



Engaging Researchers with Data Management The Cookbook

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3.2. Introducing Data Management into Existing Courses at the University of Minnesota

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To provide more discipline-relevant support, the University of Minnesota RDM team contacts staff who are teaching graduate research methods, and works with them to embed suitable RDM training in their courses.

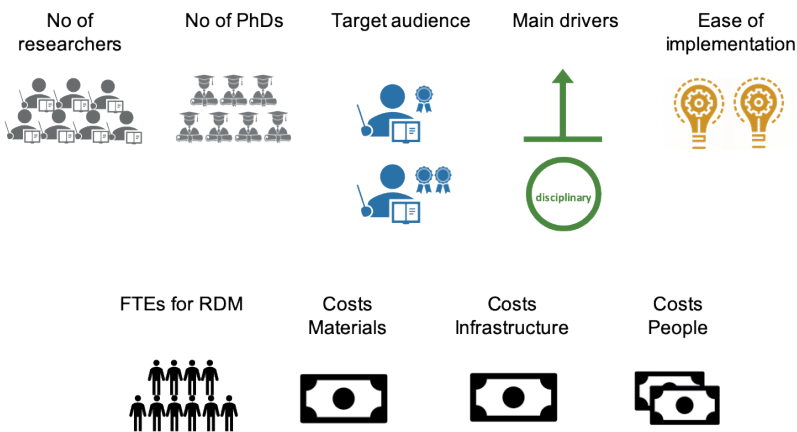


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From Grassroots to Widespread Influence

Back in 2015, two recent PhD graduates working at the University of Minnesota (UMN) contacted every instructor of graduate research methods in social science, and proposed integrating disciplinary Research Data Management (RDM) education into their courses. It was a bold proposal, but since then this disciplinary RDM training has grown from its small-scale, grassroots beginnings, becoming integrated into 60 courses across 7 colleges.

Alicia Hofelich Mohr, one of these two PhD graduates, is currently a library collaborator at the College of Liberal Arts. These collaborators are disciplinary experts based at their domain-specific college, and their job is to work closely with the RDM colleagues from the library to jointly provide general and domain-specific research support, including training, to all faculty members.

The University of Minnesota has a strong culture of good RDM. This is partly thanks to its early adoption of RDM support; since 2010, the RDM team has grown from around 10 staff members to more than 25, and includes librarians and collaborators from different colleges.

Being embedded in regular research methods courses, the RDM training usually lasts between 60 to 90 minutes with a class size of five to 20 students. All courses start with the same basic RDM principles: file-naming and file organisation; data sharing; archiving; and security issues. Additional subjects are introduced depending on the discipline.

A Lightweight Approach Makes for an Excellent Return on Investment

If you want to introduce elements of RDM training to existing courses within your institution, Alicia suggests you can 'find a few motivated people and that is really all you need to start. When you are a small team, you can do things quickly'. Their lightweight approach does not cost much but makes an excellent return on investment, and the disciplinary elements of the training clearly demonstrate the relevance of RDM to the attendees.

The training received good anecdotal feedback, and was a welcome addition to courses. Many people are now aware of RDM in general, and

interest in data management has grown. The RDM training providers no longer need to approach course instructors: instead the course instructors (re)invite them, and many instructors have even found it useful to use RDM practice in their own work. The RDM training is also starting to attract the interest of researchers and principal investigators who hear about it from their students. 'Sometimes principal investigators learn about RDM through word-of-mouth, and then ask for help from us so they can incorporate the things we talk about in class into their own projects,' says Jenny McBurney, a research services librarian at the UMN Libraries.



Fig. 3.2 RDM training in one of the research methods classes at the University of Minnesota. © Kate Peterson / UMN Libraries, CC BY 4.0.

Create a Community to Make It Sustainable

‘One challenge we are still facing is how to talk about RDM in disciplines where RDM is not a “thing” yet,’ says Alicia. This is where you need the disciplinary collaborators: they can find the place to introduce RDM topics that resonate well with the researchers. This ensures the training delivers not just appropriate knowledge about RDM, but also engages the interest of the researchers with data management skills and provides examples of how to turn their knowledge into practice.

To keep the RDM training growing, you also need a good team. Despite the low overall cost, some time and effort are required to choose an appropriate target course, and to prepare and coordinate the delivery of topics relevant to that particular discipline. ‘After a while you receive recurring course invitations; meanwhile you want to reach out to new courses — it takes dedicated people,’ explains Jenny. Sufficient availability of trainers, both librarians and disciplinary collaborators, is needed to ensure coverage of courses across multiple disciplines throughout the academic year.