Maximizing the impact of research data

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By Communications staff

Emily Murphy, a PhD candidate in the Department of English Language and Literature, was one of the speakers at the third annual Data Day at Queen's. One of the ways she interacts with data is in her teaching at the Field School in Digital Humanities at the Bader International Study Centre (BISC). (Supplied photo)

In the modern classroom data comes in many forms and some of them are not the most apparent, such as in the humanities. Data Day brings researchers across the disciplines together to share their unique experiences with data, including those that might be less obvious.

Emily Murphy, a PhD candidate in the Department of English Language and Literature and one of the speakers at the third annual Data Day at Queen's, interacts with data through her own research and in her teaching at the Field School in Digital Humanities at the Bader International Study Centre (BISC).

Students in Murphy's classroom this year experienced humanities' relationship to data first hand, as they learned and applied a mark-up language called Text Encoding Initiative-conformant XML (TEI). They marked up the letters of 18th century musician
and writer, Amelia Alderson Opie, from a privately-held collection belonging to English professors Shelley King and John B. Pierce. This enabled students to engage with the practice of digitizing text and to develop a critical perspective on the technology.

“We examined what teaching in a humanities setting means, and how we need to adapt humanities teaching, within the context of digital humanities,” Murphy explained during her session. “As we are teaching data, technology and contemporary culture, we are pushed to collaboration, less hierarchy.

“The humanities approaches to data are going to look different from other approaches, such as sciences and social sciences. This is because those who study it are choosing it. Data is not something with a lot of history in humanities, as we have historically thought of our subject matter as text rather than data. We are still hammering out the relationship that data has to the humanities and to the broader cultural context.”

Many other Queen's researchers across the disciplines also have data on their minds. This was demonstrated by the number of researchers and scholars in Speaker's Corner at Stauffer Library on Tuesday, May 10, for Data Day, hosted by Queen's University Library, Office of the Vice-Principal (Research), and the Centre for Advanced Computing. This free event provided participants with an opportunity to meet researchers and data service providers, and featured local services and national initiatives for managing, linking and promoting research data.

“It was wonderful to see so many researchers, all with a different perspective and focus, who are thinking about ways that they can maximize the impact of their data,” says moderator Francine Berish, Geospatial Data Librarian, Queen's University Library.

Opening comments at Data Day were provided by Steven Liss, Vice-Principal (Research), who was the co-founder and co-chair of the Leadership Council for Digital Infrastructure. This was followed by the Keynote Address, Queen's in the Global Knowledge Commons, given by Martha Whitehead, Vice-Provost and University Librarian at Queen's University, and president of Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL). Whitehead explored the open science context of research data management, and examined the concept of scholarly communications. She also shared some of the Institutional Research Data Management services at Queen's, as well as Portage network opportunities that have been led by CARL, and are available to researchers across Canada.
Another series of talks, *Joining the Dots: Linking Data, Publications and Creators in the Research Life Cycle*, featured Laural Haak, Executive Director of Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID), who visited Queen’s from Washington to speak about *Research Information Management with Persistent Identifiers*, and how ORCID provides identifiers that distinguish researchers from each other.

Additional topics ranged from evolving Queen’s data services, national guidelines (such as Tri-Council), and national and international initiatives for managing, linking and promoting research data. Queen’s researchers also shared their experiences in data management and experiences with digital scholarship across disciplines.

Looking to the future of data, Murphy says that “Many hands make light work.” While a lot of the groundwork of creating a digital humanities community has been seeded by her and other researchers at Queen’s, there is a lot of interest, and other researchers who could benefit from what they are building. There is also always room for more advocacy and voices, for example, the voices of graduate students, as Murphy points out, “Part of my work as president of the graduate caucus of *Digital Scholarship Ontario* has been to ensure that the needs of grad researchers in the humanities are represented as well as those of, for example, social-science researchers.”

“On Data Day, participants were engaged, and asked a lot of great questions, and this event initiated conversations that are still taking place, days and weeks after the event,” says Berish. “We can't wait to start planning for next year.”

Attendees are invited to complete the feedback survey. Input will be used to plan next year’s event.

Queen's University Library offers a Research Data Management Service that includes assistance developing data management plans, documenting and storing data, and finding appropriate archives. Please contact Data Services for help with any of your data needs.

Tags: campus community