

CougarBot— Our Students' 24/7 Virtual Assistant

This Fall, CSUSM is piloting CougarBot, a chatbot (virtual assistant) that enables students to *ask questions and receive pre-approved responses 24/7*. Students can ask CougarBot simply by texting a question on their phones. They then receive a response in a conversational, friendly tone. CougarBot can also deliver personalized messages to students with important reminders or information to help them learn "how to college" successfully.

The pilot is led by a collaboration between OUGS and IITS and is cross-divisionally supported. Currently, CougarBot is available to incoming first-year and transfer students. Students can easily opt out of the service.



Why a Chatbot?

Chatbots like CougarBot have been proven to be a highly effective communication tool for college students because they deliver personalized, engaging communications through a familiar medium, text messaging.

Additionally, chatbots are by design student-centered and promote student agency.

How Does CougarBot Work?

1. A student text-messages a question to CougarBot using their phone (no app, download, or sign-in needed).
2. CougarBot uses artificial intelligence (AI) to interpret the question and locate the best response from a list of pre-approved responses.
3. CougarBot delivers the response to the student in fewer than 1-2 seconds.

How Did CougarBot Begin?

CSUSM and 6 other CSUs (Northridge, Channel Islands, East Bay, Humboldt, Pomona, Sonoma) formed a consortium and received an Irvine Foundation Grant to pilot a chatbot with the goal of removing barriers and improving students' outcomes.

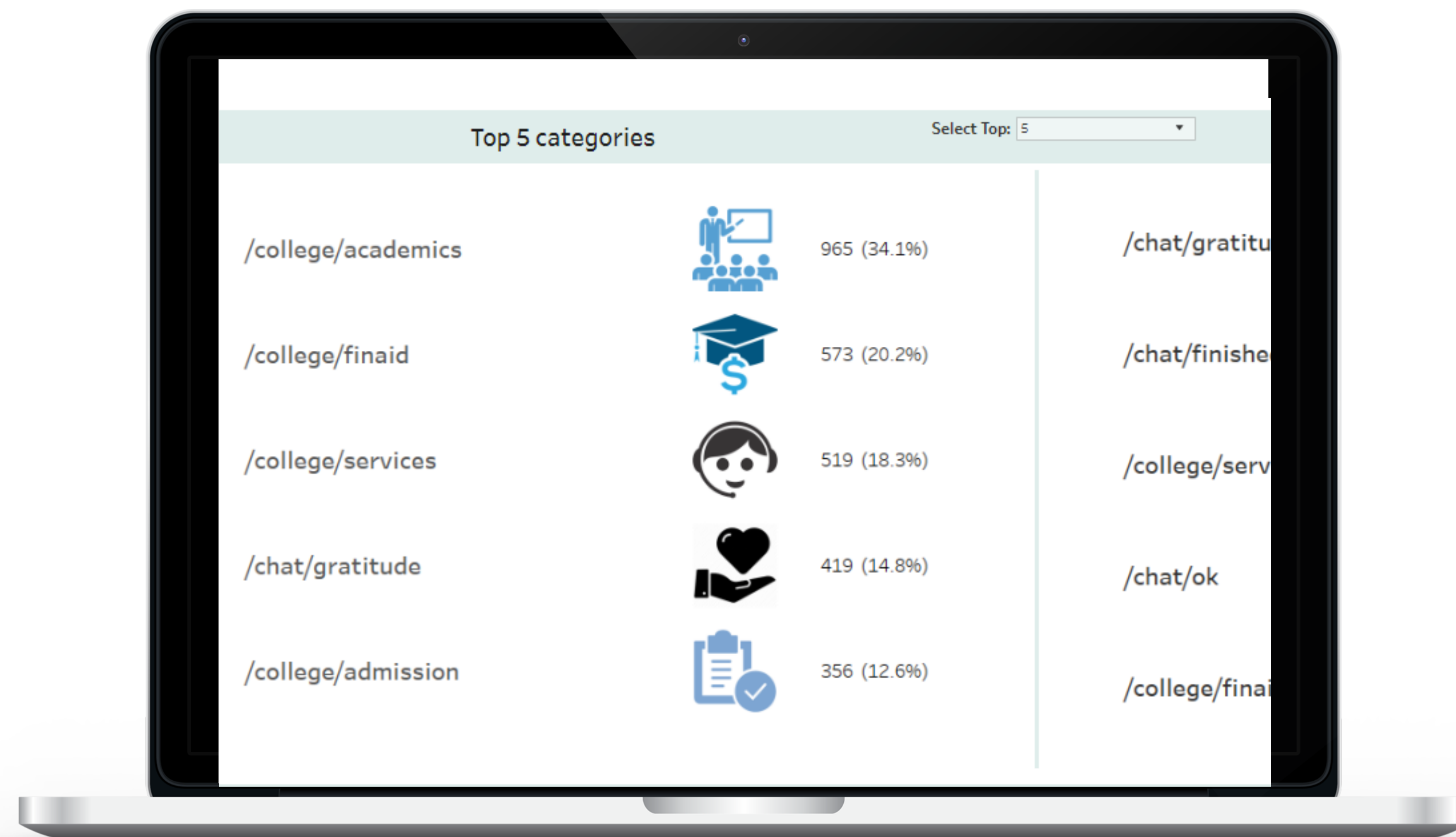
AdmitHub, the company we are partnering with, is currently serving over 1 million college students across the country.

CougarBot & CSUSM in a Snapshot

CougarBot has been a very useful student tool since launching on June 12, 2019. It has received *over 6700 questions* and has successfully responded to *over 75%* of those questions without any staff assistance. Additionally, we have used CougarBot to message our students about important deadlines, opportunities, as well as to simply make them feel welcome and included.

Student responses have consistently been positive and warm, with many expressing gratitude for the quick and accurate responses. *Fewer than 3%* of the included students have opted out of using CougarBot, a testament to the tool's perceived usefulness.

We have also built a data dashboard that allows us to see student questions in near real-time, broken down by categories. This dashboard has allowed us to see trends develop and will allow us to better coordinate student support in the future.



CougarBot Usage Dashboard

✓ Offering a Friendly Virtual Voice

Our students have been communicating with CougarBot in a friendly, personable manner, often expressing gratitude to the bot for supporting them and opening up about their challenges. We aim to continue offering a friendly, supportive campus voice through CougarBot.

✓ Providing Reminders and Resources

With CougarBot, we are developing timely communication campaigns that provide students with important resources about and reminders on topics such as advising, financial aid, health & wellness, student life, and more.

✓ Identifying Academic Struggles

We aim to better identify when our students encounter specific academic challenges and provide that information to departments and colleges.

✓ Building Academic Interventions

With CougarBot, we plan to develop campaigns that send messages to specific student populations with the goal of providing appropriate academic support.