

Decentralization and duplication: Research information management in the United States

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In Europe, most university leaders and lecturers have a ready grasp of the terms Current Research Information System ([CRIS](#)) or Research Information Management System (RIMS). These terms—and the systems they refer to—have been around for some time, are widespread across the continent as shown in the euroCRIS Directory of Research Information Systems (DRIS), and play an important role in policy compliance monitoring and in reporting for external requirements from research funders relating to research assessment and open access.

But across the Atlantic in the United States, the situation is far from clear. Terms like CRIS are occasionally used but are poorly understood—and often misapplied. Instead, there is little consensus about what constitutes a research information management system, and a multiplicity of terms are used instead, such as research networking system (RNS), research profiling system (RPS), expert finder system (EFS), and faculty activity reporting (FAR) system. This lack of standardized terminology is a direct result of the diffuse uses giving rise to different systems supported and used by disparate stakeholders.

The recent two-part report series entitled *Research Information Management in the United States*, oclc.org/us-rim-report, from [OCLC Research](#), examines the complex US ecosystem, which is characterized by decentralization and duplication. The report was published in Nov 2021 under the OCLC project “Research Information Management at US Institutions” and led by Rebecca Bryant at OCLC Research and Jan Fransen at the University of Minnesota with the support from three additional RIM experts at US institutions and euroCRIS.

In this presentation, two of the report co-authors will provide an overview of the report findings, including

- A description of the project methodology, which involved the documentation of RIM practices at five US research universities, selected for their diversity of practices, systems, products, and stakeholders. These institutions are Penn State University, Texas A&M University, Virginia Tech, UCLA (including University of California system practices), and the University of Miami. During late 2020 and early 2021, the research team conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with 39 individuals.
- An introduction to the six discrete use cases supported by RIM systems, as described in the reports. These include faculty activity reporting, public portals, metadata reuse, strategic reporting and decision support, open access workflows, and compliance monitoring.
- An overview of high level findings. For instance, most institutions support multiple RIM uses, often with different systems (and varying degrees of interoperability), with the engagement of a wide variety of stakeholders.
- An overview of a [RIM system framework](#) that provides a visual representation of the functional and technical components of a RIM system, subdivided into data sources, data processes, and data consumers.

We will conclude by sharing the definition of RIM practice offered in the reports:

Research Information Management (RIM) systems support the transparent aggregation, curation, and utilization of data about institutional research activities.¹

While intended to summon together the diverse practices in the United States, the report authors hope that this definition can also help bridge European and American practices, to provide greater international agreement on just what constitutes research information management.

Selected bibliography

- Bryant, Rebecca, Jan Fransen, Pablo de Castro, Brenna Helmstutler, and David Scherer. 2021. Research Information Management in the United States: Part 1—Findings and Recommendations. Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. <https://doi.org/10.25333/8hgy-s428>.
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- Bryant, Rebecca, Anna Clements, Pablo de Castro, Joanne Cantrell, Annette Dortmund, Jan Fransen, Peggy Gallagher, and Michele Mennielli. 2018. Practices and Patterns in Research Information Management: Findings from a Global Survey. Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. <https://doi.org/10.25333/BGFG-D241>

¹ Bryant, Rebecca, Jan Fransen, Pablo de Castro, Brenna Helmstutler, and David Scherer. 2021. Research Information Management in the United States: Part 1—Findings and Recommendations. Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. <https://doi.org/10.25333/8hgy-s428>, 7.

- Bryant, Rebecca, Annette Dortmund, and Constance Malpas. 2017. Convenience and Compliance: Case Studies on Persistent Identifiers in European Research Information Management. Dublin, OH: OCLC Research. <https://doi.org/10.25333/C32K7M>
- Several posts related to research information management are also available in the OCLC Research Hanging Together blog: <https://hangingtogether.org/tag/rim-in-the-united-states/>.