

Thinking like an Archivist

Supporting Qualitative Researchers in Long-Term Data Management

Data management is often a low priority for qualitative researchers juggling a number of responsibilities within and outside of the research lifecycle, as supported in our findings. This poster will look at ways to incorporate the archivist in the work of the research librarian to better support qualitative researchers' data management and the long-term care of their data.

Contact Information

Shelby Long, longshe@umich.edu

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Introduction

Qualitative researchers amass a great deal of data in the process of conducting research. However, they are often left to their own devices when it comes to managing their data, if they develop a process at all. Archiving data, as the final step in data management, is not discussed in most research methods courses across disciplines.

Librarians offer one-on-one consultation, guides, and workshops to support researchers. If archivists, on the other hand, interact with qualitative researchers it is often through reference work. The archivist's knowledge of preservation paired with the librarian's closer proximity to the research process offers an excellent opportunity for collaboration.

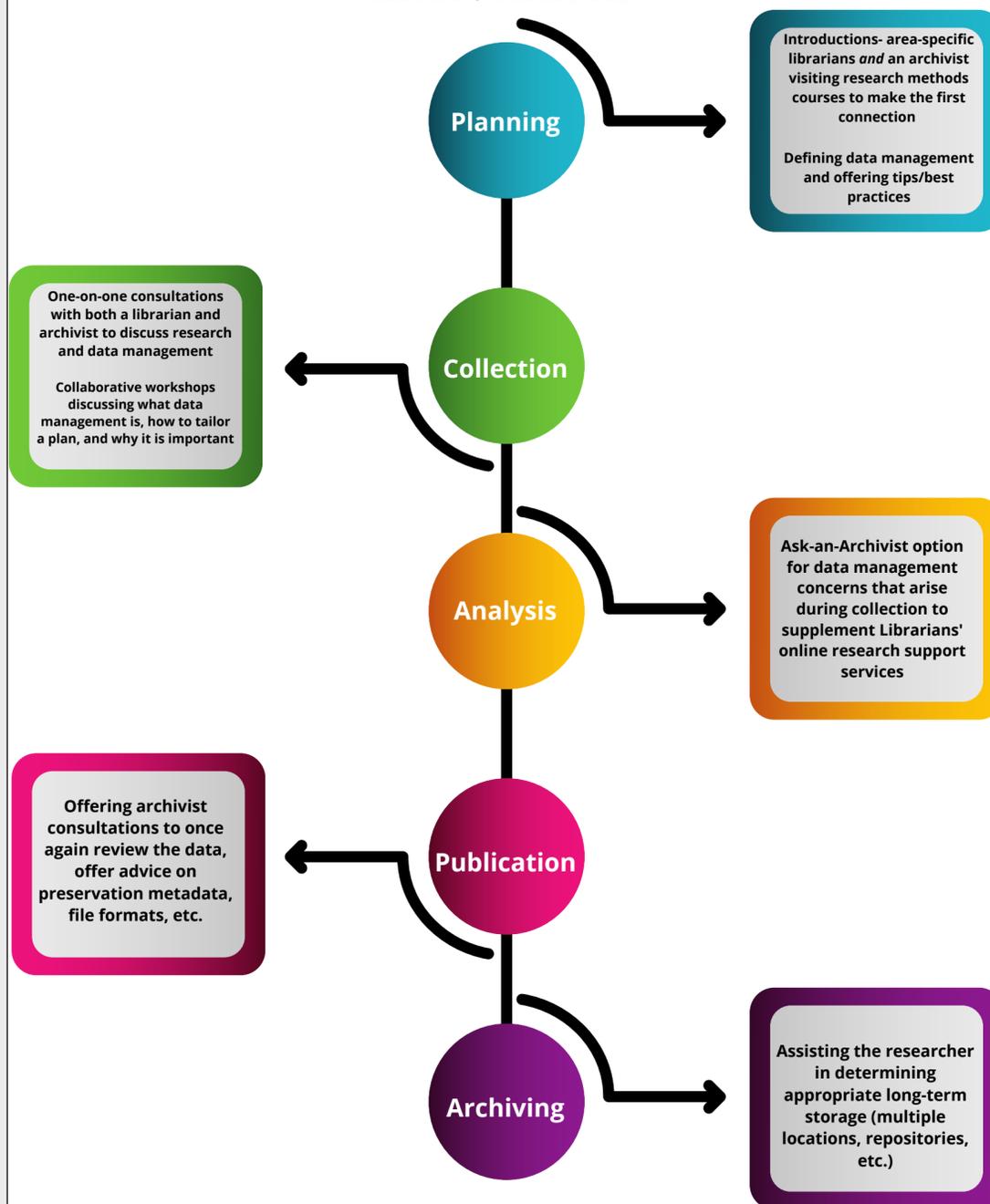
Utilizing interviews and survey responses from qualitative researchers, this poster demonstrates the gap in data management skills and presents a possible solution in the academic archivist.

Methodology

This poster is a part of a larger project to better understand qualitative researchers' practices, needs, and their engagement with on-campus resources. To do so we engaged mixed methods. First, we interviewed 15 faculty researchers, 11 doctoral researchers, and 4 librarians from the same R1 university. These semi-structured interviews dove into the researchers' particular focus, their research experience and education, library engagement, and their approach to the research process- including data management. The transcripts were then coded in NVIVO.

From the interviews we were able to craft relevant survey questions. We then sent out the survey to 359 selected qualitative researchers from the same university with which the interviewees were affiliated. Over the course of 4 weeks, we received 101 responses. Some of those responses are reflected in the "Findings" section below.

Research Lifecycle with Potential Archivist Interventions



Literature Review

Archival Literature: There is very little out there that discusses the role of the archivist in the qualitative research lifecycle. What does exist focuses more on access to resources, but not instruction on data management or archiving. When discussing instruction in the archives, the literature focuses more on archival materials than on teaching archival skills.

Library Literature: There has been a well-documented push to become more engaged in the research lifecycle. This looks like re-envisioning the role of the librarian (as embedded for example) and closing the skill gap when it comes to activities such as complex data management.

Further Questions

- In what ways can archivists further collaborate with research librarians to serve qualitative researchers?
- What obstacles stand in the way of this collaboration?
- How can these interventions be modified to serve different research contexts?
- What current practices carried out by librarians might be better executed by an archivist?
- How do we define an archivist's role in the research process in a way that makes sense for researchers, librarians, and archivists?

Conclusion

The archivist is not typically thought of in the qualitative research context, but it may be time to rethink this. As skilled digital preservationists, archivists' knowledge would fill the data management skill gap that abounds across disciplines. This also means collaborating with librarians who work more closely with researchers and leveraging those relationships.

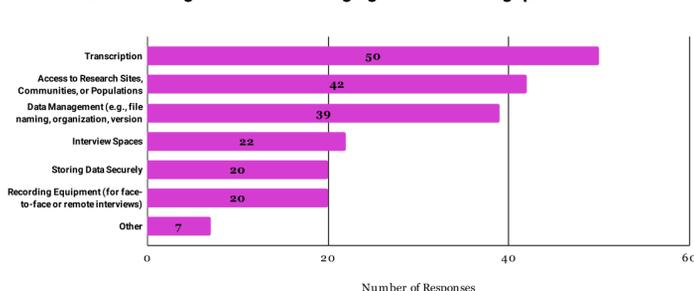
Instruction will be crucial. From our findings, most researchers are not familiar with data management, have had to teach themselves, or inherit practices from mentors (not always good practices). Archivists can also raise awareness about the importance of good data stewardship, not only for researchers' to secure grants, but also so that their data may be shared, potentially re-used, and to save them time and unnecessary headaches later.

Findings

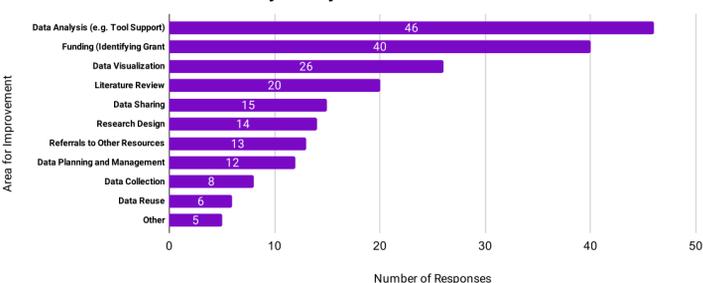
During the interviews, interviewees had **varied understandings of what data management meant**. Some focused on file-naming conventions, while others focused on storage or data security. It became clear that qualitative data management was by and large an ad hoc venture for our researchers. Of the 26 researchers, **14 expressed uncertainty about best data management practice, while 2 expressed certainty/confidence in their data management practice**. Others communicated that they did not use or need a DMP. None of the interviewees had formal data management training, although some mentioned learning some practices from colleagues or mentors within their discipline.

From our survey responses, depicted below, researchers could select up to three answers to the following questions. When asked how the library could better support researchers, data management received 12 responses. Of the library services researchers had previously used, only 2 selected data planning & management (not shown in the graphs below). However, **"Data Management" was the third most popular selection when asked which areas are challenging when collecting data**.

Which of the following areas are challenging when collecting qualitative data?



In what areas could the library better meet the qualitative research needs of you or your team?



Related Literature

Fear, K. (2011). "You made it, you take care of it": Data Management as Personal Information Management. *International Journal of Digital Curation*, 6(2), 53-77. <https://doi.org/10.2218/ijdc.v6i2.190>

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Thielen, J., & Hess, A. N. (2017). Advancing Research Data Management in the Social Sciences: Implementing Instruction for Education Graduate Students Into a Doctoral Curriculum. *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, 36(1), 16-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639269.2017.1387739>

Carlson, J., & Johnston, L. (Eds.). (2015). *Data information literacy: Librarians, data, and the education of a new generation of researchers*. Purdue University Press.