

How can Big Data be Useful in Everyday Life? Lessons and Skills from The Reading List for Life

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Abstract

The goal of this session is to provide participants with a way forward with the messy, sometimes confusing process of transforming big data into usable learning tools for libraries. We will be using our own development project, [The Reading List for Life](#), as a case study and launching point for discussion. An anticipated outcome of this session is that participants will come away with the confidence and inspiration to begin transforming their own big data into usable learning tools.

The Reading List for Life is a next generation digital tool, which is being developing in the U.S. and leverages content from the [Open Syllabus Project \(OSP\)](#). The OSP was originally created as a way of looking across a global set of syllabuses to identify content being taught in higher education curricula. Currently, the OSP has indexed over a million syllabuses. Work has begun for collocating them into disciplines and levels. The Reading List for Life is a digital tool that repurposes this big data set to create an open source tool for adult learners wanting to explore a learning path of their own. The hope is our tool will also incorporate the digital resources available through the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), the Internet Archive, and other free-to-use, open source resources. The development process for this tool has been a collaborative effort that has involved computer scientists, librarians, researchers, and designers, and requires an interdisciplinary approach in order to fulfill all the intended requirements.



Like other librarians before us, we have learned that the process of moving from big data to usable and user-friendly digital learning tool is a complex and multifaceted process. Yet, it is a necessary undertaking, especially for the library world as we move further into the age of big data. This session will have three parts: (1) explanation of our process for transforming big data into a usable tool, (2) practical skill-building exercises for participants to undertake projects of their own (e.g. parsing data, defining usability), and (3) practice of critical skills for participants to assess the limits of any big data set. Our session will be a highly interactive session, and participants will be asked to work with other attendees to solve design problems.

As part of this session, we will engage in discussion and share common issues about big data, design, user experience, and pedagogy, as well as other areas that might arise in the group work. This session is meant to be messy, yet fruitful for all involved.

Presenters

Alaina C. Bull is a librarian and researcher. She has a background in business and big data, having spent five years managing staffing and technology for a group of call centers. After

completing her MLIS in 2015, she spent a year working in information architecture consulting before making her way back to the library world. She joined the research team with Project Information Literacy in 2016 as a Research Fellow, and became the First Year Experience Librarian at University of Washington Libraries in Tacoma in 2018. Her interests are in sustainable instruction and design, the intersection of data and practice, and innovative pedagogy.

Jessica Yurkofsky is a designer with roots in ethnography, computer science, and place-making. At metaLAB (at) Harvard, much of her work focuses on library innovation and spaces for learning. She co-teaches Library Test Kitchen, a course at Simmons College in which graduate students collaboratively design for libraries, and helped create LABRARY, a pop-up storefront library in Cambridge, MA. She is currently pursuing an MLIS at San Jose State University. Email: jessica@metalab.harvard.edu