

Curation is communal: Transparency, trust, and (in)visible labor

Halle Burns, Princeton University, USA

Sandi Caldrone, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Mikala Narlock, University of Minnesota, USA

Context / Lit Review

The (In)visible Data Curator

- Studies of data curators focus on their tasks, projects, etc., less on the people themselves
 - Existing studies focus on disciplinary (or subject specific) repositories
- Different terms for the role, different conceptualizations of the tasks
- Trust required:
 - Data creators and depositors
 - Data reusers

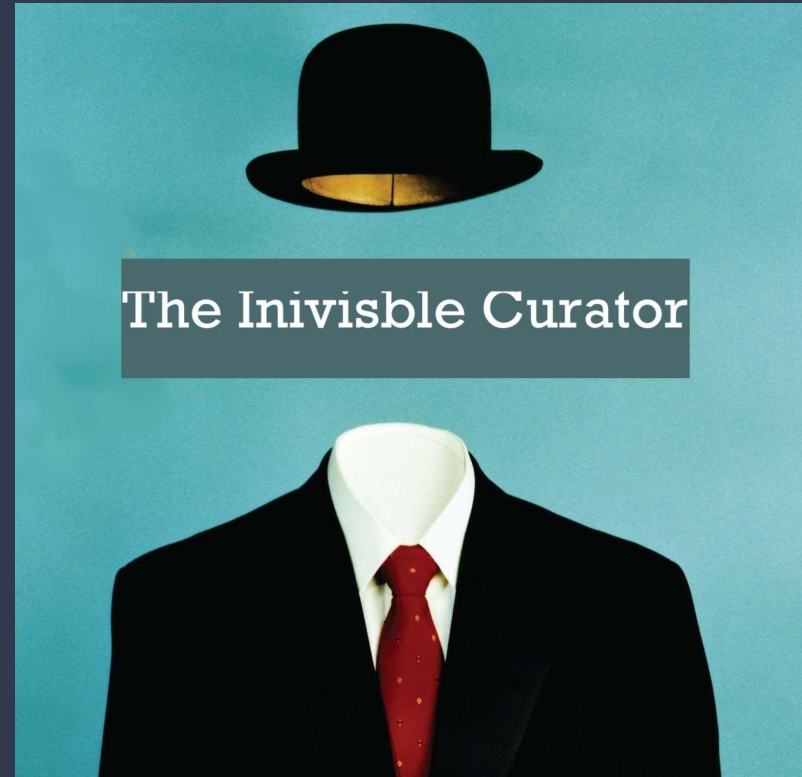


Image adapted from the Signet Classic 2010 edition of H.G. Wells' "Invisible Man."

Repositories + Community + Trust

- Since early 2000's, services have been largely invisible, sometimes by design
- Trust > Technical
- Community is essential for data curators

We argue there is a gap in the literature around the necessary visibility required to offer a successful data curation service.



Our research

Data Curation Network

- 19 Member institutions
 - 59 current curators
- Member funded since July 2021



Curator's Corner

- Publicly available on DCN website
- At time of writing, 35 interviews conducted
 - 1 removed (co-author)
- 18 institutions

Results

1. Curation is a service provided by and for people

'Data is a scholarly product that is increasingly important, and curation is important maintenance work, and both are often overlooked...Data curation tends to be very individual and isolated work. It's good to create a social network so people can collaborate.'

2. Community of curators, especially in times of stress and uncertainty, is invaluable.

‘It’s such a thoughtful community. And it’s so functional, it seems like such a basic word to use, but it’s amazing how functional it really is. I love that it’s just a community of people providing expertise and guidance, enabling growth, and providing emotional support. It’s really unique and wonderful.’

3. Expanding the capacity of member institutions

'[t]he level of curation and augmentation of data that we can provide as a network is greater than what we can do on our own'

'If we can create a successful proof of concept it could be applicable to any institution that does this work. The Data Curation Network is thinking beyond the institutional level, and we're exploring how to leverage capacity across institutions.'

Discussion

- A key draw of the network is the opportunity for data curators to see and be seen
- People-forward → transparency between colleagues builds trust among people.
 - We accept and embrace our individual perspectives, skills and shortcomings

Recommendations

- Highlight curators and their efforts on public-facing websites, such as your institutional repository or department website.
- Create avenues for engagement with other curators at your institution or in your area.
- Develop outward-facing documentation describing the steps your institution's curators take when curating data
- Reframe how curation is described to researchers and depositors.

Recommendations (cont.)

- Seek out and include curator opinions and perspectives
- Create, maintain, and utilize clear, cross-subject definitions regarding the expectations and responsibilities associated with various roles in the data curation process
- Explicitly clarify and create space in documentation and literature around curation to discuss both technology as well as human-centered aspects
- Make visible the role of the data curator

Thank you to our colleagues in the DCN!

- Halle Burns, Research Data Management Specialist, Princeton University
 - halle.burns@princeton.edu
- Sandi Caldron, Research Data Librarian, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
 - caldron2@illinois.edu
- Mikala Narlock, Director, Data Curation Network
 - mnarlock@umn.edu