The Data Intensive University: The Idea of a University in a Digital Age

Speaker Biography

Dr. David Berry, Professor of Digital Humanities at University of Sussex, will be the speaker for this meeting. His research explores the theoretical and medium-specific challenges of understanding digital and computational media. His work draws on digital humanities, critical theory, political economy, and social theory. His new work examines the historical, philosophical, and cultural implications of the digital and computational era.

Abstracts

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In a digital age the university needs to reconsider what constitutes value and its contribution to public life in more ways than one. The university is increasingly constructed by a data-centric economy and polity. I argue that there are two issues that are interesting to consider. Firstly, that the GDPR might require universities to have or to be “explainable” in some sense and therefore subject to the same data protection regime as other algorithms (perhaps as Explainable Universities – xU). This may mean they are required to provide their internal processing descriptions (e.g. automated grading/plagiarism detection) – the social right to explanation. This right has come to be known as the problem of explainability for artificial intelligence (AI) and the creation of an economy of imperious digital monopolies. We need to ask key questions about who, what, why, when, where, for whom and with what purpose such processing takes place. How can we explain this to new generations or to the wider public? Perhaps explainability offers a critical site to reflect on these questions?

For me, a critical site for both understanding these issues and for starting the process of responding to them is the idea of a “data-intensive university” (DIU), which is increasingly constructed by a data-centric economy and polity. I argue that a number of shifting social, political and economic forces call for a response in the form of a new distinctive role for the university. But this also raises new questions for the university – what thereby is the compass by which a university is able to justify its direction? In this talk I will explore these issues and the ways forward for meeting the challenges.