

# Researcher examines complexities of data-sharing in four research projects

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Christine Borgman, the Distinguished Professor and Presidential Chair in Information Studies at UCLA, looks at how researchers in a data-intensive environment handle and share information.

Christine Borgman, who studies how research information is retrieved, processed, curated and conveyed, is in the right place at the right

time—when the demand for data by researchers and scholars in many different disciplines is greater than ever before.

But sharing [data](#) isn't as simple as it sounds.

"Data are complex, compound, heterogeneous and messy objects that rarely lend themselves to easy sharing or reuse," said Borgman, the Distinguished Professor and Presidential Chair in Information Studies at UCLA and a scholar with degrees in mathematics, library and information science, and communication research.

Borgman and her research team at UCLA's Center for Knowledge Infrastructures will be analyzing how data are handled in four different research projects in astronomy, biology and the medical sciences with the aim of simplifying the complexities of data practices and challenging prevailing assumptions about the value of sharing data. To help them accomplish this, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation recently awarded her research group a three-year grant that posed this question in its title: "If [data sharing](#) is the answer, what is the question?"

By presenting their findings to these scientific communities as well as to funding agencies, government agencies, publishers and other key stakeholders, the team hopes to change policy, she explained.

In addition to her research, Borgman has written a new book, "Big Data, Little, Data, No Data: Scholarship in the Networked World," published last January by MIT Press. Her book builds upon earlier assessments of the global information infrastructure and examines data and scholarly research.

"Having the right data is usually better than having more data; little data can be just as important as [big data](#)," she pointed out.

In the book, Borgman lays out the challenges of data-intensive scholarship; includes a series of case studies of data practices in the sciences, social sciences and humanities; and assesses data sharing, reuse, credit, attribution and discovery.

"While I don't claim to have the answer to these challenges, my goal is to provoke a much fuller and more comprehensive conversation about the diversity of data and practices, the infrastructure required to support them, and the roles and responsibilities of varied stakeholders," Borgman explained.

She maintains that we need to make a huge investment in knowledge infrastructures to support the management, curation and use of data in the future. She defines knowledge infrastructures as "an ecology of people, practices, technologies, institutions, material objects and relationships."

Borgman, who has been teaching at UCLA since 1983, has led classes on information retrieval, library automation and information-seeking behavior. Prior to joining UCLA, she developed the first course on [human-computer interaction](#) at Stanford University.

When she came to Los Angeles, she not only established a new course in human-computer interaction, but also brought information policy, electronic publishing, bibliometrics and data curation into the curriculum. She also expanded existing IT courses in the then-Graduate School of Library and Information Studies. She was recently named a co-chair of the Academic Senate-administration data governance task force, which was formed to recommend a campus governance mechanism in response to the increasing demand for data about UCLA students, faculty and staff.

An exemplary role model with a passion for interdisciplinary research,

Borgman dedicates a large amount of her time to mentoring students and young researchers in these fields.

"What excites me about interdisciplinary research is the opportunity to combine disparate perspectives and to learn from each other," she said.

Despite her incredible achievements, Borgman remains a humble leader. "The most rewarding outcome of these projects is guiding my brilliant team of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows to making their own discoveries," she said.

When asked about her proudest accomplishments and what she looks forward to achieving in the future, Borgman remained modest.

"My proudest accomplishments are my students, who have gone on to lead their own research teams, win their own grants, found companies and take on leadership roles in professional societies," she said. "My future accomplishments, in addition to successful research and influencing policy, are to advance my current students, to mentor my graduates and to learn from all of them."

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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