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Wenli Gao

*University of Houston*, wgao5@central.uh.edu

Andrea Malone

*University of Houston*, armalone@uh.edu

Alexandra Simons

*University of Houston*, acsimons@uh.edu

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*From the Field*

Love Data @ UH: Collaborating with Campus  
Partners to Promote Data Services

Wenli Gao ([wgao5@uh.edu](mailto:wgao5@uh.edu))

Data Services Librarian, University of Houston Libraries

Andrea Malone ([armalone@uh.edu](mailto:armalone@uh.edu))

Coordinator of Research Services, University of Houston Libraries

Alexandra Simons ([acsimons@uh.edu](mailto:acsimons@uh.edu))

Librarian (History; Comparative Cultures; Women, Gender &  
Sexuality Studies [WGSS]; & Government Information), University of Houston Libraries

**Introduction**

“There are powerful reasons for librarians to explore how their academic libraries can better satisfy the needs of researchers in the new data-intensive research atmosphere.”<sup>1</sup> Conversations surrounding data permeate the academic landscape as researchers develop plans for creating, locating, using, and storing data. At many universities, librarians are building programs and services to support research taking place at their institutions that creates and utilizes large amounts of data. Collaborations between librarians and researchers manifest strategies to improve data management planning and provide avenues for increasing research productivity.

At the University of Houston (UH) Libraries, data-related services are spread throughout the research lifecycle from inception to publication, in line with the research tenet of the UH Libraries Strategic Plan 2017-2021. One of the goals of the plan is to “position the Libraries as a campus

leader in research productivity.”<sup>2</sup> In order to achieve this goal, we concentrate our efforts on data management, data visualization, data preservation and storage, and building and embedding data literacy into research and curricular activities. For these efforts to have the desired impact, it is crucial for the Libraries to communicate and collaborate with individual researchers as well as campus units such as the Division of Research and other campus centers that support data and research to ensure they are aware of and able to effectively take advantage of all we have to offer.

In this paper, we describe the research landscape of UH and present the work we have done related to data services by building a day-long program to support data research on campus. With the Love Data @ UH event we sought also to connect administrators, researchers, and graduate students with one another to further contribute to the collaborative nature of current research activities taking place at UH.



## Background

The University of Houston (UH) is an urban, public, doctoral-granting research institution. In 2011, UH received the Carnegie designation as a Tier 1 research institution. Since that time, research productivity has steadily increased with the creation of new centers, institutes, and core research facilities. Along with this growth in research activity came increased needs for new data resources and services, and the UH Libraries have gradually stepped in to meet this demand. In 2015, the Libraries hired a Social Sciences Data Librarian to build strategic relationships across campus including a limited set of departments working across disciplines such as Political Science, Education, Communications, History, and STEM-related fields. Upon the departure of this librarian in early 2017, we soon recognized that we needed to refill the position with another full-time data librarian who could work with all disciplines, and that the Libraries would need to collaborate and support research with services and resources such as data sets, data tools, and data storage.

The research profile of UH has continued to advance and in the summer of 2018, the university's president announced a university-wide initiative to increase the research and scholarly output by fifty percent within five years. This new 50-in-5 initiative means that as research activity and scholarly output increases so does the need for research support. Keeping in mind the vast amount of data that will be generated and used in the coming years, it was vital for the Libraries to be prepared for these needs and to educate the campus community about the support and resources available to them. Building and managing data services and resources became a joint responsibility of the Liaison Services and the Digital Research Services departments within the Libraries. Within Liaison Services, the data librarian and the research services team worked with Digital Research Services to establish a research lifecycle from which all research-

related services would develop. To fulfill these services, this team of librarians enhanced existing knowledge and acquired new technology skills to meet the data-related needs of researchers.

There are three key players on campus that provide data-related support, but they have different models of service. Unless they are working directly with these data service providers or have specific needs, faculty and students are generally not aware of these key players, or what they do, and most likely could not distinguish what kinds of services each unit provides.

Located in the center of the campus, the main UH library attracts thousands of faculty and students daily, providing access to a broad range of academic resources while also providing research help to all campus users, whether on campus or remotely. However, data services are relatively new in the library, so many users are not aware of the resources available and services provided. UH Libraries subscribe to a number of data-related resources, including the databases *Social Explorer*, *Simply Analytics*, and *Gallup*, and also offer research guides, consultations and instruction on finding data from proprietary and open sources. Also provided are services for data management, data visualization, and geographic information systems (GIS). The Libraries' Metadata and Special Collections departments also provide access to data in the digital libraries and audiovisual collections. Data services in the library are open to the entire campus community, including undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, and faculty.

The Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics (TIMES), a center on campus, has a different focus and service model from that of the Libraries. Founded in 2001 with initial research initiatives focused on psychology and education, it is now a university-based resource in measurement, evaluation, and statistics for faculty and administrators.<sup>3</sup> Faculty



ranging from those in social sciences to computer sciences are affiliated with TIMES, and post-doctoral students work in this center, and are the experts on campus in terms of statistical support. However, as TIMES funding comes from grants, researchers have to either write their services into the grant or pay for their statistical consultation if it involves more comprehensive work. As a result, TIMES is more of a research partner rather than a service unit, and can only work with a limited audience.

A more recently opened data services unit on campus is the Hewlett Packard Enterprise Data Science Institute (DSI). DSI consults on software that is not offered by the Libraries and provides large-scale data storage. While the Libraries' data-related workshops encompass one to two sessions, DSI workshops are more in-depth, usually lasting one to two months and meeting at least three hours a week. DSI also supports faculty working with big data, and is also involved in helping with data-related minor degrees and certificate programs.

Recognizing the purpose and functions of data-related campus units and understanding the need to support and promote library services related to data, a group of four librarians formed a committee, headed by the Data Services Librarian, to plan a day-long event to take place on February 14 (Valentine's Day) focusing on data resources and information related to them. In conjunction with national Love Data Week events, the committee organized the Love Data @ UH event to raise awareness about the data-related resources and services the library provides and to build an engaged community around topics related to the research data lifecycle.

### Event planning and execution

UH Libraries has an internal "microgrants" program that allows groups to apply for up to \$2,000 of funding for a variety of events and

projects that could not otherwise be supported through traditional library funding channels. The planning team applied for a grant based on the need to cover the costs of the Love Data @ UH event, including gift cards for speakers (ten gift cards at \$25 each), two large posters, pizza for lunch, and chocolates to celebrate both Valentine's Day and Love Data @ UH.

The project team began meeting in July of 2018 to explore how to fund the event, find speakers, set the agenda, and promote it to the UH campus. The team then met regularly to keep on track with the various elements of planning. For funding purposes, we estimated that the total amount needed was \$800 (the final expenditure was \$685). The grant application was accepted well before the actual date of the event, so we had plenty of time to prepare with library personnel who could help us configure the room, get the needed resources, and coordinate other logistics, such as placing food and beverages in close proximity to the audience. Once all this was in place, we concentrated on setting up the event.

The planning team brainstormed about who would be the best presenters for various parts of the program, and members of the committee contacted potential speakers. In order to let the campus know what services each of the data services units provides, the committee invited representatives from each unit to talk about their research, resources, and services. Directors of both TIMES and DSI were asked to give an overview of their units. The Data Librarian works with various faculty who deal extensively with data in different disciplines, and through those connections was able to invite a faculty panel representing Sociology, Computer Science, Business, Communication, and Mechanical Engineering to talk about their research and how they use data. The faculty member from Sociology discussed her research using GIS data, and the faculty member from Business presented an overview of big data analysis in the business world. The



Communication professor showcased research using biometric analysis, and the presentation helped promote the availability of biometric analysis software, which had been purchased jointly by the UH Libraries and the School of Communication. Faculty from Computer Science and Engineering were chosen to represent the sciences, and the moderator for the panel represented the humanities. The project team also felt that it would attract more people and have a broader impact if there were speakers from outside of UH. We invited a speaker from

Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research to give a presentation. The Kinder Institute specializes in creating open data resources that include urban-based statistical data that are available for use by the UH community and other organizations, so we felt that our audience would be very interested in the kinds of data supplied by the institute. It also created potential collaboration among local researchers. The final program of the day consisted of a panel of three librarians from the UH Libraries who discussed resources and services available within the library.

**Table 1: Love Data @ UH Program**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Presenter</b>
9:00-9:10am	Welcome	Dean of UH Libraries
9:10 - 10:30am	Data for All Disciplines	Faculty panel
10:30 - 11:00am	The Hewlett Packard Enterprise Data Science Institute	Director of the Hewlett Packard Enterprise Data Science Institute
11:00 - 11:15am	Break	
11:15 - 12:00pm	Cross-Classified Random Effects Models in Psychology and Education	Director of Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch	



1:00 – 2:00pm	Connecting Changemakers with Data	Director of Research Management at Rice University’s Kinder Institute for Urban Research
2:00 – 3:00pm	Collections as Data	Data Services Librarian; Coordinator of Metadata Services; Audiovisual Archivist

Figure 1: Love Data @ UH Flyer



Once we had confirmed the speakers, we were able to plan the program and reach out to others within and outside the Libraries to help us promote the event. The UH Libraries have an internal Director of Communications and a staff member who is a professional graphic artist and photographer. With their help, we were able to design the poster and program, and promote the event via the Libraries’ social media accounts

(Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). In addition to social media posts, promotion of the event also included a news release, a follow-up announcement, and listings on the Libraries’ calendar. The communications director and photographer were also on hand the day of the event and posted updates and photos throughout the day to various social media sites. Since we were able to collaborate with TIMES and DSI and listed



them as co-sponsors, they promoted the event using their channels. By working with other units on campus to participate in and publicize the event, we were able to show that this was not just a library-centered effort, but also a campus-wide initiative. Subject liaisons were also encouraged to promote the event to the departments they serve, mainly through email messages to department heads and faculty members working with data.

### **Outcome**

Sixty-seven people were in attendance, including the fourteen presenters, moderators, and committee members, thirty-three participants who registered ahead of time, and twenty that had not pre-registered. Of those who attended, 39% were faculty, followed by graduate students (27%) and librarians and staff (27%). The rest were post-doctoral students (7%). Attendees represented nine departments on campus, including the College of Education, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics, College of Pharmacy, College of Technology, College of the Arts, College of Engineering, Honors College, and the Libraries. The College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences had the most attendance (29%), followed by the Libraries (18%), College of Education (15%), and the College of Natural Sciences & Mathematics (12%). Seating at round tables helped to foster discussion among the audience. Before they left, attendees were encouraged to fill out an evaluation form to rate their experience of the day.

Because we wanted to get an accurate count and understand the interests of the attendees, the planning team also had a sign-in sheet at the beginning of the event, and kept a tally of how many people attended each session. By using these simple assessment methods, we were able to determine what disciplines were attending and how many people were at each session, and

we were pleased to see that the sciences, technology, social sciences, and humanities were all represented. Attendance at the sessions varied during the day, with the highest attendance in the morning, dropping slightly in the afternoon. Having food and beverages available helped us keep people in the room as we transitioned from the morning to the afternoon sessions.

We received sixteen evaluations, and overall the feedback was very good. Responses indicated that the panel discussion, presentations by various data groups on campus, and the speaker from the Kinder Institute were especially informative, and gave audience members “different perspectives of research going on in the field of data science.” Evaluations indicated that it is “good to know what’s available through the library,” and a “good review of what’s available to us.” A couple of commentators expressed surprise at the depth of resources and personnel available through the library. This was good to know and will be helpful for future planning and outreach, especially for our Data Librarian, and Research Data Management Librarians. Other commentators expressed the need to have another event focused specifically on data resources for social sciences faculty and students.

### **Conclusion**

We were encouraged by the feedback, and given the strong ongoing interest in and the growing need for data resources, we see this as an event that could be done annually or semi-annually, and not necessarily be tied to the national Love Date Week events. Promoting UH Libraries’ data resources and services in tandem with those provided by other units on campus, and at other research centers such as the Kinder Institute at Rice University, raises our profile and helps us retain our reputation as a vital part of the campus research network.

If other libraries are considering holding similar events, we suggest identifying specific groups or



faculty for targeted promotion early on in the planning process to get better attendance. While only thirty-three out of the seventy-five who registered attended, we welcomed the drop-in attendees who came in without pre-registering.

The speakers had attentive audiences, and attendees had an informative and positive experience. It was a good return on investment considering the low budget spent on the event. Based on the enthusiastic evaluations we received, we were gratified that those who did attend were glad that the library hosted this event, making it more likely that the library would host similar collaborative events in the future. Perhaps most importantly, it was clear from the feedback that this event helped raise the profile of the library as a key partner in data services on campus.

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<sup>1</sup> Tenopir, Carol, Ben Birch, and Suzie Allard, "Academic Libraries and Research Data Services: Current Practices and Plans for the Future." Association of College & Research Libraries white paper, June, 2012, [http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/Tenopir\\_Birch\\_Allard.pdf](http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org/acrl/files/content/publications/whitepapers/Tenopir_Birch_Allard.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> University of Houston Libraries, "Research. UH Libraries Strategic Plan 2017-2021." <https://libraries.uh.edu/strategic-plan/research/>

<sup>3</sup> Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics, "History," <https://www2.times.uh.edu/about/history/>

