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# Big grant for big data at UW

Posted by [Brier Dudley](#)

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The University of Washington is one of three schools across the country sharing a major grant to spread "big data" analysis skills beyond computer science and apply them to other fields.

The UW's share of the five-year, \$38 million grant will build up the school's [eScience Institute](#) and [Center for Statistics and Social Sciences](#). It is funding five data scientists, four postdoctoral data science fellows and a "data science studio" that will be a campus-wide resource.

Building up this cluster of expertise may also add momentum to the [UW computer-science department's push for a new building](#) to be used partly for interdisciplinary research.

"Our goal is to figure out how to rapidly evolve universities to support and utilize data-intensive discovery," Ed Lazowska, eScience Institute founder and computer-science professor, said via email.

"We have been doing this on a small scale, but now we'll be able to work the problem at a large scale, and as a collaboration among three teams that include some of the strongest faculty at some of the nation's strongest universities."

Other recipients of the grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation are New York University and the University of California-Berkeley.

"We see enormous potential in the cross-pollination that happens by having participants co-locate in the data science studio," Bill Howe, a UW affiliate assistant professor of computer science and engineering, said in the UW release. "These projects will help expose common problems and enable collaboration as we continue to scale up our investment in data science expertise."

Lazowska said the schools were selected in May, but it took months to sort out the "arranged marriage." Details were also kept quiet until today, when the program is being presented at a White House event highlighting a number of big-data research projects.

The UW also received an additional \$2.8 million "integrative graduate education and research traineeship" grant from the National Science Foundation that will fund graduate students learning to analyze massive data collections in their research fields.

Other projects called out today by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy include a partnership between Amazon Web Services and NASA. Amazon.com hosts and shares earth observation data gathered from space.

"America is rich with institutions that are expert at generating data, but as a nation we have not fulfilled our potential to make the most of these data by merging pre-competitive resources, partnering on analytics and sharing lessons learned," John Holdren, OSTP director, said in a release.

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Brier Dudley offers a critical look at technology and business issues affecting the Northwest. Send tips or comments to [bdudley@seattletimes.com](mailto:bdudley@seattletimes.com). His column runs Monday, and his commentary appears here all week.