Decolonizing Description at the University of Alberta Libraries

SLA Western Chapter Webinar 24 April 2018

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We respectfully acknowledge that the University of Alberta is located on Treaty 6 territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Metis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/ Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community.

Local Contexts

Image: Wikimedia Commons

Image: Indigenous Relations, Government of Alberta

Alberta is home to many diverse Indigenous communities, including Blackfoot (Niitsítapi), Cree (Nêhiyaw), Dene, Nakoda (Stoney), Saulteaux (Anishinaabe). There are **45 First Nations** in **three Treaty areas** (Treaties 6, 7 and 8), as well as other groups who have not signed treaties. The most commonly spoken First Nations languages are **Blackfoot, Cree** (mainly Plains Cree but some Woods Cree), **Chipewyan, Dene, Sarcee and Stoney** (Nakoda Sioux). Métis people live throughout the province, including in the Métis Settlements. In Alberta the Indigenous languages spoken by Métis people include **Cree and Michif**.

Indigenous Initiatives

- Indigenous internship program
- Personal librarian program
- First Nations Information Connection
- First Peoples House & Transition Year Program support
- Nantâwihiwêwin FNMI Student Zine
- Research Support Services for the Field of Indigenous Studies
- Indigenous graphic novel collection
- Indigenous language collection development
- And more ...

Decolonizing Description Working Group (DDWG)

Photo: Andy Grabia

To investigate, define and propose a plan of action for how the University of Alberta Libraries can more accurately, appropriately, and respectfully represent Indigenous peoples and contexts through our descriptive metadata practices.
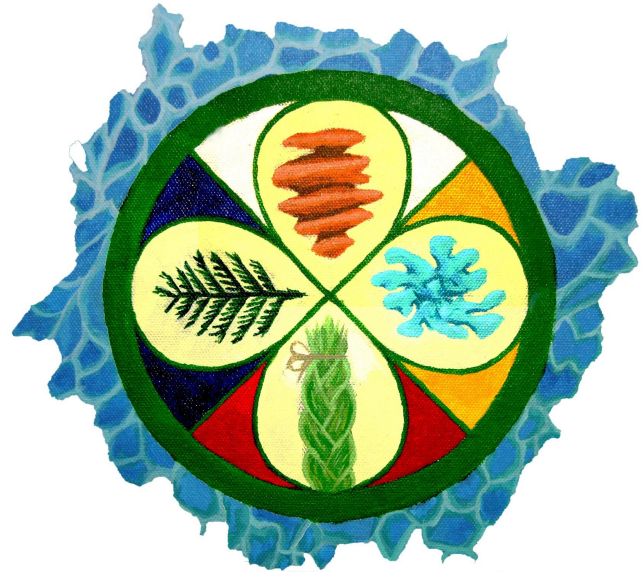
DDWG

Members:

- Metadata Coordinator
- Cataloguing Coordinator
- Associate University Librarian
- Public Service Librarian
- Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator
- Indigenous Intern

Activities:

- Literature review
- Environmental scan
- Consultations
- Data analysis

Literature Review

- Acknowledgement of challenges of describing Indigenous materials with current standards
- Differences between Indigenous and Western approaches to knowledge organization
- Appropriate descriptions and subject access are social justice issues and moral imperatives
- Need for relationship building with communities

Artist: Alex Auger, aauger@ualberta.ca

Consultations & Environmental Scan

Photo: Anne Carr-Wiggin

- To better understand importance of the initiative, interests and concerns
  - Internal Libraries stakeholders
  - Students, alumni
- To learn from others
  - University of British Columbia
  - University of Manitoba
  - Library and Archives Canada

Data Analysis

- Not only metadata in ILS but also metadata for local digital collections, institutional repository materials, etc.
- Begin with subject headings, will look to classification systems as next phase
- Looking to understand potential scope and scale of problematic terminology
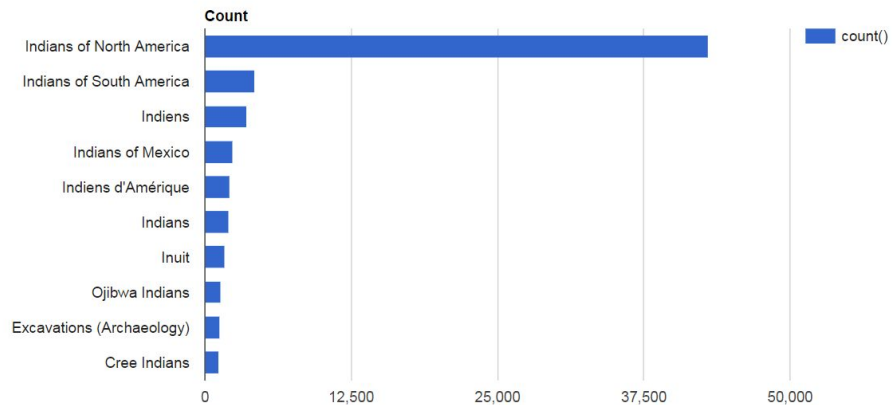

Image: Pixnio (Public Domain)
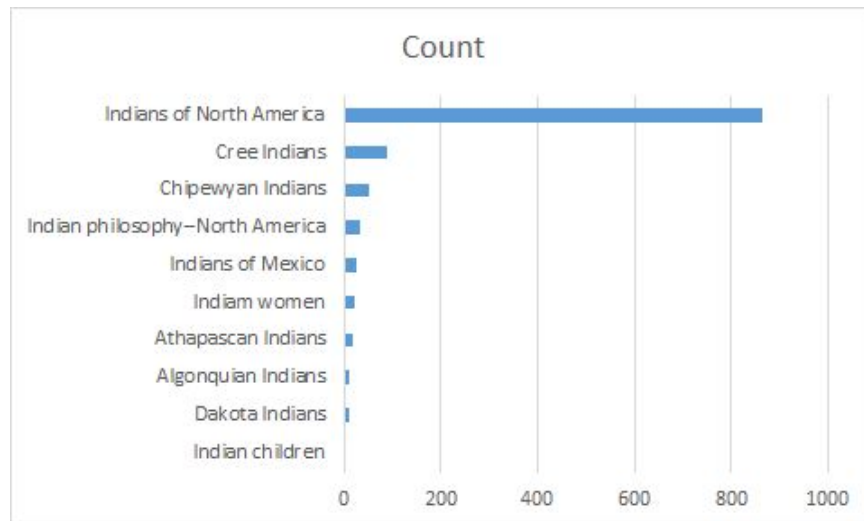
Manitoba Archival Information Network (MAIN)

- Multi-year process to engage community members and experts in reviewing and assessing LCSH
- Proposal for revisions, additions, deletions
- Available at https://libguides.lib.umanitoba.ca/c.php?g=455567&p=3278374
- Used this as the basis to take a snapshot of our metadata

Current LCSH	Change to… OR delete
Indians of Mexico--Social life and customs	Indigenous peoples--Mexico--Social life and customs
Indians of Mexico--Taxation	Indigenous peoples--Taxation--Mexico
Indians of Mexico--Transpacific influences	Indigenous peoples--Mexico--Transpacific influences
Indians of Mexico--Urban residence	Indigenous peoples--Urban residence--Mexico
Indians of Mexico--Wars	Indigenous peoples--Wars--Mexico
Indians of North America	Indigenous peoples--North America
Indians of North America in textbooks	Indigenous peoples in textbooks
Indians of North America--African influences	Indigenous peoples--North America--African influences
Indians of North America--Agriculture	Indigenous peoples--Agriculture--North America
Indians of North America--Agriculture--Health aspects	Indigenous peoples--Agriculture--Health aspects--North America
Indians of North America--Alabama	Indigenous peoples--Alabama
Indians of North America--Alabama--Antiquities	Indigenous peoples--Alabama--Antiquities
Indians of North America--Alaska	Indigenous peoples--Alaska
Indians of North America--Alaska--Antiquities	Indigenous peoples--Alaska--Antiquities
Indians of North America--Alaska--Languages	Indigenous peoples--Alaska--Languages
Indians of North America--Alberta	Indigenous peoples--Alberta
Indians of North America--Alberta--Antiquities	Indigenous peoples--Alberta--Antiquities

← Subject headings by count (ILS)

Subject headings by count (Local Repositories) →

Final Report and Recommendations

- That UA Libraries
  - collaborate with communities, organizations, and groups across Canada to cooperatively develop and incorporate revised subject headings that more accurately, appropriately, and respectfully represent Indigenous peoples and contexts, and which can be seen as a model for change and widely implemented.
  - take the lead on working with Indigenous communities and partners to develop revised subject headings reflective of the Alberta and appropriate Northern contexts.
  - engage an individual to coordinate and conduct consultation and outreach which is groundwork critical to the success of moving forward with this project.
- Report available at http://bit.ly/2wvArQh

We cannot move forward in changing the terminology used in our libraries, without knowing what to change it to.

Making Meaning Symposium

Purpose:

- This is be the first in a series of steps to gain understanding of how people who will be using the library would like to see the project proceed.
- Knowing which words would be preferred over what is being used in our current systems can only come through an ongoing, relationship building process.

Desired Outcomes:

- Through conversation, participants will engage with Indigenous knowledge systems, worldview, and culture. This will aide the University of Alberta Library (UAL) and other librarians to create meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities.

Next Steps: Symposium Suggestions

- Interest group created/listserv, meetings on a regular basis, information sharing, programs/activities (ex. Edit-a-thon).
- I also feel an awareness campaign would be helpful. Social media, across libraries / institutions etc. I think the more awareness is raised around this issue and the work being done on it, the more support and pressure to be supported will happen.
- A decision to change a single subject heading or class of subject headings (ex. Indians of North America) would be a way to see a tangible results while the library works with communities to determine local naming practices.

- Plan for another gathering [...] I understanding that this creates a burden in organizing, but more frequent meetings results in not only sustained momentum, but also allowing new people to enter the conversations. It results in a core audience that will attend each meeting with regularity, but also a periphery who will change. As a result you get some really dynamic conversations occurring over time.

Community consultations at the grassroots level.

Initial Steps

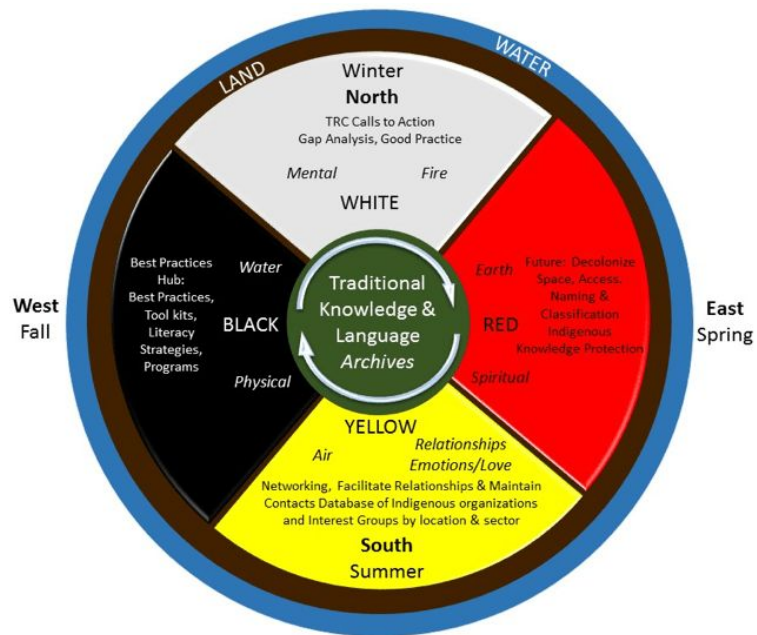ATEP - Aboriginal Teacher Education Program

Peel's Prairie Provinces

Communications

Relationships: Indigenous Matters Committee

Image: CFLA/FCAB Indigenous Matters Committee

- CFLA-FCAB - Association of associations
- TRC implementations across librarianship
- Creating and harnessing existing relationships

Relationships: Next Making Meaning Symposium

- Simon Fraser University/University of British Columbia to host in March, 2019
- Continuing discussions started within other places, but within a localized context
    - Who is in your community?
    - What does your community want?
    - What does your community need?

Relationships: Consultation process within our own systems

- Can't tech your way out of a social problem
- Relationship building as a way of practicing librarianship
- Respecting protocol, Indigenous ways of being and learning

Photo by Josh Felise on Unsplash

Next steps for the project

- Community consultations
- Who is in our broader UAL community?
- Who is in our closer-to-campus community?

Image: Pixabay (https://pixabay.com/photo-386673/), CC0

Things that other institutions should consider

- What existing relationships can be built up?
- Planning for a long-term project
- Not knowing all the answers
- Listen to what students and library users have to say

Photo by Anisur Rahman on Unsplash

Thank you! Questions?

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