

Demonstrating the Academic Library's Value through Research Data Management Services

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Abstract

In order to position itself as an institution that supports the 21st century researcher, the academic library must be able to demonstrate its value in a clear and convincing way. Three research librarians at San Diego State University set out to create value for campus researchers by developing and promoting research data management tools and training. They first reached out to the campus division supporting faculty research and received enthusiastic support for their ideas. It was suggested that the librarians design and administer a survey in the Spring of 2015 to assess the RDM practices and needs of campus researchers. This survey informed the design of outreach, education, and services for faculty researchers affiliated with the university. The quick turnaround of the survey design and implementation, coupled with a strong response from researchers not only indicated a need for more support in research data practices on campus, but the value of the Library's interest and involvement in this area of service. This paper will focus on the outreach and support activities of the three research librarians and the resulting value created by their efforts.

Background

A new provost was appointed in the summer of 2014, and he made clear that research was a top priority for the campus. In response to the shifting focus towards research, the Library included goals to support the data management needs of campus researchers in its 2015-2018 Strategic Plan. Three research librarians, each hired in the Fall of 2014, set out to achieve the planned RDM goals. While these librarians all shared a common interest research data management, they all worked closely with departments and colleges in the sciences and social sciences that would benefit directly from research data management support. This group of librarians established a more formal group, known as the RDM Team, which would take a leadership role in developing RDM support at SDSU.

In order to gain better access to faculty researchers, the RDM Team formed strategic partnerships with the Division of Research Affairs and the San Diego State University Research Foundation (SDSURF). Even though the Library and the Division of Research Affairs share many goals, they have not partnered on many projects in the past. The Division of Research Affairs hired a new director in the spring of 2015, and the RDM Team saw this as an opportunity to connect and collaborate. The new director became instrumental in the success of the initiatives undertaken by the RDM Team.

Campus Climate

In order to assess the RDM practices and needs of campus researchers, the RDM Team was encouraged to design and administer a survey in the Spring of 2015. A survey was quickly designed in Qualtrics based on a previous study conducted at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (Library Data Services Advisory Group, 2013). While the survey was based on a previous study, its development was supported by our newly formed collaboration with the Division of Research Affairs. Multiple conversations took with the Director of Research Affairs in order to develop questions that would uncover knowledge about and challenges related to research data management at SDSU.

Once the survey was finalized, a link to it was distributed via email to principal investigators and campus researchers by SDSURF and Research Affairs on behalf of the Library. The survey remained open for the two weeks leading up to the end of the Spring 2015 semester. The RDM Team received 119 responses to the survey, approximately 11% of faculty, and the responses served to inform the design of outreach, education, and services for faculty researchers affiliated with the university. The quick turnaround of the survey design and implementation, coupled with a strong response from researchers not only indicated a need for more support in research data practices on campus, but the value of the Library's interest and involvement in this area of service.

Services and Outcomes

The RDM Team began planning and implementing services indicated to be of most interest to researchers throughout the 2014/15 academic year. The first service implemented was the DMPTool, an online, customizable tool that assists with writing data management plans (DMPs) run by the California Digital Library and the University of California Curation Center. The tool allows campus researchers to login using their campus ID and password in order to access templates for DMPs from various funding agencies, as well as be able to link to helpful resources and have their plan submitted for review by the RDM Team. The DMPTool was quickly adopted after discussions with university administration, and links to repositories by discipline were added to guide researchers in decisions about where to deposit their research data. In the future, the link to the tool will be added to the SDSURF website, and the RDM Team hopes to be able to provide standardized language for university policies on issues such as data backup, storage, and intellectual property.

The team has started work on a research guide hosted on the library website. At this time it has contact information, an overview of our services, a brief tutorial about the DMP Tool, and links to many data repositories arranged by broad disciplines. While the number of data repositories on the guide may be overwhelming to those new to RDM, we believe it is important to highlight the many places data can be accessed and stored. Even though it is a work in progress that the team will continue to edit and update, the guide has already attracted a strong level of interest in the short time it has been live.

The other major activities of the RDM Team revolve around teaching workshops. A workshop was given to the Center for Teaching and Learning on what issues graduate students

need to know in order to be effective data stewards. This was a strategic presentation, as we knew that many faculty themselves needed to be introduced to these concepts, and we had a good turnout for a luncheon workshop of 12 faculty. The next workshops offered were marketed toward graduate students and faculty, and were two sessions of an hour and a half brown bag lunch that covered major issues and some best practices in lifecycle management of digital research data. Over two days we had attendance of 11 graduate students and faculty from an array of disciplines. Feedback gathered was extremely positive and next workshops are being planned around developing lab documentation for management standards, file naming and organization, and storage and backup best practices. The Team also scheduled a workshop that was advertised through the Research Foundation as part of the SDSURF's workshop series. The class was based on using the DMPTool to create data management plans and had over 30 registrants and 14 attendees.

Value

As library budgets remain stagnant or shrink, it becomes more important than ever for library initiatives to clearly demonstrate value. While demonstrating value is important, it can also be difficult to calculate. As libraries are not for-profit organizations, the value of a project or initiative cannot be calculated by looking at the revenues generated. So how can value be calculated for an initiative like the one undertaken by the RDM Team at SDSU? Despite the lack of revenues or profit, the complex question of value in libraries still usually involves numbers. In this particular case, many would look at the number of people involved and/or impacted by the initiative. However, the value of the RDM Team's efforts can be measured by more than just numbers.

While views of the research guide, attendees at workshops, and diversity of services are obvious and easy ways to measure the value of this initiative, there are intangible ways the RDM Team has not only provided value to campus, but increased the value of the library to campus stakeholders. Provision of research support services like data management helps to support the strategic plan of the university, specifically in fostering "...the development and growth of excellence in research and creative endeavors" (San Diego State University, 2013). The services the RDM Team provides and plans to expand upon in the future directly support the SDSU faculty in their endeavors to secure grant funding. The individual faculty and graduates who attend our educational sessions will gain valuable skills and knowledge that are transferable to any position they may take elsewhere in the United States, as well as day-to-day management of their personal digital resources.

The RDM Team's productive and strategic partnerships with the Division of Research Affairs and the SDSU Research Foundation raise the profile of the library across campus and helps to reaffirm to campus administration the expertise and value of librarian faculty. The RDM Team was also the first entity on campus to talk about data management and suggest that services should be provided to faculty researchers. This opportunity to be seen as innovative is invaluable to academic libraries as we struggle to prove our value to campus administration. The RDM Team believes that these successful partnerships, the innovative nature of our service on campus, and continued positive response from faculty will bolster our partnerships and begin to change the perception of librarian skills across campus.

The Future

The San Diego State University Library's Research Data Management Team will continue to develop and offer educational programming around digital data management topics. The Team hopes to leverage existing partnerships and utilize connections made during presentations to provide services to an even wider audience. The Team will also continue to add information to and improve the research guide, and is looking forward to more questions about creating data management plans once the DMPTool becomes more widely publicized and used by faculty.

References

- Library Data Services Advisory Group. (2013). *Faculty Data Management Survey*. Unpublished. Lamar Soutter Library, University of Massachusetts Medical School.
- San Diego State University. (2013). *Building on Excellence: A Strategic Plan for San Diego State University 2013-2018*. Retrieved from <http://go.sdsu.edu/strategicplan/images/finalstrategicplan.pdf>