

Connecting the data dots: Delving into the data practices of veterinary researchers

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Background

Kerby, E. E. (2015). Research Data Practices in Veterinary Medicine: A Case Study. *Journal of eScience Librarianship*, 4(1), e1073. doi:10.7191/jeslib.2015.1073

Kerby, E. E. (2014, November 14, 2014). *Research Data Publication Policies in Veterinary Medicine*. Paper presented at the Because Evidence Matters - the 6th EBVMA Symposium.

Kerby, E. E. (2016). Research data services in veterinary medicine libraries. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 104(4), 305-308. doi:10.3163/1536-5050.104.4.010



Objective

Many academic libraries now offer various types of data services in an effort to better support researchers. Several recent studies have suggested that such services need to be tailored depending upon the discipline of the researcher^{1,2}.

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the experiences and perspectives of veterinary researchers regarding research data management.



Methods

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in person with nine veterinary researchers during the summer of 2017.

The participants were all faculty members from a single college of veterinary medicine situated within a large academic research institution in the United States.



Participants

By rank:

2–Full Professor

1–Associate Professor

1–Clinical Associate Professor

4–Assistant Professor

1–Clinical Assistant Professor

By department:

3—Pathobiology

3—Comparative Biosciences

3—Veterinary Clinical Medicine



Results & Implications

Focus on three major findings:

- Data definitions
- Collaboration complications
- Student skills



What is data?

Depends on who you ask

- More clear cut for some researchers than others

Researchers do not think much about defining data

- Has implications for storage and preservation

Depends on where in the research begins

- Reusing data



More about preservation

“We had questions about [deceased faculty member’s] lab notebooks because those are property of the university. The archivists came and they walked in and it’s like they had found a treasure trove, I was watching them. That’s a very different perspective than how I view the information. They viewed every page as something of value, and I viewed it as, well, maybe there is something in here that’s worth saving, but it would be a very small fraction of what was sitting in that room.”



More about reusing data

“HIPAA data are the hardest ones for us. It’s really interesting how the different states handle this. What we ask for is a very particular thing, it has HIPAA implications. And the same types of forms that are being used for this kind of use agreement could also be used for some kind of clinical trial where you’re getting permission to access the people themselves, which we don’t do.”



Collaboration and data management

All of the researchers in this study were collaborating

- With researchers at the same and other academic institutions
- With corporate and government entities

Even within an institution, sharing data can get complicated

- As intended, grants are forcing researchers to consider management
- Shared services and tools are patchy

Sharing externally can be even more complicated

- Various strategies to get around this barrier



More about data sharing

“There’s a lot of hoops that we have to jump through. So I would say it’s not very straightforward, which is why people are looking for cloud computing solutions.

People still literally mail hard drives to each other with raw data on it because it’s not too easy to talk between institutions. The size is an issue, but it’s more the firewalls that the campuses have established.”



Students' data practices

Not currently incorporated in the curriculum

- Has implications for practice as well as research

Only those involved in research receive training

- Usually on-the-job training

Actively have to seek out help



More about student training

“Within the vet school, I have a feeling that a lot of the grad students could use training in data management that they’re not getting.

I do collaborate with clinicians sometimes where they ask me to help out with some stats and the first thing I do is I have to explain to them how to clean up their data sets.

So just workshops to teach them how to put their data into a form that can then be used for analysis, because they use spreadsheets like tables.”



Conclusions

Does discipline matter?

- For some things, yes, such as storage issues
- Research methods may be just as important

Three immediate take-aways:

- Be the local point person
- Data archiving and preservation advising
- Partner with faculty and data specialists on training



References

¹Doty, J., & Akers, K. G. (2013). Disciplinary differences in faculty research data management practices and perspectives. *International Journal of Digital Curation*, 8(2), 5-26.
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²Weller, T., & Monroe-Gulick, A. (2014). Understanding methodological and disciplinary differences in the data practices of academic researchers. *Library Hi Tech*, 32(3), 467-482.
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