 50 Web pages researched, 46 of them included the name of the library, 44 had either an email or phone number available for contact purposes, and 38 reported operational information on the library (hours). These high numbers provided proof that basic library information was deemed necessary for school media center Web pages. Approximately half of the Web pages analyzed included a photograph of the library (22), library rules (24), as well as the mission and/or goals of the library (26). Finally, only a minimum number of the Web pages included staff biography information (11), news about the library and activities (13), and a calendar and/or schedule (5). This provided evidence that the majority of school media centers did not consider such aspects as staff personal information or library activities and calendars as necessities for their Web pages.



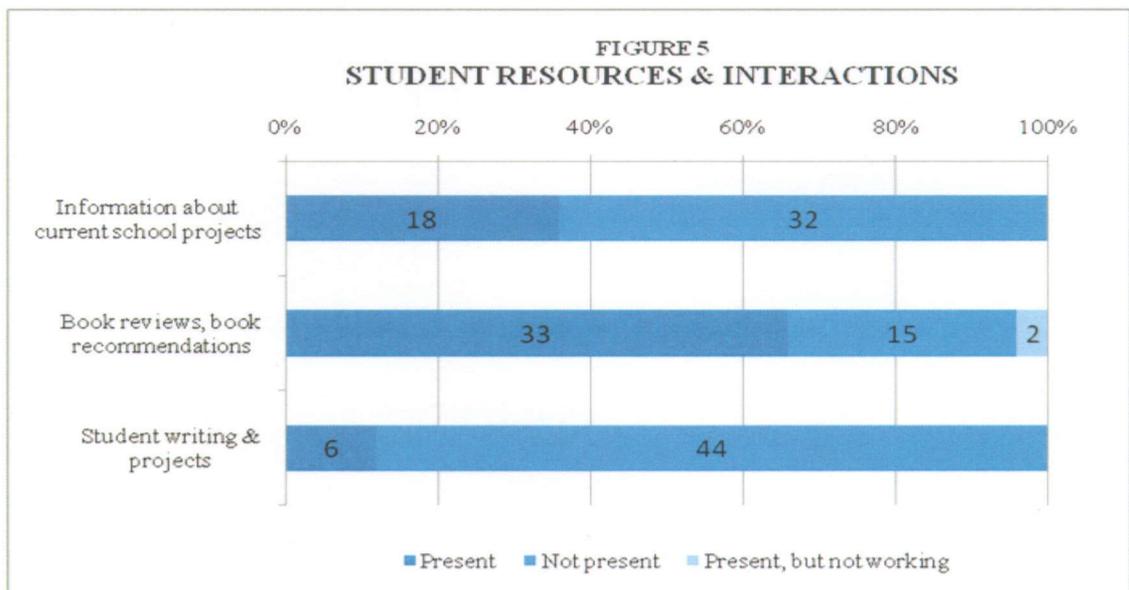
Library Resources was the third section analyzed for the 50 Web pages. The variables included under Resources were as follows: (1) OPAC, (2) databases, (3) online magazines and/or encyclopedias, (4) links to Internet search engines, (5) links to resources for teachers and/or staff, and (6) parent resources. Based on the research gathered, most Web pages included databases (45) and online magazines and/or encyclopedias (47). This proved that most high school media centers reasoned it essential to include these two resources. More than half of the 50 Web pages included OPAC (31), links to Internet search engines (39), and links to resources for teachers and/or staff (32). Again, this was evidence that such resources and tools were important to high school media center Web pages. In regards to the availability of the OPAC, although 31 Web pages provided the resource, there were an additional 9 sites that included it but the OPAC resource link was not operable. As for parent resources, only 4 Web pages of the 50 included this option, which provided an indication that most high school media centers did not judge this resource to be a necessary factor on their site.



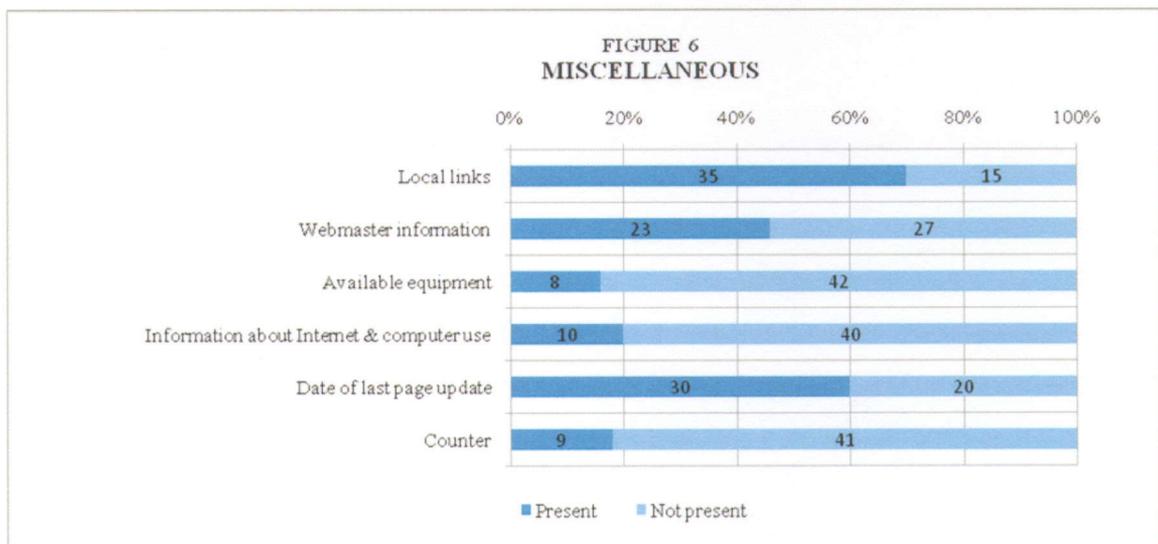
The next category, Research Paper Guidelines, only included 2 variables: (1) research skills information and (2) information and resources on bibliographies and/or citations. For both variables, over half of the 50 schools included related elements on their Web pages. While the majority of schools had information and resources on bibliographies and/or citations (43), a reduced number included research skills information (28). This proved that many high schools considered it important to include guidelines on research paper bibliographies and citations, but approximately half reasoned it necessary to include guidelines on research skills.



The category directed towards students, Student Resources and Interactions, included 3 variables: (1) information about current school projects, (2) book reviews, book recommendations, and (3) student writing and/or projects. Of the 50 Web pages researched, over half had information related to book reviews and recommendations (33). As for the other variables, less than half had information on school projects (18) while a significantly small number (6) had any information related to student writing and/or projects. These results indicated the lack of attention directed towards student work, both in progress as well as completed by high school media center's Web pages.



The final category, Miscellaneous, involved an assorted mix of variables, including the following: (1) local links, (2) Webmaster information, (3) available equipment, (4) information about Internet and/or computer use, (5) date of last page update, and (6) visitor counter. Over half the Web pages included local links (35) and date of last page update (30) and slightly less than half provided Webmaster information (23). Of the 50 Web pages analyzed, relatively low numbers included available equipment (8), information about Internet and/or computer use (10), and a visitor counter (9). This presented substantial evidence that high school media center Web pages did not deem it necessary to include such variables as counters, equipment availability, and Internet/computer use information. However, since approximately half the Web sites included local links, page update information, and Webmaster information, it can be determined that these variables are important factors for high school media center Web pages.



CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the research and analysis of the 50 Web pages provided an insight as to what the researcher considered essential for a high school media center's Web page. Due to the wide array of variables and their results, a three tiered scaled was generated to determine if the variable was considered (1) essential, (2) tentative, and (3) not essential. Table 2 details this scale along with the appropriately placed variable and the number of times it appeared during the research of the 50 Web pages.

TABLE 2 NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES FOR EACH VARIABLE		
Essential (34-50)	Tentative (17-33)	Not Essential (0-16)
Name of school (47)	Links to resources for teachers/staff (32)	News about library/activities (13)
Online magazines and encyclopedia (47)	Date of last page update (30)	Staff biography information (11)
Name of library (46)	Address of school/library (28)	Information about Internet/computer use (10)
Databases (45)	Research skills information (28)	Counter (9)
Email/phone contact information (44)	Library mission/goals (26)	Available equipment (8)
Information/resources on bibliographies/citations (43)	Library rules (24)	Student writing/projects (6)
OPAC (40*)	Webmaster information (23)	Calendar and/or schedule (5)
Links to Internet search engines (39)	Photograph of library (22)	Parent resources (4)
Link to school home page (39)	Information about current school projects (18)	
Information about library (operational) (38)	Links to school activities/clubs/etc. (17)	
Book review, book recommendations (35*)		
Local links (35)		
* includes Web pages with factors that existed yet were inoperable		

This three tiered scale provided a clear illustration of Web page variables considered essential to high school media centers. The name of the school and library should be staple elements on a media center Web page, as they provide identity to the site. Along with these features, a link to school home page should be available for users to easily navigate back to the school's main page. In addition, basic library information, including contact phone numbers and/or email and operational hours, should be available to users as well. As a high school, online magazines and/or encyclopedias, databases, OPAC, links to Internet search engines, and information/resources on bibliographies and/or citations should be readily available for student since all are critical elements of high school curriculum and assignments. Finally, the media center should promote book titles, authors, and topics through book reviews and support local causes through links for all users to utilize and enjoy on their Web page.

There were several variables that fell in the middle of the three tiered scale and were therefore considered tentative in regards to being essential or not on a Web page. While some variables may be considered essential and others not, the existence of many may be based on the individual media center and whether it finds a need for that variable on the Web page. For the most part, teacher and staff links should be provided on a school media center's Web page. These resources would assist teachers in the classroom as well as with professional development. The library's address, rules, and mission and goals should also be included on the Web page. These variables provide basic information to users and should not be over looked. Information about current school projects and research skills should also be provided on a high school media center's Web page. At the high school level, students are constantly writing research papers and

engaging in various projects and therefore need a reference point for information related to these and other assignments.

The three tiered scale also provided a list of variables considered not essential to high school library media center Web pages. According to this system, news about the library and its activities and a calendar or schedule should not be included on the Web page. These results may raise doubts and questions, as both variables could be considered essential to many library media centers in regards to functioning and operating. Other variables considered not essential, such as available equipment, visitor counter, and information about Internet/computer use should not be displayed on the Web page since they may no longer be considered necessary elements of media centers. Many classrooms are equipped with technology (TVs, DVDs, Smartboards, computers, etc) and requesting such equipment is no longer required. High school media center Web pages should also not include parent resources on their Web pages due to the age of students and their level of independence and responsibilities for school work. According to the three tiered scale, staff biographies are not considered essential and therefore should not be displayed on media center Web pages. Although contact information is necessary, personal information on the media specialist and additional staff members is not an important part of a high school Web page. Lastly, samples of student writing and projects should not be included on media center Web pages as they tend to be lengthy and detailed and therefore require vast space. Instead, these items should be physically displayed in the media center facility for full exposure and visibility to the school members.

Recommendations for Further Study

At the completion of the research and analysis of high school media center Web pages and their essential elements, there are recommendations for further study presented. First, it is recommended that media specialists be interviewed to determine why factors were or were not included on their Web pages. To perform this research, the same 50 high schools could be used to determine a more correlated analysis. These schools could be accessed through email to initiate a form of correspondence. Ideally, media specialists would be interviewed. However, in some cases, the actual Web pages may have been designed by a third party person (technology department, administration, teacher, etc.) and therefore, this person would be requested to perform the interview. This would only be the case if the school's media specialists had minimum input on the Web pages development and creation. The interview would include a series of questions related to the factors listed on the original checklist. Responses would be analyzed to determine the need for factors on Web pages according to the individual responsible for the site.

Another recommendation for further study would be to form focus groups to analyze the various elements that are presented throughout the 50 Web pages. These focus groups would include high school media specialist not affiliated to the schools researched. These groups could discuss the need for the different factors located on the 50 Web pages. As a group, a comprehensive list of factors could be determined as essential for high school media center Web pages. In addition to this list, another list could be created as not necessarily essential, yet optional for individual Web pages. High school media specialists would greatly benefit from such lists as they would serve as

guidelines for the creation and maintenance of Web pages. These lists would have to be constantly updated as new technologies, trends, and other factors affecting elements are introduced on a frequent basis. Ultimately, the lists will provide a form of unity for all high school media center Web pages.

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