

Big Data, Little Data, or No Data? iSchools, Scholarship, and Stewardship

The growth of information studies, as reflected by the international expansion of iSchools, reflects a broad research and teaching agenda in social, technical, institutional, and political aspects of the information society. As data science, scholarship, and stewardship are central to the iSchool agenda, they provide a framework to launch the new iSchool at Linnaeus University. Whereas almost all fields of scholarship today are conducting data-intensive research, only a few areas are adept at exploiting “big data.” “Little data” remains the norm in those many fields where evidence is scarce and labor-intensive to acquire. Until recently, data was considered part of the process of scholarship, essential but largely invisible. In the “big data” era, data have become valuable products to be captured, shared, reused, and stewarded for the long term. They also have become contentious intellectual property to be protected. Public policy leans toward open access to research data, but rarely provides the public investment necessary to sustain access. Enthusiasm for big data is obscuring the complexity and diversity of data in scholarship and the challenges for stewardship. Data practices are local, varying from field to field, individual to individual, and country to country. As the number and variety of research partners expands, so do the difficulties of sharing, reusing, and sustaining access to data. Until the larger questions of knowledge infrastructures and stewardship are addressed by research communities, “no data” may become the norm for many fields. This talk will explore the stakes and stakeholders in research data, focusing on implications for iSchool policy and practice, drawing upon the presenter’s book, *Big Data, Little Data, No Data: Scholarship in the Networked World* (MIT Press, 2015), and subsequent research.