

IMT 570 B AU 18 :
ANALYTIC METHODS FOR INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

Group Assignment 1: Research Problem

“WHY UW AS A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY DOES NOT
RELEASE OPEN SOURCE DATA?”

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GROUP 7 -

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Topic Overview

What is Open Source Data?

Open source data is the idea that some data should be freely available to everyone to use and re-publish as they wish, without restrictions from copyright, patents or other mechanisms of control (Auer, Bizer, Kobilarov, Lehmann, Cyganiak, & Ives, 2007). Historically, the idea behind open data has existed, but the term "open data" is recent, especially when the use of the Internet is on the rise.

There have been proponents and opponents of this idea of making the data available to everyone. Private institutions, more often than not, are not willing to share their data and the resources used by them. Nevertheless, giant tech companies like Google, Github, Intel, Netflix etc. offer products based on open source software. In spite of all arguments between the proponents and opponents of open source data, both of them do agree on the fact that the governmental organizations and institutions should make the data available to everyone.

This argument caught our interest and made us ponder about the fact that why University of Washington, even being a public university does not release open source data. Open data about the university can help prospective students in knowing about the program costs, placement statistics, number of students completing etc. which will help them in deciding whether they want to be part of that particular university or not. It can also aid better fiscal oversight and accountability of university operations (Castro, 2015). Moreover, it helps in the flow of ideas and growth of innovation among the students and professors.

Our aim is to know the potential reasons for this problem and also to recommend some solutions which are within the rules and guidelines of the institution.

The Research Problem

The concept of open data should be contextualized, with consideration of geographical, political, economic, social, cultural situations. Because of the complexity of different conditions, the standard of open data might differ. So in our study, we need to specifically interpret the definition of open data in higher education in the contemporary US. In the United States, most public universities are state universities founded and operated by state government entities. So when we discuss open data in public university in the US, it is related to the issue of government open data.

Our research problem therefore is,

“Why UW as a public university does not release open source data?”

According to a recent interview with Jaime Adams, senior advisor for international affairs and Anne Mims Adrian, PhD from Auburn University, open data practices are currently driven by funders’ requirements, yet very few universities have policies and procedures to address these requirements. So, this study also raises the question about which methods to follow at the university of Washington to make data available publically. Open data in higher education could include open data about the university, open science, open educational resources, open knowledge, and so forth. We would further select one aspect to dive into through future research.

Research Questions and Boundaries

The research problem we want to explore is the situation of open data in the public university - UW. To dissect this problem, there are some research questions and primary concepts we would work on.

Open Data in Higher Education in the US

We would first do research on the related open data policies in higher education in the US at the federal and state levels. This would give us a way to contextualize and comparatively analyze the situation of open data at UW. Also, we plan to read into those policies and critically analyze the pros and cons of open data in higher education.

Based on research, some other countries, especially the UK, in which universities minister launches open data competition. Use this international context, we would study the reasons behind the open data in higher education. Specific research questions could include: why the access to open data in higher education is important? Why it was not fully conducted before? What makes the movement rise? What might be the concerns of the higher education, regarding open data?

Open Data in Public Universities in US and Case Study of UW

We need to critically review the following research questions.

First, what are the pros and cons for the state government to open data?

Second, does it mean public universities, because of their “public” attribute, should have the same way to provide open data, like the state governments? How could we recognize the similarities between state

governments and state universities on the one hand and identify their differences on the other hand in our analysis?

Third, even if to provide open data in public universities is important, but should it be optional or compulsory?

With all these research questions above, our group hopes to use a case study on the situation of open data at UW to further understand these questions. Although this case study would not be fully used for generalization, we think this case study has a controllable scale for us as researchers to conduct. Then, we could use different research analytic methods to critically analyze this case study and come up with thought-provoking ideas and recommendations.

What is this research important?

As researchers, we hope to unearth the university's underlying reasoning behind the decision of releasing data to the public. Right now, there is some data which is available while some is still hidden from the public which make things obscure. We also intend to create more transparency; many public universities like those in Georgia, publish salaries of all government employees, including faculty and staff. This practice ensures that the administration is treating all its employees in a fair manner.

Another benefit of open data is its scope to be used for understanding large demographics and creating tailor-made solutions while tackling the problems. Since University of Washington is a large public institution with around 60,000 students studying at one time, there's a large potential data which can be used by the civic bodies for improving the governance and implementing better policies. This can also help in achieving a safer campus.

References

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