Implementation of Primo Research Assistant at University of Manitoba Libraries

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Presentation Overview

- Background & Purpose

- Working Group Structure & Methodology

- Key Findings

- Implementation Strategy

- Technical Integration Details

- Q&A

Why This Matters

- Rapid integration of AI into library systems

- Growing interest in responsible implementation

- Importance of critically evaluating new features before adoption

- Assess usability, user alignment, and potential risks

Primo Research Assistant Reviewing Working Group

Objectives

- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the AI Research Assistant feature, including:

  - Usability

  - Accuracy and reliability of responses

  - Alignment with the library's user needs and expectations

  - Integration with existing library resources and platforms

- Identify potential risks or concerns associated with implementation, including ethical considerations.

- Compile a final report summarizing findings and making recommendations.
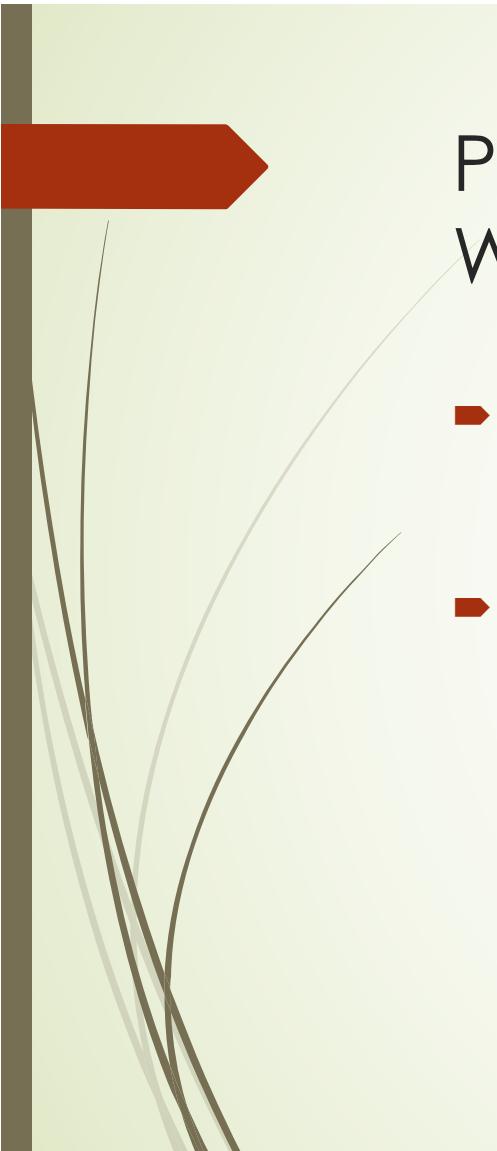
Primo Research Assistant Reviewing Working Group

- Members: Staff and Librarians from Systems, User Services, Instruction, Resource Management, and Digital Strategies

- Timeline: Oct–Dec 2024

  o October: Initial assessment and orientation with the Primo AI Research Assistant.

  o November: Conducting a deeper evaluation of the tool.

  o December: Final evaluation, drafting, and submission of the report.
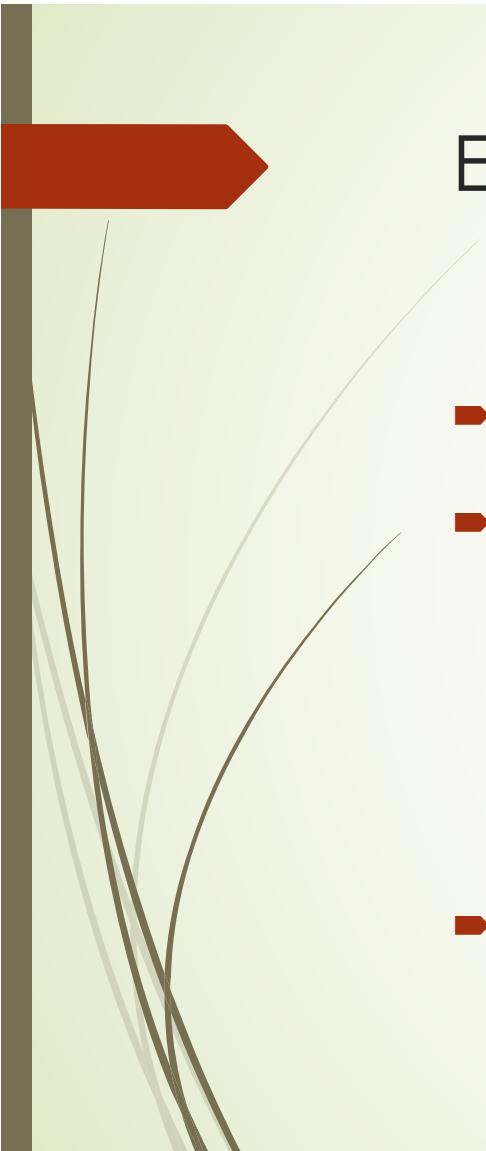
Evaluation Methodology

- Each member asked at least 5 questions

- Focus areas:

  o General academic questions

  o Local content

  o Ambiguous or broad prompts

- Reviewed AI answers for accuracy and relevance

Key Strengths

- Strong performance on focused, well-scoped questions

- Helpful as a research starting point

- Search string generation feature

- Free and easy to enable
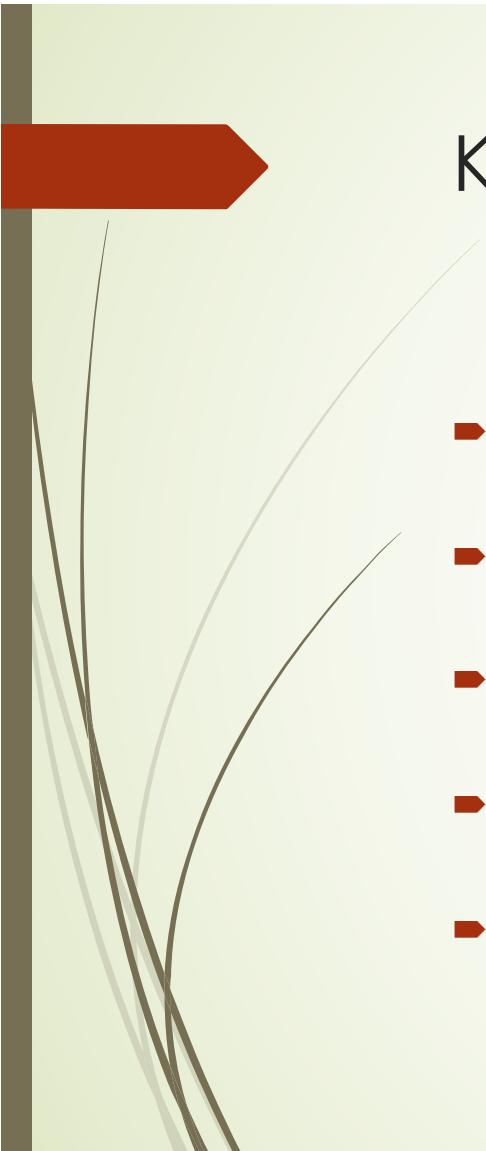
Key Limitations

- Could not limit to recent/local content

- Struggled with homonyms and ambiguous phrasing

- Responses were sometimes confidently wrong or incomplete

- Requires user judgment to verify information

- Not a substitute for subject expertise

Sample Interactions

- Example 1: Strong response to a clear question

  Question: What is the origin of the lieder in music?

  Response Summary: The Assistant provided a well-structured, historically accurate summary tracing the 19th-century German origins of lieder, naming major composers like Schubert and Brahms, and citing relevant academic sources.

  Why It Worked: The topic is well-covered in existing literature, and the AI was able to access sufficient authoritative sources.

Sample Interactions

- Example 2: Weak Answer to a Local Topic

  Question: What is the impact of Manitoba Hydro's Churchill River Diversion Project on Indigenous communities?

  Response Summary: The Assistant drew primarily from a single eBook from 2002 and gave a broad overview of impacts like ecological disruption and displacement. However, it missed key print materials and more recent scholarship.

  Evaluator Comment: "This is a subject we have a lot of print resources on. The resulting answer is fine, but not extensive. This may be a weak spot: information that is in specific local print publications, not digital ones."

Sample Interactions

- Example 2: Broad Question Triggering Off-Topic Drift

    Question: What is historically informed practice?

    Response Summary: The Assistant correctly defined the musical concept but soon diverged into unrelated topics, including philosophical critiques and implications for music librarians, which were not relevant to the original intent of the query.

    Evaluator Comment: "By the third paragraph, the response moves on to discuss how the topic affects music librarians, which is not relevant to the question. Even the first paragraph uses language like 'the philosophy of music,' which must have been pulled from a source, but is not natural language for the profession."
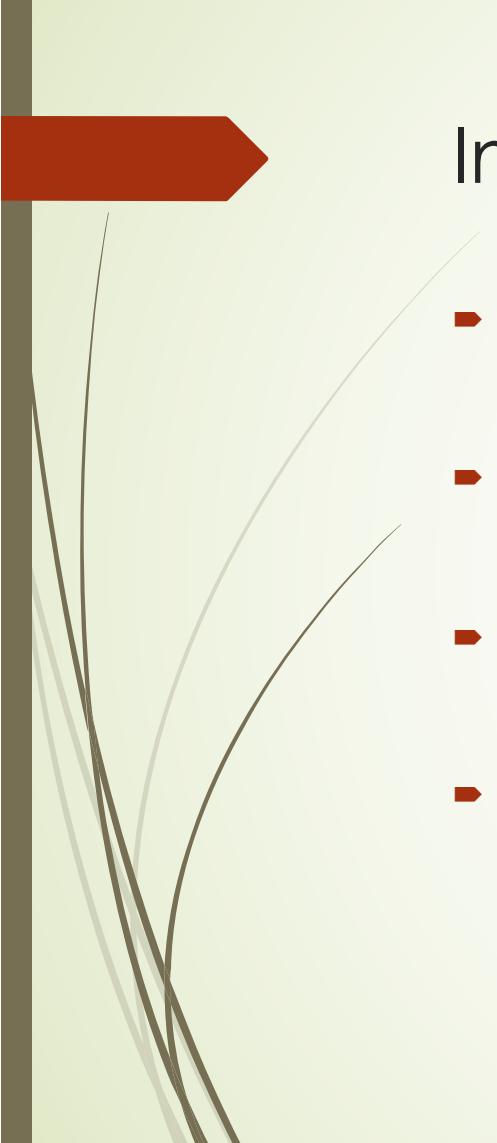
Implementation Recommendations

- Tool Positioning
  - Start-of-research, not final answer; Emphasize AI-generated nature
- Training
  - For staff: how to use and explain it
- User Education
  - Promoting critical use, academic integrity
- Outreach
  - Communications on website and campus channels; Links to subject librarians and guides
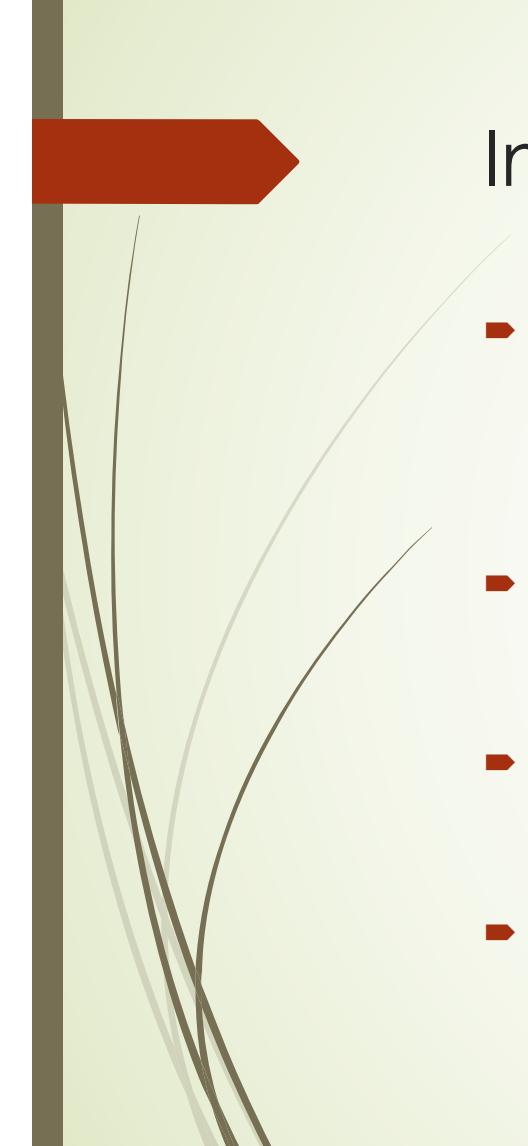
Implementation Approach

- A Communications Team was formed, including:
  - Learning and Instruction Coordinator, Subject Librarian, Communications Specialist, Associate University Librarian
- Team tasked with implementing recommendations from the Review Working Group
- Naming this feature:
  - AI Research Assistant
- Developed detailed communication and training plan tailored to diverse audiences

Institutional Consultation and Launch

- Consulted the Provost's Office, which recommended:

    o Educational framing of the introductory webpage

    o Clear messaging that the tool is available but not endorsed over other methods

    o Note on instructor-specific rules about AI use (checkbox suggested)

    o Include reference to university-wide AI workflow

- Officially launched in April 2025

- Launch article: UM News
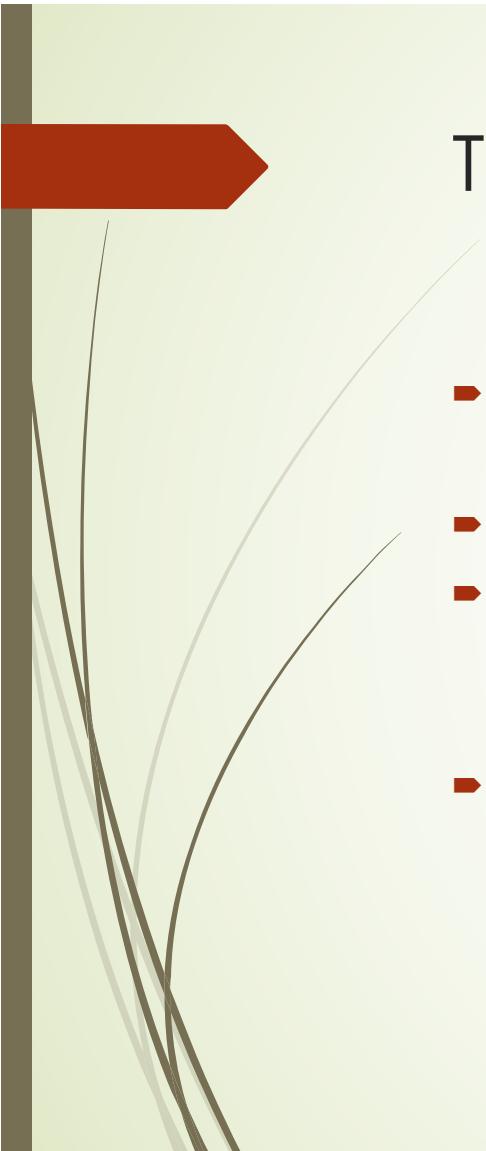
Technical Integration

- Discovery Platform: Primo VE
  - URL: search.lib.umanitoba.ca
- UI Placement: First item in the top menu
- Custom JS Redirect:
  - Original link replaced using JavaScript
  - New destination: umanitoba.ca/libraries/ai-research-assistant
- Purpose of Redirect:
  - Directs users to a dedicated information page
  - Users review purpose, limitations, and responsible use guidelines before accessing the tool

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Questions?