Finding the Right Words

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METADATA JUSTICE IN OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES & ARCHIVES SYMPOSIUM

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Overview

1. **Define what we mean by inclusive metadata statement and why create one**

2. **Provide an overview of our process**

3. **Question the use of the word "decolonization" in the context of remediating library metadata**

What is an "Inclusive Metadata Statement"?

Also known as...

- **"Statement on Potentially Harmful Language"**
- **"Statement on Critical Cataloging"**
- **"Ethical Cataloging Statement"**
- **"Historical Language Advisory"**

The Cataloging Lab

"statement on harmful or offensive language in description and bias in cataloging"

State of the Cataloging Profession

Increased Call for Addressing Problematic Metadata
Calling out LCSH has been around for a while…
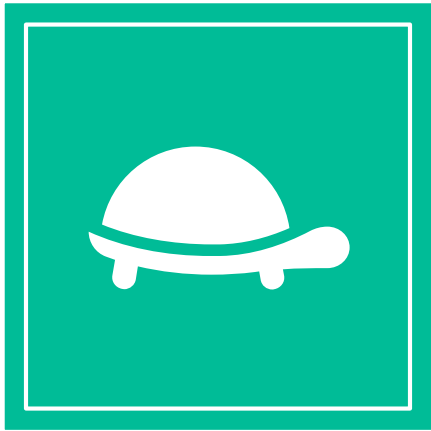
"Illegal Aliens" Subject Heading
…but it's become more prominent as libraries were making localized changes and many are not satisfied with "illegal immigrants" as the revised heading

Increased Transparency of Bureaucratic Processes
Catalogers have been working to explicate the subject heading creation and revision process (SACO)

Why Draft an Inclusive Metadata Statement?

Explanation of Bureaucracy

Empathy for Users

Commitment to Progress

Our Process

Overview of Our Process

Task 1
Draft an inclusive metadata statement

Task 2
Identify inclusive metadata strategies

Task 3
Create a form for users to report offensive terminology

Review
2 rounds of review (first with area director and final review with executive director)

Release
Published in the About section of our website

Task 1

Draft an inclusive metadata statement

1. **Reviewing existing statements**
2. **Decide on a name**
3. **Create an outline**
4. **Write!**

- We went through the list on The Cataloging Lab and read as many statements as possible

- Our initial task was to identify the ones we liked best and why

- Our favorite statements focused on actions specifically taken

Task 1

Draft an inclusive metadata statement

1. **Reviewing existing statements**
2. **Decide on a name**
3. **Create an outline**
4. **Write!**

- No standard name for this type of proclamation
  - "Acknowledgment of bias"
  - "Statement of ethical description"

- Inclusive Metadata
  - Phrasing aligns with UCO's Inclusive Community initiative

Task 1

Draft an inclusive metadata statement

1. Reviewing existing statements
2. Decide on a name
3. Create an outline
4. Write!

- Acknowledgement of problematic metadata
- Context
- What we're committed to doing

Task 1

Draft an inclusive metadata statement

1. **Reviewing existing statements**
2. **Decide on a name**
3. **Create an outline**
4. **Write!**

- **Write collaboratively**
  - **We each took a piece of the outline and wrote the corresponding part**

- **Consider word choice carefully**
  - **We strongly caution against using the word "decolonize" in any of these statements**

Acknowledgement

Who is acknowledging the problem?

What is the problem?

Where is this problem?

Max Chambers Library is committed to serving underrepresented communities. One way we accomplish this is through our professional catalogers' dedication to accurately and respectfully describing materials relating to underrepresented communities. We acknowledge that standards for descriptive practice are entrenched in discriminatory concepts, such as racism, homophobia, ableism, and misogyny. These practices directly affect our users as metadata rooted in discrimination may be visible to our community in Central Search, SHAREOK, the library's website, or the library's digital collections. We are actively taking steps to ameliorate these problematic practices that directly affect the Central community's access to library resources.

Background / Library of Congress

Consider the audience

Explain in a user-friendly manner

Not an attack on Library of Congress personnel or colleagues contributing through SACO

Libraries are not without biases - both conscious and unconscious - that affect policies and practices. In the case of cataloging and metadata, *the classification of library resources reflects how a cataloger views and interprets the subject matter. We primarily use the classification standards maintained by the Library of Congress*, which have been created by *people with their own biases and judgments from their specific cultures and time periods.*

Commitment

So what we will do about it?

By acknowledging weaknesses and flaws in these standards and other areas of librarianship, we aim to support the [University's inclusive community initiative](#) through the following practices:

List of Commitments (no. 1-3)

Cultivate a supportive and safe environment where staff feel encouraged to acknowledge their biases and engage in constructive discussions.

Continue to identify areas of bias in the library.

Apply metadata using the standards provided by the Library of Congress in a selective manner and use professional judgment for incorporating alternative controlled vocabularies.

List of Commitments (no. 4-6)

Collaborate with Library Systems staff in identifying opportunities for data normalization for vendor-supplied metadata found in Central Search.

Commit to actively learning about controlled vocabularies that improve access to resources by or about underrepresented communities.

Commit to completion of specialized training and become approved to submit new or revised terminology to the Library of Congress.

Before You Commit...

Do you have the staffing?
Can you adequately carry out the tasks you want to do? It's ok to start small!

Are you able to get training?
What training opportunities are available? What are obstacles?

Are you able to carry out newly-trained tasks?
Be professional -- don't waste your trainers' time with not following through on anything!

Task 2

Identify inclusive metadata strategies

- What have we done?
- What are we currently doing?
- What do we plan to do?

Purpose

- Provide evidence of action behind words
- Provide examples to large audience
- Show existing projects for those who might want to report something

Categories

Offensive/Outdated Terminology
Verbiage used in standardized library cataloging practices that is based on outdated or offensive language

Classification
The basis for creating call numbers, which are used to organize library materials in the physical stacks

Inclusive Language
Opportunities to provide more inclusive language in library metadata

Offensive/Outdated Terminology

Problem	Action	Status
"Illegal Aliens" and "Illegal Immigrants" (Library of Congress Subject Headings)	Replaced with "undocumented immigrants" in metadata sourced from WorldCat as part of greater library community initiative Updated 2022 to include revised subject heading "illegal immigrants"	Retroactive removal completed (2020) On-going removal for new materials (2020-present)

Classification

Problem	Action	Status
The letter "N" to organize materials by, about, or relating to Black people in the library's physical collections	Replace "N" with "B" in call numbers for materials by, about, or relating to Black people - 300 titles affected have been identified for review and reclassifying.	Library of Congress issued change (07/2021) Titles identified in collection (08/2021) Project underway (09/2021-Present)

Inclusive Language

Problem	Action	Status
Inadequate options for 2SLGBTQIA+ descriptors in Library of Congress Subject Headings	Utilize terms from Homosaurus, a linked data vocabulary designed to be more inclusive of the nuances of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, in addition to existing metadata when appropriate.	Homosaurus identified as an option (2016) Adding terms on-going (2016-Present)

HOMOSAURUS
AN INTERNATIONAL LGBTQ+ LINKED DATA VOCABULARY

Task 3

Create a form for users to report offensive terminology

- Contacted other institutions

- Decided on naming the form "Report Offensive/Outdated Terminology"

- Option for users to remain anonymous

Offensive/Outdated Terminology Form

Please use this form to submit offensive/outdated terminology you encountered in Central Search, SHAREOK, the library's website, or the library's digital collections. Current projects addressing identified problems are listed at Inclusive Metadata Strategies. Questions about this form may be directed to metadata@uco.edu.

Please list the offensive/outdated term: (required)

> Please list only metadata that is not found on the resource itself (e.g. table of contents, title, etc.)

Please provide the citation of the resource whose metadata/descript...ywords included the offensive/outdated term: (required)

> Please copy/paste the citation (title, author) here

Where did you see the offensive/outdated term? (required)

○ Central Search

○ UCO Library Website

○ SHAREOK

○ Other

Would you like to be contacted for follow-up?

○ Yes

○ No

SUBMIT

- Clarification about how we're looking for metadata not found on the item itself

Final Review and Uploaded to Website

Once signed off by Executive Director, we uploaded everything to our website

Statement

Strategies

Form

But our work is not done!
These actions are only just the beginning

Why We Avoided the Word "Decolonization"

Acknowledgements

- **This is not an attack on our colleagues in the broader library community who may use "decolonize" to describe this work**

- **We acknowledge that decolonization used metaphorically is not limited to library spaces**

- **This perspective is our own and not necessarily in line with our employer's, as UCO's website on our land acknowledgement discusses decolonization of the academy, education, etc.**

Webster's Dictionary Says....

To decolonize

- **To free people from colonial status**

- **To relinquish control of a subjugated people or area**

- **To free from the dominating influence of a colonizing power**

Decolonization Redefined

"Decolonization is the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. On the one hand, decolonization involves dismantling structures that perpetuate the status quo and addressing unbalanced power dynamics. On the other hand, decolonization involves valuing and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and approaches and weeding out settler biases or assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being. For non-Indigenous people, decolonization is the process of examining your beliefs about Indigenous Peoples and culture by learning about yourself in relationship to the communities where you live and the people with whom you interact."

[**Source: Pulling Together: A Guide for Front-Line Staff, Student Services, and Advisors by Ian Cull; Robert L. A. Hancock; Stephanie McKeown; Michelle Pidgeon; and Adrienne Vedan**]

"Decolonizing" the catalog ?

Are These Actions Really "Decolonizing The Catalog"?

- **Identifying harmful language**
- **Updating and proposing new Library of Congress subject headings**
- **Finding new terminology to use instead of outdated or offensive words**
- **Updating Cutter numbers**

Ask Ourselves

- What do we mean when we say "decolonizing the catalog"?

- Have we given full consideration the meaning and impact of "decoloniz*?"

- Is it an appropriate way to describe metadata remediation?

In a Nutshell

We purposely chose not to use "decolonize" in our inclusive metadata statement because

1. Equating decolonization with remediation didn't feel right, because decolonization is far more than remediation

2. Decolonization is a powerful, radical act, and would we be watering down its meaning by using it metaphorically?

3. It didn't feel like it was our word to use, and we wanted our statement to reflect our genuine and sincere intentions

From Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang:

"When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks.

The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym."

[**Source: Decolonization is not a metaphor."**]

From Dr. Nayantara Sheoran Appleton:

"I thus hold my fellow academics to account and ask for some refrain when using the word 'Decolonizing.' It does a disservice to the amazing indigenous scholarship and activist work that is targeting power structures to shake and reshape them to accommodate indigeneity. So, my humble suggestion, till you are actually willing and able to do the work of decolonizing the structures you (and even me) benefit from currently, let us think of better words to do what we are actually doing."

[Source: Do Not 'Decolonize' . . . If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding]

What Are Some Other Words We Could Use Instead?

Appleton's examples:

- *Diversify your syllabus and curriculum*
- *Digress from the cannon [sic]*
- *Decentre knowledge and knowledge production*
- *Devalue hierarchies*
- *Disinvest from citational power structures*
- *Diminish some voices and opinions in meetings, while magnifying other*

How We Can We Be More Specific to Describe This Important Work?

- **Diversify**
- **Digress**
- **Decenter**
- **Devalue**
- **Disinvest**
- **Diminish**

How We Can We Be More Specific to Describe This Important Work?

- Diversify controlled vocabularies used in bibliographic metadata
- Digress from outdated terminology and ensure your documentation reflects these local practices
- Decenter white supremacy from bibliographic metadata
- Devalue Dewey
- Disinvest from vendors with poor quality metadata
- Diminish the idea that cataloging is "neutral"

The catalog is more than just subject headings and terminology used to describe materials—

Its very organizational structure would have to be completely dismantled to truly decolonize the catalog!

What Would That Look Like?

- **Complete overhaul of WorldCat**
  - **Worth noting that "what is known must be shared®" is not necessarily in line with different cultures' perspectives on knowledge organization**
- **Complete overhaul of our integrated library systems and service platforms**
- **Complete overhaul of Resource Description and Access and the rules/instructions that guide catalogers in creating metadata**
- **Complete overhaul of classification schemes and controlled vocabularies beyond just improvements**

Is "Decolonization" *Really* The Right Word?

- **Are we scrapping the library catalog as it currently exists and remaking it with an Indigenous perspective?**

- **Are we violently dismantling structures that uphold white supremacy?**

- **Are we relinquishing control of colonized land and resources and returning them to Indigenous peoples?**

...If the answer is "no" or "we don't know," we're probably not decolonizing.

Parting Thoughts

- **Worth having this discussion as a profession – please share your thoughts (even and especially if you have a different perspective than ours!) in the chat**

- **Words and how we use them are important, so our statements must reflect conscientious, informed research, careful consideration, and genuine sincerity**

Recommended Resources

- **The Cataloging Lab: List of Statements on Bias in Library and Archives Description**

- **Cataloging Ethics Bibliography**

- **CritCat.org**

- **CritLib.org: CritCat**

- **"Do Not 'Decolonize'. . . If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding"**

- **"Decolonization is not a metaphor."**

Questions?

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