

ABSTRACT

Big Data, Little Data, or No Data? Sustaining Access to Scholarship

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While the popularity of “big data” reflects the growth of data-intensive research, “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 sustained for the long term. They also have become contentious intellectual property to be protected, whether for proprietary, confidentiality, competition, or other reasons. 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. Until the larger questions of knowledge infrastructures and sustainability 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 and implications for policy and practice, drawn from the presenter’s recent book, *Big Data, Little Data, No Data: Scholarship in the Networked World* (MIT Press, 2015).