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Building Research Data Services at Mount Holyoke College

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Introduction

Mount Holyoke College ranks high among liberal arts colleges in faculty research activities and has initiated a new program in Data Science. In this context, and given the recent growth in the use of very large datasets in research, more coherent and comprehensive campus support for the management and storage of faculty research data at Mount Holyoke has become essential.

Laying Foundations

In 2015-2016, a working group of MHC librarians and technologists from the Research and Instructional Support Department began exploring the need for data services at MHC by:

- Studying data services models at other institutions
- Administering a survey to learn about faculty research data practices and needs
- Developing a proposal for data services at MHC

In the spring of 2016, a cross-functional team formed to meet faculty data storage and backup needs. Ten members were drawn from multiple library and IT departments. Building upon the survey and individual faculty interviews, this team developed use cases and personas to begin:

- Guiding the development of policies and procedures
- Planning infrastructure provisioning
- Building support models around research data needs

Additionally, metadata librarians, research and instruction librarians, and digital assets managers planned support models for metadata creation and research data management planning.

Individual Interviews with Faculty Researchers

Frequency word cloud: Meeting notes from four interviews

Moving Forward

Gathering information from the faculty survey and interviews, along with studying data services models elsewhere, gave LITS a better understanding of our users’ needs. These insights guided us in developing matrices of needs, services, and support responsibilities that allow LITS to better meet support requirements and to plan future infrastructure provisioning.

LITS has revised and created processes to:

- Provide an intake process for individual users seeking data services, including forming a LITS Research Data Needs intake team
- Consult with faculty on data storage and backup systems
- Support faculty in crafting research data management plans (DMPs) and creating metadata for archiving newly created data sets
- Become a DMPTool Partner to support faculty with customized DMP templates
- Arrange access for Mount Holyoke researchers to the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center (MGHPCC)
- Create an MHC Data Center to provide data storage and backup on LITS maintained servers.

Conclusion

The recent work of departments across LITS to evaluate research data needs at MHC allows us to plot a path to a more coherent and robust set of services to support faculty researchers.

Faculty Survey: Research Data Practices and Needs

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