

The Importance of Community: Planning a Reparative Description Symposium in Your State

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Some context around our interesting times...

- Michigan is considered a purple state and currently has a Democrat Governor
- Michigan does not have state statutes or laws restricting DEIA+ work
- We are affected by Federal Executive Orders, but they did not affect our ability to host this symposium



Building a foundational community



- 2023 - At the Michigan Academic Libraries Conference, the Cataloging and Metadata Interest Group and the Critical Librarianship Interest Groups jointly hosted a workshop on incorporating critical cataloging into our work.
- 2024 - representatives from Ferris State University, Hope College, Michigan State University, and University of Michigan, and University of Michigan-Dearborn presented a series of lightning talks on projects each library has undertaken to address harmful language in their catalogs.
- 2024-2025 - [MSU Harmful Language Remediation Working Group](#) began meeting regularly with the [University of Michigan DEIA Catalog Working Group](#)

Meanwhile at MSU Libraries...

- Internal enthusiasm around building on this community development honed through MiALA and MSUL/UM
- Offer to present from Blaire Morseau, a citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Michigan State University. She is also Affiliate Faculty in Digital Humanities and American Indian and Indigenous Studies at MSU.
- Noticed that Anne Heidemann & Melissa Isaac had been presenting at libraries across Michigan on their locally created Maawn Doobiigeng Classification System for the Chippewa Tribal Library

Can we combine these
opportunities to build an event?

Intentions

- Center our guest Indigenous voices and perspectives
- Offer opportunities for attendees to present on interesting projects as well
- Provide time for attendees to connect
- Bring together cultural heritage workers from across areas -- academic libraries, K12 libraries, public libraries, vendors, library school students, archivists, etc.
- Keep costs low to encourage participation from folks who may not have professional development funds
 - Solicited sponsorships from MiALA and our R1 state institutions - MSU Libraries, University of Michigan Libraries, and the Wayne State University Library System
- Opted to keep it an in-person event this year since we didn't know what to expect re: interest.



Logistics

- Established a working group to handle planning that included our Latin American and Indigenous Studies Librarian, our Middle East Studies & Religious Studies liaison librarian, two Special Collections catalog librarians, and our Associate Dean for Diversity, Inclusion and Organization Development
- MSU Libraries fortunate to have an events coordinator
- Advertised on numerous listservs
- Handled registration via or [LibCal app](#)
- Included tours of interesting spaces in the library (e.g., Special Collections, Digital Scholarship Lab, Map Library)
- Food logistics is tricky, but worth it to provide meals free of charge!
- Logistics take a team!!



AGENDA



KEYNOTE

Blaire Morseau

Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, 1855 Professor of Great Lakes Anishinaabe Knowledge, Spiritualities, and Cultural Practices, MSU Department of Religious Studies



SPEAKER

Melissa Isaac

Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Libraries



SPEAKER

Anne Heidemann

Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Libraries

9:15–9:45 a.m. **Registration and light refreshments**

9:45–10:00 a.m. **Welcome and remarks**

Nell Romanosky, Dean of MSU Libraries and
Nicole Smeltkop, MSU Libraries

10:00–11:00 a.m. **KEYNOTE**

Better for Everyone: Cataloging Indigenous Archives with Reparative Language and Traditional Knowledge Labels

Blaire Morseau, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, 1855 Professor of Great Lakes Anishinaabe Knowledge, Spiritualities, and Cultural Practices, MSU Department of Religious Studies

11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. .. **Creating Maawn Doobiigeng: Developing An Anishinaabe Classification System for a Tribal Library**

Melissa Isaac and Anne Heidemann, Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Libraries

12:00–1:00 p.m. **Lunch buffet** from Woody's Oasis

(Mediterranean restaurant, vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free options)

OPTIONAL TOURS (sign up at the registration desk)

- Digital Scholarship Lab (12:15 p.m. & 12:30 p.m.)
- Map Library (12:15 p.m. & 12:30 p.m.)
- Murray & Hong Special Collections (12:15 p.m. & 12:30 p.m.)

1:00–2:00 p.m. **Michigan State University and University of Michigan Updates**

- *How It Started and How It's Going: Harmful Language Remediation at MSU Libraries*
Autumn Faulkner & Nicole Smeltkop
- *Updating Metadata at University of Michigan Libraries*
Bonnie Dede & Leigh Billings

2:00–2:15 p.m. **Break, light refreshments**

2:15–3:00 p.m. **Lightning talks**

- *Small steps for big change*
Sarah Baar and Jeremy Barney, Hope College
- *"Face Value": Contextual Cataloging of Historic Native American Photographs*
Jakob Dopp, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan
- *New tool: the RBMS prejudicial works vocabulary*
Ruth Ann Jones, Michigan State University Libraries

3:00–4:00 p.m. **Facilitated Discussion, Leah Morin, MSU Libraries**
Wrap Up, Alex Rivera, MSU Libraries

Outcomes

- Capped our registration at 80 due to our room size...and it filled to capacity!
- Attendees from across the state (including the Upper Peninsula!) as well as from Indiana, Ohio, and Canada!
- Fulfilled our intention to bring folks together across varying areas of librarianship.
- Survey of attendees demonstrated there's interest in holding the symposium again!



Feedback example

I just wanted to express my gratitude and say thank you for your incredible work putting together yesterday's symposium on reparative description. The keynote presentations about Indigenous description and classification were enlightening, and the other presentations and lightning talks were a great way to learn more in depth the problems --and solutions-- we encounter in our work; it's amazing to me how similar our work is, and yet how we approach it differently, our communities can value one change over another.

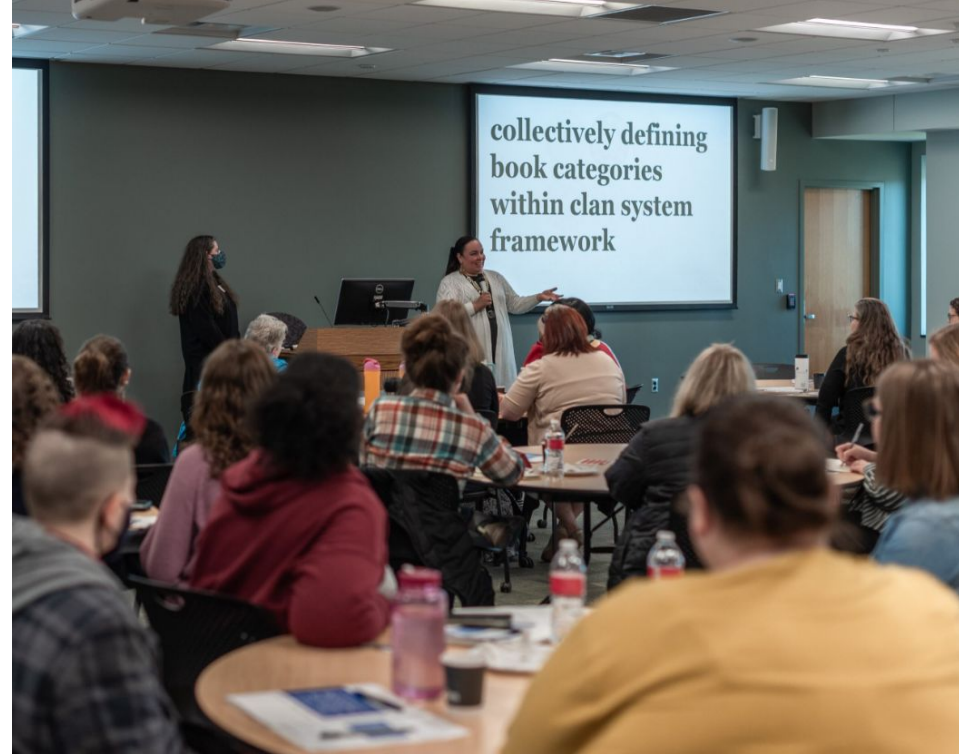
In addition, the snacks, coffee, and food was great, as was the opportunity to tour a bit of the library's spaces (which I have never visited before!).

As a side note, I absolutely loved the fact that you gave us notebooks and pens to take notes with. It made it easier to engage with the presentations and I came away with a laundry list of projects and ideas. I will look forward to seeing the slides as well, but being able to engage from not behind a laptop screen was really valuable for me, so thank you for that!.

I think it was a great symposium, so I just wanted to say thank you all for putting it together, and please pass my gratitude along to your other colleagues who made it possible as well!

Recommendations / Lessons

- Sponsors through professional organizations helps build community and adds justifications for administrators to approve attendance
- Institutions may have endowment funds that can assist - ask!
- Library workers are very interested and passionate about this work, but many work in solo positions - providing opportunities to come together propels this work forward
- It's a big morale boost to come together and see enthusiasm around this work!



Future plans

- Plan to hold another symposium in Spring 2026!
- Next year's theme likely focused on LGBTQIA+ metadata (popular in survey results)
- Surprised to find people preferred East Lansing as a central location instead of moving it around the state.
- Added intention of including more Library Science students and colleagues from nearby states that have laws/statutes prohibiting DEIA activity
- Potential to livestream on Zoom to allow more people to attend
- Excited to build on this momentum!



Thank you!

Nicole Smeltekop

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