

# Virtually Linked: Librarians, Chat Reference, Communities & Engaged Scholarship

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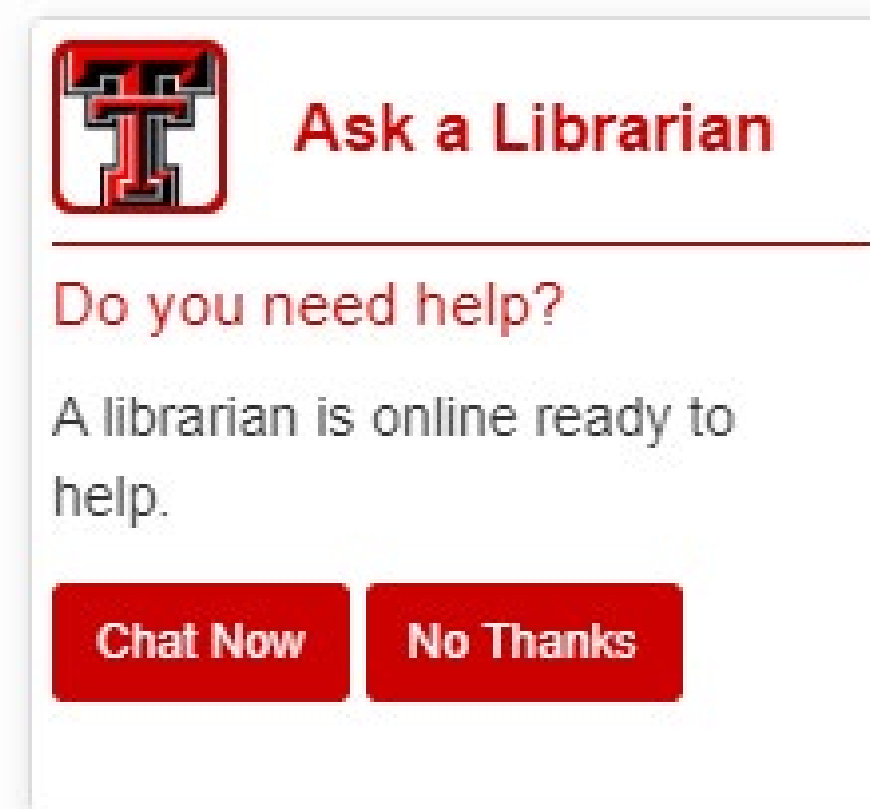
## Librarians

Librarians are **bridge builders** and **connectors** in the academic communities they serve, which is an essential ingredient of engaged scholarship. Library services have long served as a catalyst for the promotion of collaborative and interdisciplinary scholarship.

In the digital age, this assertion is no less true. **Virtual reference** (VR) in the form of **chat** or **Ask-a-Librarian** services provide ample opportunities for librarians to initiate relationships with outside communities in mutually beneficial **engaged scholarship** as patrons interact with these services.

Such opportunities come only as those responsible for libraries' chat reference are well-trained and equipped to recognize and capitalize on **seminal reference interactions** with outside organizations.

## Chat Reference



What is VR? Virtual Reference is an interaction with a librarian usually initiated by a patron, member, or student for an information need. Libraries have names for it vary:

Ask!  
Ask Us!  
Ask-a-Librarian

## Methodology

The first part of this study, conducted between Autumn 2017 and Spring 2018, surveyed 133 libraries that are members of the **Big 12 Conference** and the **Association of Research Libraries (ARL)**. It specifically looked at **13 characteristics** of communicated chat service at each of the respective institutions. The authors identified the following qualities through the Reference and User Services Association's (RUSA) Guidelines for Implementing and Maintaining Virtual Reference Services (2017) and the policies, procedures, and best practices of a well-known virtual reference cooperative or consortia, QuestionPoint (n.d.).

Survey Question asked:

Are you able to direct me to a page on your site, if available, about your chat policies or services?

### Service

- No Stated Policies
- Service Hours
- Scope of Service
- Response Time

### Privacy

- Privacy Statements
- Transcripts emailed
- Transcripts deleted
- Transcripts retained
- Patriot Act Disclaimer

### Expectations

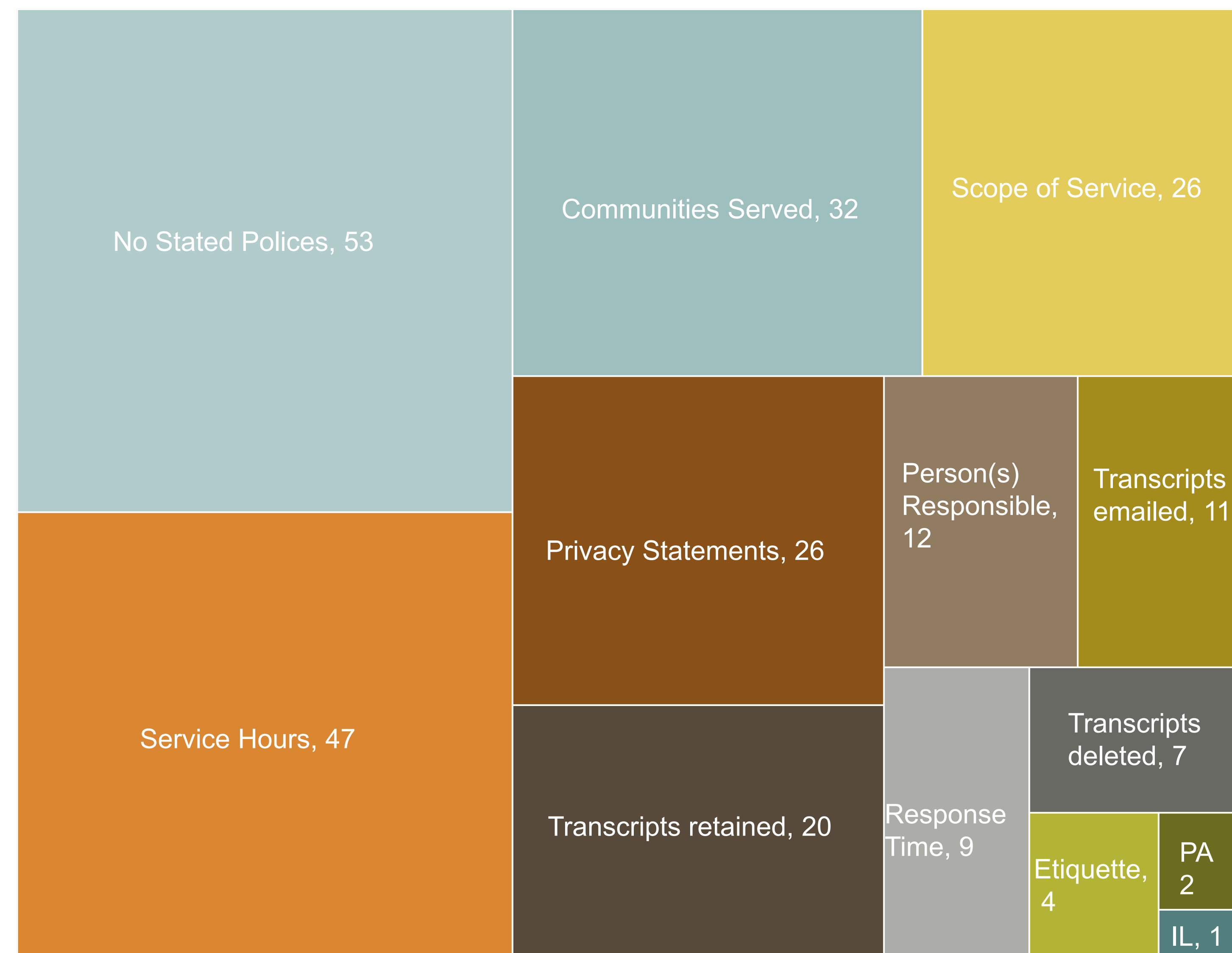
- Communities Served
- Person(s) Responsible
- Etiquette
- Information Literacy Commitment

We first scanned libraries' websites to locate their virtual reference service page or widget.

If no discernable policies in the above categories were noted or decoded either through direct text or through a link on the page or near the widget, we then turned to general policies pages.

If no policies specifically related to the thirteen characteristics listed above were observed, we then connected to libraries' virtual reference services through chat or email to request information on communicated chat policies via their website, research guides, or chat widget.

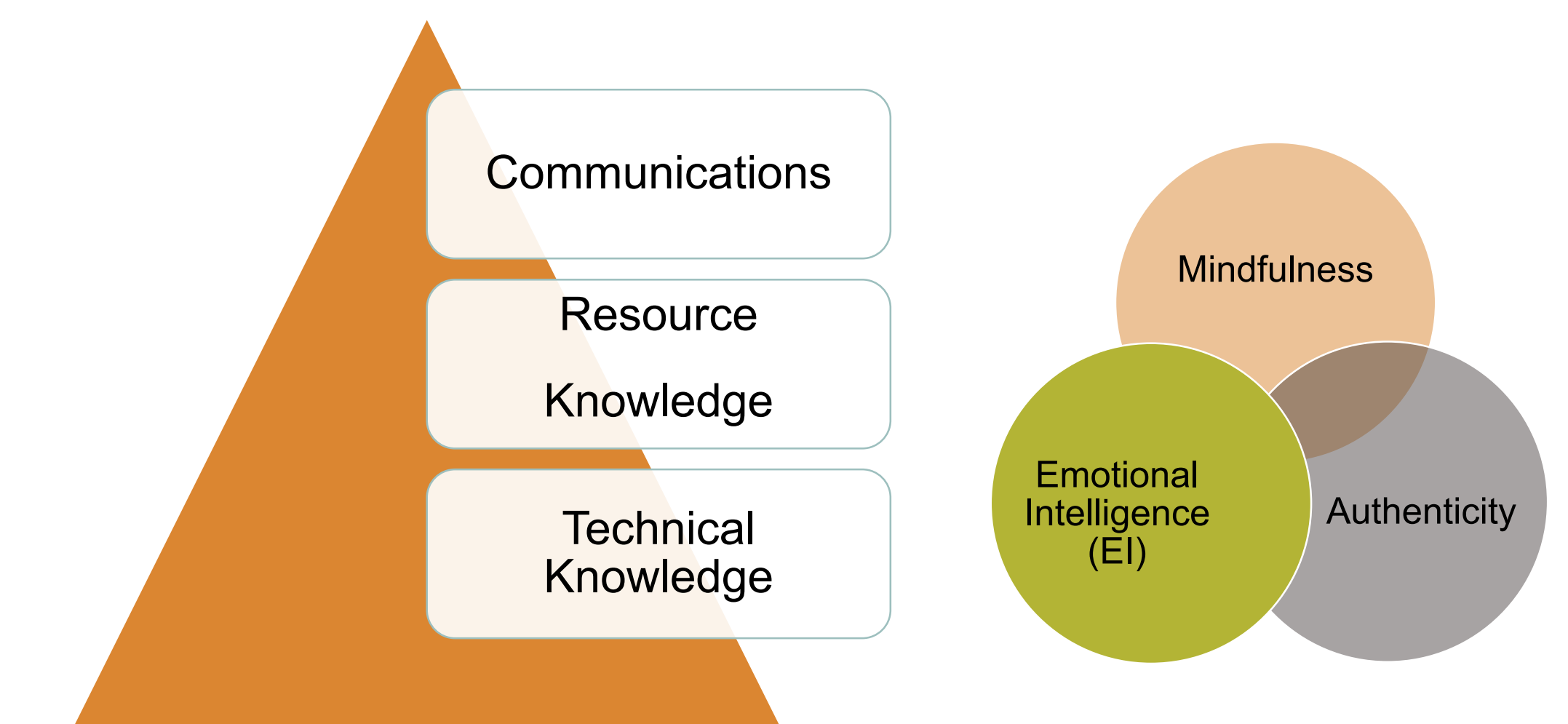
## Results



ARL Communicated Policies, (n=124)

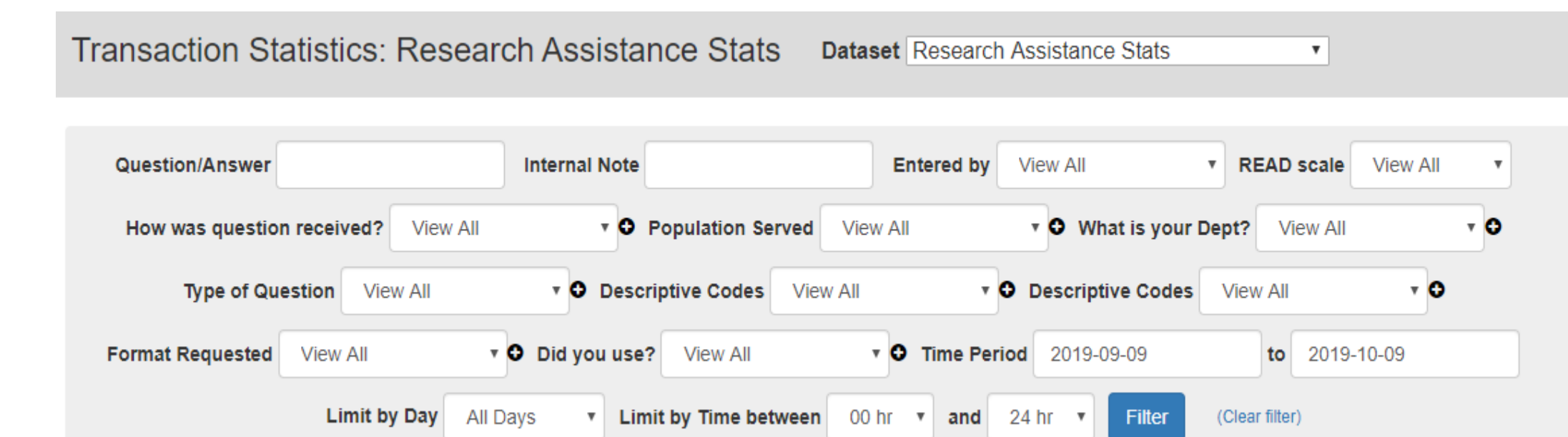
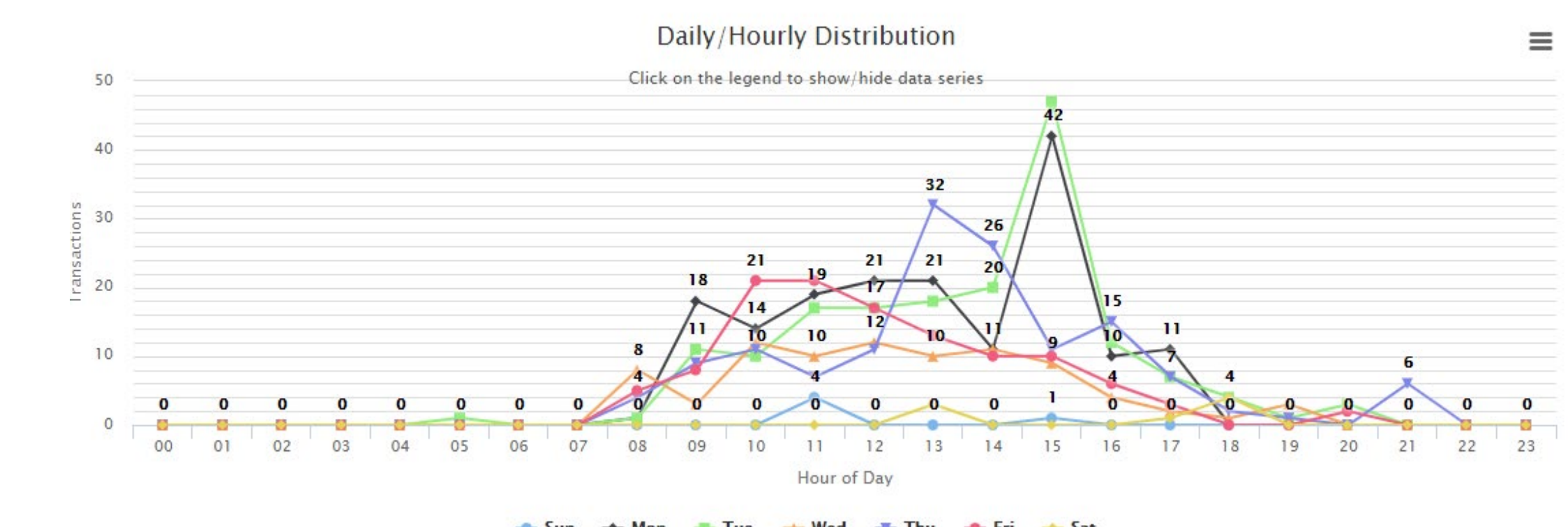
## Community & Engagement

Resnick (2009) noted that librarians engaging community and students are in an ever-increasing complex environment and need to have certain competencies to capitalize on initial contacts: Communications, Resource Knowledge, and Technical Knowledge. Prieto (2017) extended Resnick's first category of Communication from a huminitic perspective to draw more inter-personal skills: Mindfulness, Authenticity, and Emotional Intelligence.



## Measuring Impact

What chat software allows librarians to effectively do is tell a story about the broader impacts as users continue to interact with librarians and other departments. SpringShare is one such product that captures that story through transcripts, the Reference Effort Assessment Data (READ) scale (Gerlich, 2010), and other data analytical tools.



## References

Gerlich, B. (2010). Testing the Viability of the READ Scale: Qualitative Statistics for Academic Reference Services.

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Contact

Big 12 Communicated Policies (n=9)

