

# Assessing information literacy instruction in the virtual sphere

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## Introduction

**Research question:** How do relational cues such as greetings, introductions, softeners, and courtesies in IM chat openings influence engaged learning?

**Why it matters:** Awareness of how opening bids shape IM chat interactions empowers librarians to seize the teachable moment.

**Theory:** Relational cues frame opening bids as conversation and establish mutual roles of participants.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

## Data & method

- Transcripts ( $n=411$ ) from one week of IM chat reference at two academic libraries (figure 1)

### 1. Institutional comparison

#### Purple U.

( $n=241$ )  
Larger  
(FTE=21,500)  
Private  
(In-state tuition & fees \$30K)

- Urban
- Multicampus
- IM staffed all hours
- IM comprises 1/4 of all reference
- Library spending per student ~\$500
- ~2 librarians per 1,000 students

#### Green U.

( $n=170$ )  
Smaller  
(FTE=8,200)  
Public  
(In-state tuition & fees \$8k)

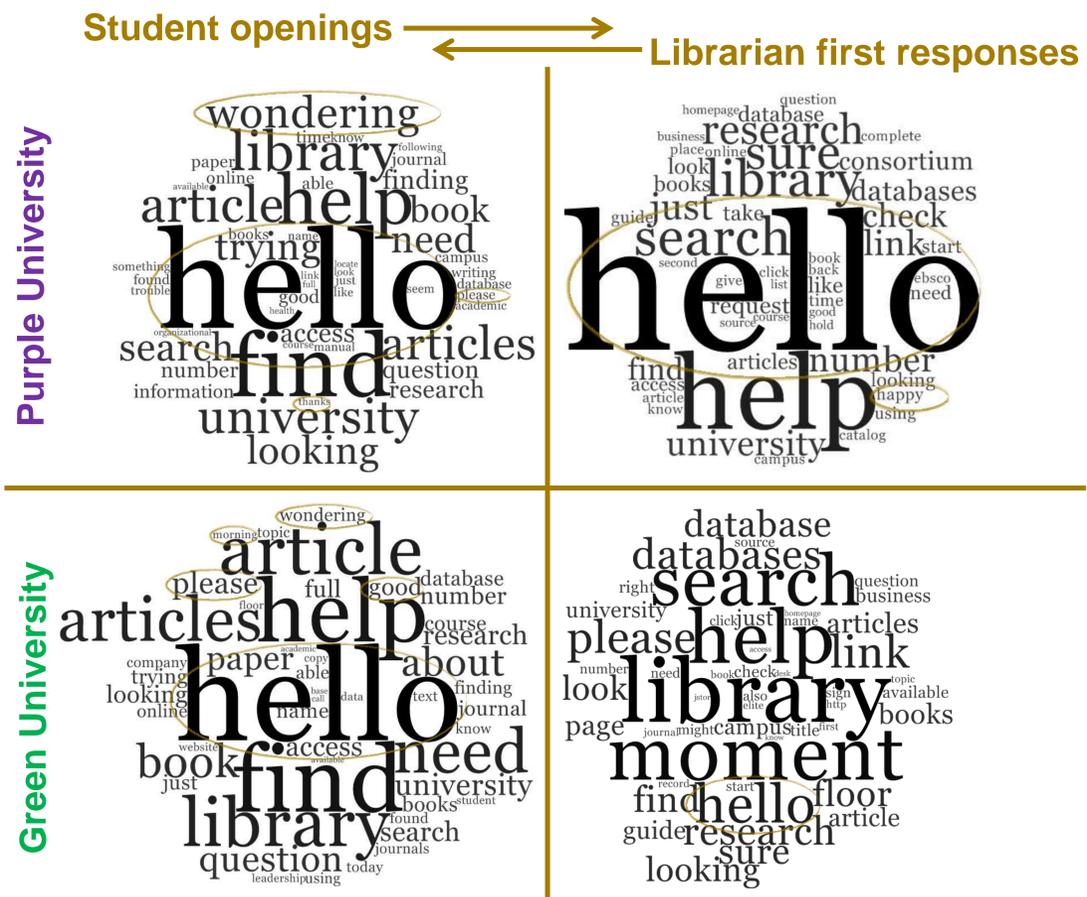
- Detailed, turn-by-turn qualitative analysis with NVivo software
- Coded students' opening bids and librarians' first responses for relational cues
- Ranked top 50 words longer than 4 characters (figure 2)
- Calculated duration from time stamps (figure 3)
- Assessed librarians' efforts to engage students in learning (instruction) or to provide information (service) (figure 4)

## References

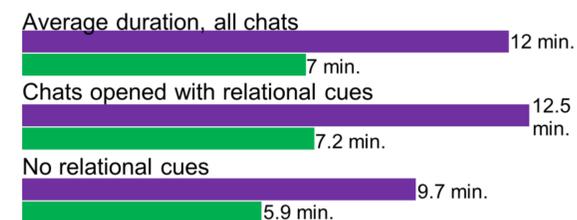
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## Results

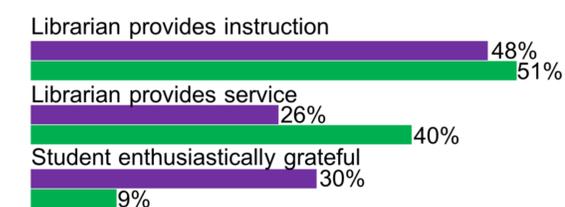
### 2. Word frequency of opening exchanges showing relational cues



### 3. Chat duration comparison



### 4. Percentage of chats in which ...



## Discussion

- Librarians at Purple U. return more greetings (89% vs. 24% at Green U.) (figure 2).
- Chats are longer on average (29% at Purple U., 22% at Green U.) when students enter the conversation with relational cues (figure 3).
- Relational cues correlate with longer chats, more instruction, less direct service, and more enthusiastic gratitude (figure 4).

## Conclusions & next steps

- Students who open without relational cues display an instrumental understanding of the interaction.
- Librarians should recognize abrupt openings as an opportunity to clarify mutual goals.
- Librarians need strategies – and time to focus – to re-frame instrumental openings as collaborative learning.
- Turn-by-turn analysis of these data will show:
- How librarians respond to student bids for instruction, service, and ambiguous bids.
  - How their responses enact their professional identities as teachers or as service providers.

## Further information

For data samples, coding definitions, and relevant literature, please see:  
<http://researchguides.uic.edu/dempseyLAC>

## Acknowledgments

Gratitude to Shannon Asaria, David Green, Tina Griffin, Bernard McMahon, Ryan Rafferty, Pam Sessoms, Mihail Tsvetkov, Lisa Wallis, Anna Wolf, and Simon Zuberek for their kind assistance



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