So What Do They Ask? Analyzing Content of Digital Reference Transactions
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INTRODUCTION
- 1,758 questions asked by campus affiliates in Winter 2011 via UCSD Library’s digital reference services were reviewed to determine the topic or content of each inquiry.

GOALS:
- Determine the most frequent topics of user inquiry via chat, text, and email reference services.
- Determine number of non-library questions asked.

PROJECT SCOPE
- Included chat, text, & email questions received via QuestionPoint, January through March 2011.
- Focused on content of questions asked, excluding other assessment elements like volume, response time, accuracy, user satisfaction or demographics, timing of questions across day/week/term/year, etc.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS
- Expand alumni privileges web page, stating that online journal/database access isn’t afforded.
- Add detail (definition, cost, eligibility, turnaround time, etc.) to ILL & requesting book/article web pages for frequent referrals there.
- Give accurate, discoverable information online for visiting researcher use of Special Collections.
- Increase awareness of mobile website as an easy way to find hours, locations, and the like.
- Ensure that hours, locations, study spaces, & other basic information is easy to find on mobile & traditional websites.
- Consider staffing text service with non-librarians because of typical simplicity of those questions.
- Alert users to a variety of general purpose databases to reduce reliance on a single database like JStor.

TOP 5 QUESTION CATEGORIES FOR EACH INQUIRY METHOD

SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS OF EACH METHOD

USES FOR THE ANALYSIS
- Share findings with all library staff, so reserves, interlibrary loan, circulation, reference, instruction, and others benefit from the insight.
- Write or update canned responses or scripts to be used.
- Develop new or enhance existing web page & publication content to address common questions.
- Address frequent questions in staff training & user instruction.
- Adjust staffing types & levels based upon complexity of questions typically asked.
- Promote resources & services about which user’s seem unaware.
- Work with consortial chat service partners to improve their ability to address UCSD-specific questions.

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