

University Data Policies and Library Data Services: Who Owns Your Data?

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Research Data Access and Preservation

EDITOR'S SUMMARY

A review of research data and library data services presented on the websites of 206 top research universities as of July 2014 provided insights into policies and practices. Limited to publicly accessible information, the review indicated about half of the surveyed libraries offer some type of data services beyond a resource guide, about four in 10 had a librarian fully or partly dedicated to data management support and about one in 10 had a dedicated data repository. Institutions are likely to have a specific data policy if they are more involved in research and have higher research spending, have larger faculties and offer data services or a data librarian. Significant concern about data ownership and other legal issues is apparent. There is need for broad further development of policies, best practices and education about library data services, with librarians as the appropriate leaders.

KEYWORDS

library policy	data curation
library technical services	digital repositories
academic libraries	legal aspects
research libraries	intellectual ownership

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What is the landscape of policies covering research data and library data services at major U.S. research universities? This lightning talk discussed that question by reviewing the prevalence of university policies on data management topics such as stewardship, ownership, retention and sharing, and the existence of data services from the university library. Our research reviews the websites of 206 institutions with a Carnegie Classification on Institutions of Higher Education for research level of either “High” or “Very High” (as of July 2014). In addition to examining library data services and university data policies, we examine the content of the policies themselves. What is included in the policy? Who hosts the policy (for example, office of research, information technology, libraries)? What happens to the ownership and management of the data when a researcher leaves the institution? Are universities with data management services provided by the library more likely to have a policy on data management? At RDAP 2015, we presented our environmental scan of current library data services in the context of institutional policies and summarized the findings for future research in policy and service development.

The complete report of our research into these subjects will be available Summer 2015 in an article in the *Journal for Scholarly Communication and Librarianship*.

Who Owns Your Data?

This is the question we asked each other just over a year ago when we met for another symposium on research data management. It is a big question. While it may be somewhat clear for funded research, it is often not clear for unfunded research and pilot projects. Other questions then pop up, usually around policy:

- What happens if a researcher leaves the institution?
- What if someone needs access to my data?
- How long do I have to keep them and how should I discard them?
- How do I set policy for my team, my lab or myself?
- But I'm collaborating: whose policy wins?
- What if there isn't a policy?
- What help can I get?

There are many more questions, and so we sought to find answers, both for our own sanity and to help support our organizations. We determined that we wanted to understand the current landscape of university data policies as well as what library data services were available to support these policies.

A Look at Research Institutions

We decided to look deeper at universities classified by Carnegie as high and very high. Other metrics for these institutions are ARL membership, research expenditure, faculty size, student population and public/private status. We looked at all publicly accessible university data policies including but not limited to intellectual property (IP), technology transfer, copyright, information technology and other governance policies. We only analyzed policies that specifically covered research data. This analysis was a huge undertaking, and we faced uncertainty about the complete number or breadth of policies because some institutions have their policies behind an institutional log in.

Library Data Services

We also wanted to know what data services were provided by the libraries at these institutions. We again looked only for publicly accessible information, usually through the library websites. Occasionally, we found some library data services in other areas such as the office of research or information technology. We looked for services such as a data repository, data librarian and specific data services such as data management plan (DMP) consultations. This was also challenging since some institutions post on library websites, while others utilize content management systems such as LibGuides.

Currently, about 50% of the libraries surveyed offer some form of data services that go beyond simply providing links to external resources via a resource guide. Nearly 40% of the libraries have a librarian either entirely dedicated to research data management initiatives or someone for whom it is a major portion of the job description. Unsurprisingly, the latter are frequently science librarian positions. Roughly 10% have a dedicated data repository, though this number may be inflated due to consortial arrangements such as the Merritt repository, which services all of the University of California.

Data Policy Landscape

In terms of the landscape of institutional data policies, our findings are not surprising, but the process did open our eyes to the challenges that researchers, librarians and institutions face when trying to meet funder or journal requirements on public access. This is further complicated as researchers are attempting to navigate policies that many do not know exist, have not read or may not exist at all for their institution.

There were a few correlations we found in this process [1]:

- Universities that perform more research, as measured by these characteristics, offer more data services:
 - Higher Carnegie Classification
 - ARL membership
 - Higher research expenditure
 - Larger faculty size
- Universities with more research, as measured by these characteristics, are more likely to have a stand-alone data policy:
 - Higher Carnegie Classification
 - ARL membership
 - Higher research expenditure
- Universities with data services or a data librarian are more likely to have stand-alone data policy
- Universities focus on legal repercussions of research data
 - IP policies covering data are concerned with data ownership
 - Stand-alone policies cover access, retention, separation, etc.

ZILINSKI, GOBENS and BRINEY, continued

We also found differences in institutional data policy and funder data policy content. These variations offer an area for future analysis. Of note, this analysis found that top research institutions almost universally offer research data services. Will it soon be expected for all academic research libraries to provide data services? With the recent growth in both data services and data policy, will we see all research universities build services in this area?

These data suggest that universities' significant concern is ownership and legal issues with regard to data, while libraries are developing programs and services aimed at the entire data lifecycle. This division offers libraries and librarians an opportunity to provide important clarity where policies exist or advice in policy development on their campus.

What's Next?

While all of our questions were not answered in our initial query, we have a roadmap for demonstrating clear areas of further need at our institutions. This challenge is one that all research universities are presently facing, and librarians can lead the way in developing a response that considers both the researcher and the institutional point of view. Librarians can lead policy development; educate faculty and administrators about best practices; and determine how to navigate the myriad policies from funders, journals, collaborating institutions and more. We hope to see more librarians engaged in institutional research data policy development in the future. ■

Resource Mentioned in the Article

- [1] Briney, K., Goben, A., and Zilinski, L. (Summer 2015). Do you have an institutional data policy? A review of the current landscape of library data services and institutional data policies. *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*.