

Closing the Digital Divide

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ENG I - Honors

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Outline

Thesis statement: Government and business must ensure that libraries and schools have the hardware, connections, and training capabilities for computer technology to make Americans more rather than less equal.

- I. The digital divide is wide.
 - A. Poor people have much less access to computer technology than middle-class and affluent people do.
 - B. People who aren't online are at risk for missing important information.
- II. Public libraries can provide Internet access to those who do not own computers, but they face several challenges.
 - A. Some individuals attempt to abuse public Internet privileges.
 - B. Risky Internet use can lead to expensive repair costs and loss of private information.

Note to students on document format: When you finish typing the word “challenges” at the end of numeral II, press your enter key. The numeral III will appear. To begin typing at numeral A, click the increase indent button on your formatting menu bar in Word 2003 or the increase indent button in the “Paragraph” group in the “Home” tab of MS Word 2007. To move to the next page (which is the first page of your paper), use your scroll bar to move to the next page. Notice that page begins page numbering on page 1 of the body of your paper. Be sure that you are in the Print Layout view so that you can see the header of your document. Double click the header to change the last name “Stewdent” to your last name on both the outline and the first page of your paper since this document has been set up with a different first page for the outline page and a different first page for the body of your paper.

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From wireless connections in coffee shops to advertisements for all kinds of wireless devices, we see evidence nearly everywhere that our society is online. It's easy to assume that everyone who wants to be online is indeed online and that those who aren't simply don't want to be. But this assumption is misguided. The digital divide in the United States—the gap between those who have access to the Internet and those who don't—reflects a similar gap between rich and poor.

Unfortunately, providing Internet access to individuals who may be in dire need of such services sometimes causes more problems than it solves. First, libraries must contend with the cost factor of both the machines used to access the Internet as well as the network infrastructure that allows such access. The cost of single user machines can often be in the range of hundreds to thousands of dollars—costs that clearly warrant intense monitoring of those who use them to access the Internet. According to Jay Smith of the National Association of Libraries, sometimes the good intentions that libraries have to provide access to the Internet for the poor and underprivileged must be off-set with the reality that the very people who would benefit most from having such services are the very same people who could inadvertently or intentionally do the most harm to the machines that provide their contact points (Nambino 97). Smith's observation, however, fails to weigh the risks of not providing services to these same people. Although it is difficult to place a dollar amount on the value that Internet access provides, it is

important to see that economic benefits abound for those who cannot afford to maintain machines and network infrastructure at an individual level. Rick Gaguin of the Center for Social Justice Research Organization suggests that the economic value of providing such service to the poor and underprivileged contributes vast amounts of economic capital flow by putting people in these underserved groups within reach of the tools and resources they need to improve their own socio-economic standing in the world (Gaguin 42). He writes that "...the economic forces driving our citizens can and should be unleashed on the world with the power of the Internet" (44). His choice of the term "unleashed" suggests that he understands the potential impact that providing Internet connectivity can have on the underprivileged and the underserved. And he's right.

Works Cited

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