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Toward Reusability: Preliminary Metadata Best Practices From the Realities of Academic Data Sharing Initiative

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Incomplete and inconsistent connections between institutional repository holdings and the global data infrastructure inhibit research data discovery and reusability. Preventing metadata loss on the path from institutional repositories to the global research infrastructure can substantially improve research data reusability.

The Realities of Academic Data Sharing (RADS) Initiative, funded by the National Science Foundation, is investigating institutional processes for improving research data FAIRness. Focal points of the RADS inquiry are to understand where researchers are sharing their data and to assess metadata quality, i.e., completeness, at six Data Curation Network (DCN) academic institutions: Cornell University, Duke University, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, Washington University in St. Louis, and Virginia Tech. RADS is examining where researchers are storing their data, considering local institutional repositories and other popular repositories, and analyzing the completeness of the research data metadata stored in these institutional and other repositories. Metadata FAIRness (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) is used as the metric to assess metadata quality as FAIR complete.

Research findings show significant content loss when metadata from local institutional repositories are compared to metadata found in DataCite. After examining the factors contributing to this metadata loss, RADS investigators are developing a set of recommended best practices for institutions to increase the quality of their scholarly metadata.

Further, documentation such as README files are of particular importance not only for data reuse, but as sources containing valuable metadata such as Persistent Identifiers (PIDs). DOIs and related PIDs such as ORCID and ROR are still rarely used in institutional repositories. More frequent use would have a positive effect on discoverability, interoperability and reusability, especially when transferring to global infrastructure.

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