According to the literature, asynchronous large- and small-group interaction are key to effective online learning environments. Despite the widespread emphasis on the quality of online interaction, the authors argue that we must also attend to the quantity of interaction, as evidenced in 450 RIT online courses that included 1500 students.

Students were queried about their interaction with the other students and the instructor, the learning that they felt that occurred both from the instructor and from other students, and the overall satisfaction with the course.

When analyzing responses, student demographics were separated into hearing, deaf, hard of hearing and English as a Second language (ESL). Courses were grouped into four quartiles Q1 to Q4, representing how frequently students interacted online in a particular class. The classes with higher frequency of interactions were classified as "heavy hitters".

One significant discovery was the value of the frequency of online discussions within a course. Data indicates frequent online discussions help level the playing field among deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing and ESL students regardless of race and gender, and heavy hitter classes had increased student satisfaction, especially among the deaf and hard-of-hearing students.