Do Students Care?
Student Perspectives on Personal Data Use in Library Learning Analytics

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Grant Overview

A student-centered, three-year research project to study student perspectives of privacy issues associated with academic library participation in learning analytics initiatives

• Phase One: Student Interviews

• Phase Two: Multi-institution Student Survey

• Phase Three: Scenario-Based Focus Groups
“Students Don’t Care about Privacy”

How Students Learned to Stop Worrying — and Love Being Spied On

By David Rosen and Aaron Santesso

Guiding Research Questions

• What privacy issues do students identify when informed about library learning analytics initiatives?

• How do the identified privacy issues map to particular goals of learning analytics initiatives?

• How do privacy perceptions change according to student demographics and academic experiences?

• With regard to their privacy expectations, what library and non-library learning analytics scenarios are acceptable to students?
What are Learning Analytics?

The “measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of [student and other data] for the purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.”

Library Participation in Learning Analytics

- 83% (53) of ARL libraries were participating in learning analytics projects

  *SPEC Kit 360: Learning Analytics*, a survey of Association of Research Library members (https://doi.org/10.29242/spec.360)

- > 44 Published studies since 2010

  Robertshaw & Asher (2019)
Why is Student Privacy an Issue?

- LA infrastructures make visible student demographics, behaviors, and intellectual processes
- LA enables powerful actors to describe and predict student life
- LA practices enable human actors and systems to intervene in student life and influence their decision making
- There are serious data access and control issues
- Privacy is an important function of autonomy & academic freedom
Phase One:
Student Interviews
Interviews

• Semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students

• 112 Interviews across 8 institutions
  • Indiana University-Bloomington; Bloomington, Indiana
  • Indiana University-Indianapolis (IUPUI); Indianapolis, Indiana
  • Linn-Benton Community College; Albany, Oregon
  • Northwestern University; Evanston, Illinois
  • Oregon State University; Corvallis, Oregon
  • University of Illinois at Chicago; Chicago, Illinois
  • University of Wisconsin-Madison; Madison, Wisconsin
  • University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Structure

• Each interview asked three core questions then focused on a specific theme

• Themes included:
  • Privacy (generally)
  • Data sharing and use
  • Data protections
  • Awareness of and reactions to learning analytics
  • Libraries and learning analytics

• Interviews averaged around 30 minutes
Emerging Findings
Information Collection by Institutions

- Students are generally unaware of the data and information their institutions collect when initially asked.

- However, probing questions revealed that students could identify a variety of demographic, academic, financial, and other information to which their institutions may collect or have access.

- Some students were able to identify that campus information systems were likely to track their digital behaviors.
“I don’t know what information [my institution] is necessarily taking from me.”

“[The LMS knows] every move a student is making.”
Information Access by Libraries

- Students overwhelmingly believed libraries tracked the physical materials they checked out.

- Some students suggested that librarians have access to academic information, including a student's enrollment records and stated program of study—but not their course grades and grade point average (GPA).

- Other students suggested that libraries know when students interact with information systems and what they search for within those systems, such as the library website and journal databases.
Information Collection by Libraries

- Responses to institutional and library access to student information were, on the whole, positive.

- Students saw that benefits could accrue for themselves, their peers, and their institution from accessing and analyzing student information.

- Students recognize that when they are using institutional services and information systems, it is plausible—if not an actual reality—that information is being created about them and made accessible for analytical purposes.
Information Restrictions

• Students expressed nuanced arguments about when access should be restricted, especially concerning third parties

• Some students recognized that their liberal perspective on information access should not determine the privacy rights of their peers

• Some information is especially sensitive, and that information deserves rigorous access limitations

• Students primarily referred to GPA, but there were other notable examples about healthcare records
“So, me personally, I don’t search things that are really like too out there. I could see where someone else might do that and that would be like a problem; I definitely understand that… since I personally don’t do anything that would embarrass me, I wouldn’t be worried about the school seeing… for other students who might not be able to do what I’m doing, give them some privacy.
Information Restrictions and Third Parties

• Students reacted negatively to providing entities outside of the institution access to student data.

• Student concerns about third-party data access lessened under two conditions:

  1) When data are presented in statistical form without identifying characteristics, students perceived fewer chances of downstream harms.

  2) Students expressed that they would like the opportunity to review the reasons for such sharing and the ability to consent to specific data practices.
“…if you’re actually helping the students get an article that they need for like a research paper, then I feel like that would be fine…. [If] it’s not benefitting the student in any way or may harm them, then I think that’s where you kind of have to draw the line.”
“I guess it comes back to what type of data are they looking at? Is it more personal stuff or is it solely looking at, well, **what are they researching for this, or what are they doing?**”
Trust in Libraries

• Their concerns, however, were allayed in part by their trust in their library

• To maintain that trust—and the student’s belief that their privacy remained protected—students expressed that libraries should have “protocols” and “data classifications” in place, which would define sensitive data types and guide data uses
“And, I feel like since there’s kind of like a trust in libraries, like libraries should kind of like return that like gesture in a way. Like, I trust the institution of a library. I don’t trust Facebook. So, it’s like when you’re on Facebook, you know it’s kind of like the Wild West….. The implicit kind of feeling that people have towards libraries, the library should not betray that trust.”
Concluding Discussion
Privacy Literacy

- Students became more forthcoming with their perspectives and privacy expectations as they worked through interviews.

- Many students struggled to describe basic information to which their institution may have access and use for analytic purposes.

- The discursive process created an opportunity for them to increase their awareness of learning analytics and enhance their privacy literacy.
Awareness and Informed Consent

- Students’ lack awareness about their institutions' data practices stems in part from minimal—sometimes nonexistent—informed consent processes.

- By informing students of an institution’s data practices, protections, and their related privacy rights, student understanding of how particular data practices intersect with privacy issues is likely to increase.

- Treat informed consent as an educational process—not a policy burden.
Questions?

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