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SAA Research Forum 2019

*Radical Collaboration, Archivists, and Data*

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*Please note: this is a representation of my remarks, not an exact transcript.*

Hello everyone. I have been thinking about y'all.

I'm going to talk about two things. First, I will sketch a brief example that I wrote about for the special issue in RLI.

Second, I want to talk about y'all.

First, when thinking about how to encourage research data management, create education and activity, one option is to do and model that work in public. When we actively demonstrate and model good practices, provide stepping stones from beginner to more advanced, and welcome experimentation, questions, and contributions, we can encourage participation and a mindset and culture of growth and shared ownership. That's important! It's vital to welcome people and meet them where they are, and help them to understand and grow.

As a postdoctoral fellow working with the DataONE Community Engagement and Outreach Working Group, one of the projects that I shepherded was a revision of research data education curriculum. The Working Group decided to convert older educational modules on research data management from static PowerPoint slides to slides in R Markdown, shared openly in GitHub, that are now reusable, available, and customizable by the broader research data management community. Some of that work was completed with the intent of sustainability and reuse of resources over time, with the reasoning that anyone with a GitHub account could contribute or update at any point. However, by deliberately placing this work in an open, shared repository, we also consciously provided a window into what it looks like to do ongoing maintenance to these materials in a public place. Who is contributing or maintaining or adding issues to the repository? That previously invisible work is now transparent; anyone can track or see who created or worked on the lesson, whether a pull request has been submitted, or whether an issue has been closed.

Discussions about transparency and visibility of work are certainly not limited to the archival field, but my thinking was at least partially informed by ongoing conversations about making the work of archivists much more visible in descriptive practice. When we open up and make clear the identities and work of authors and maintainers, we demonstrate that *people* are making decisions to include this information. Providing this context can also connect people to the selection process, opening dialogue and curiosity such as: why was this added? When? What else is relevant? Adding the human context can help us to understand and reflect on bias, neutrality, and gaps in our work and the work of others.

By modeling transparent behavior for community engagement and outreach, this approach also suggests a way to encourage and engage with overlapping communities. Encouraging an open and welcoming approach to sharing and learning tools, systems, and techniques is an avenue for connecting more deeply with researchers and others who both use and benefit from well-described, well managed, accessible research data.

Archivists and librarians are *absolutely* positioned to lead this charge. We are familiar with organizational models and with the work and benefits of ensuring preservation over time, and are equipped to bring those and many other professional skills to the research data table. Archivists, librarians, and other information allies can continue to provide strong, flexible, and important leadership by developing inclusive approaches, seeking and building collaborative partnerships, and insisting on research data management as a common good. Further, by investing in approaches to train and educate our communities in transparent, open, and welcoming ways, archivists and allies can frame the act of making good practices as an easy choice that contributes to a common, sustainable good.

Ok, now I said that I would talk about y'all. What I mean, is the usage of y'all as a device to express solidarity and promote inclusivity. As an early career archivist in Texas, I quickly found that y'all was a great all-purpose term. Archivists and archives can move beyond documenting the world as it is to making and encouraging change in the world. I don't own this idea. I mention it here because I want to encourage us all this week in moving forward to embrace the spirit (and maybe the usage too) of y'all (and the even bigger *all y'all*) as we continue to think broadly about how to move the field forward. Lets do this kind of radically collaborative community building work together.