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An Evolving Approach to Supporting Indigenous Data Sovereignty in an Institutional Data Repository

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Our university is built on the traditional and contemporary homelands of the Dakota people, a federally recognized Tribal Nation made up of four communities and their sovereign governments. We recognize the importance of acknowledging the People on whose land we live, learn, and work, but understand that words are not enough. Within our institutional data repository, we seek to improve and strengthen our relations with Minnesota Native Tribal Nations (Dakota and Anishinaabe) by supporting and advocating for Indigenous data sovereignty (IDSov), which affirms the rights of Indigenous Peoples, communities, and Nations to govern the collection, ownership, and application of data pertaining to them, their lands, and their non-human relations.

We began thinking about Indigenous data in earnest in 2021, when we received a dataset about animal locations and recognized shortly thereafter that the data collection occurred on Tribal lands. This marked the first time we requested documentation of Tribal approval for data sharing.

In the years since, we have been actively engaged in learning more about steps we could take to better manage Indigenous datasets and preserve Indigenous data governance. We implemented new language in our data repository's automated email, encouraging submitters to clarify Tribal data ownership and consent if applicable.

Next, we engaged in conversations with the US Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network where we received generous guidance from 16 collaborative members, and in April 2024 we attended the US Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance Summit. These experiences inspired a systematic assessment of Indigenous data within our repository as a first step. We utilized Data Services Continuing Professional Education to find a partner who could help to launch this effort. Her formidable efforts set us up to take immediate, effective action - she developed a list of Indigenous data search terms, created a spreadsheet to document datasets existing in our repository, curated relevant policies and resources, and drafted recommendations for us as we proceed.

We are currently focused on relationship development within our university which has resulted in the Native American Affairs Office offering to review and provide feedback on the list of Indigenous search terms. The list - now finalized and tailored to our repository - will be utilized to audit our data repository. We will document data that is potentially governed by Indigenous Peoples and collect information about that data, such as whether or not there is evidence of Indigenous consent to share the data in a public repository. This is just the beginning as we advocate for the ethical and responsible stewardship of Indigenous data, aligned with IDSov and the CARE Principles.

This poster will describe the background work that we did to better understand Indigenous data governance, repository audit details, early outcomes, and possible next steps.

Primary authors: ZUNIGA, Alicia (California State University, Sacramento); HUNT, Shanda (University of Minnesota); MARSOLEK, Wanda (University of Minnesota); GERBER, Kent (University of Minnesota); FARRELL, Shannon (University of Minnesota Libraries)

Presenter: FARRELL, Shannon (University of Minnesota Libraries)

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