

Rethinking Representation: Indigenous Peoples and Contexts at the University of Alberta Libraries

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Abstract

Appropriate subject access and descriptive practices within library and information science are social justice issues. Standards that are well established and commonly used in academic libraries in Canada and elsewhere, including Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Library of Congress Classification (LCC), continue to perpetuate colonial biases toward Indigenous peoples. In the fall of 2016, the University of Alberta Libraries (UAL) established a Decolonizing Description Working Group (DDWG) to investigate, define, and propose a plan of action for how descriptive metadata practices could more accurately, appropriately, and respectfully represent Indigenous peoples and contexts. The DDWG is currently beginning the implementation of recommendations approved by UAL's strategic leadership team. In this paper we describe the genesis of the DDWG within the broader context of the libraries' and the university's responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action; outline the group's activities and recommendations; and describe initial steps toward the implementation of those recommendations, with a focus on engaging local Indigenous communities. We reflect on the potential impact of revised descriptive practices in removing many of the barriers that Indigenous communities and individuals face in finding and accessing library materials relevant to their cultures and histories.

Keywords: cataloguing; decolonization; inclusive description; information ethics; metadata

Publication Type: research article

Introduction and Background

State-sponsored apologies and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are a worldwide phenomenon, as has been the experience of colonialism. It is important to contextualize Canada's TRC within this global phenomenon. As highlighted by Cornassel and Holder (2008), there have been upwards of 24 truth commissions examining the situations of Indigenous peoples globally. While one may assume a global phenomenon would be beneficial for Indigenous people everywhere, outcomes have been varied and have not always been considered successful. This is partly due to these reconciliation processes being tied to a state-sponsored structure. In order for reconciliation processes to be truly authentic, there needs to be "not only a forgiveness

of the past but shared strategies for moving forward collectively to decolonize existing relationships” (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 469).

Alberta is home to many diverse Indigenous communities, including Blackfoot (Niitsítapi); Cree (Nêhiyaw); Dene Tha’ (Dene); Dene Suliné (Chipewyan); Dunne-za (Beaver); Nakoda (Stoney); Saulteaux (Anishinaabe); and the Tsuu T’ina, who are part of the Blackfoot Confederacy but are historically from the north. There are 45 First Nations in three Treaty Areas (Treaties 6, 7, and 8) as well as other groups that have not signed treaties, such as the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation. The most commonly spoken First Nations languages are Blackfoot, Cree (which has several dialects but mainly Plains Cree; some Woods Cree is spoken in Alberta), 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. Alberta is also home to many Inuit people, and many of them speak the traditional language of Inuktitut. Of course, many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people live in urban areas as well as in traditional communities.

It is within this global context of TRCs and state-led apologies, in what has become known by some as the “Age of Apology” (Corntassel & Holder, 2008, p. 467), that Canadian institutions of higher education find themselves responding to our TRC’s Calls to Action. The purpose of the TRC was to investigate what happened in the Canadian Residential School system for Indigenous children removed from their homes and placed into residential schools. Many of these schools were government funded and church operated, with the intention of “civilizing” and assimilating Indigenous children and eliminating Indigenous cultures (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b). In this school setting, students were forbidden to speak their languages and practice their cultures. All too many students suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of school staff, and the death rate for Indigenous children in residential schools was substantially higher than that for the general Canadian population (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b). These schools began operating in the 19th century, and the last one did not close until 1996. It should be noted that the Canadian TRC was not part of a state-sponsored event, but rather a class-action lawsuit by survivors and the Independent Assessment Process (IAP) that resulted from this legal action. In addition, institutions are now responding to Calls to Action rather than recommendations. As outlined by Lightfoot (2015), one reason previous TRCs have not been successful is that “There is no reexamination or reordering of the underlying institutions and thought processes that made such atrocities possible in the first place” (p. 29).

The final report of the TRC of Canada, including 94 Calls to Action, was released in 2015. These Calls to Action focus on the educational system, as it has contributed to the negative relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, and on the ways that the educational system can contribute to the work of reconciliation. In this paper we describe the genesis of the Decolonizing Description Working Group (DDWG) of the University of Alberta Libraries (UAL), whose purpose was to create more inclusive metadata practices. We describe the genesis of the working group within the broader context of the libraries’ and the university’s response to the Calls to Action of the TRC of Canada; outline the group’s activities and recommendations; and describe initial steps toward the implementation of those recommendations, with a focus on engaging local Indigenous communities. We reflect on the potential impact of revised descriptive practices in removing many of the barriers that Indigenous communities and individuals face in finding and accessing library materials relevant to their cultures and histories.

The University of Alberta Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Post-secondary educational institutions figure large in the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a) for the important role they can, and must, play in advancing reconciliation in Canada. The Calls to Action include protecting Indigenous languages, providing appropriate curricula, and supporting Indigenous research. Universities Canada, a nonprofit national organization that fosters collaboration among Canadian universities, governments, and communities to address challenges in higher education, has set out a variety of principles for Indigenous education, including recognizing the importance of the indigenization of curricula through responsive academic programming, supporting programs, orientations, and pedagogies; recognizing the value of promoting partnerships among educational and local Indigenous communities; and continuing to maintain a collaborative and consultative process on the specific needs of Indigenous students (Universities Canada, 2015). The University of Alberta has expressed a commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous communities, and its strategic plan, *For the Public Good* (University of Alberta, 2016), takes seriously the responsibility to respond to the Calls to Action in the TRC report. The university has made a commitment to develop “a thoughtful, respectful, meaningful, and sustainable response to the TRC report” (University of Alberta, 2017). A significant step forward in honoring that commitment was taken on June 1, 2017, when the university signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (Turpin, 2017).

The University of Alberta Libraries’ Indigenous Initiatives

Libraries, as sites of learning in and of themselves as well as key units within post-secondary institutions, have a responsibility and opportunity to contribute to reconciliation through collaborations and partnerships but also, and perhaps more importantly, through their own initiatives. UAL has had a long-standing commitment to working with Indigenous communities, for example via the First Nations Information Connection, launched in 2007. Through this collaboration, UAL has made connections with five First Nations colleges in Alberta: Old Sun Community College (Siksika), Red Crow Community College (Kainai), Maskwacis Cultural College (serving Ermineskin, Samson, Louis Bull, and Montana First Nations), University nuhelot’ine thaiyots’i nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (serving Beaver Lake, Cold Lake, Frog Lake, Whitefish Lake, Heart Lake, Kehewin, and Saddle Lake First Nations), and Yellowhead Tribal College (serving Alexander, Alexis Nakota Sioux, O’Chiese, and Sunchild First Nations). Within the context of the TRC Calls to Action, UAL has continued to focus on building relationships with Indigenous students, staff, and the broader community through a variety of initiatives such as the Indigenous Internship Program, Personal Librarian Program, and the First Nations Information Connection. The Indigenous Internship Program provides an Indigenous student with employment in the libraries while pursuing a master’s degree at the University of Alberta’s School of Library and Information Studies (Carr-Wiggin, Ball, Lar-Son, & MacLeod, 2017). Through the Personal Librarian Program (<https://library.ualberta.ca/services/personal-librarian>), all self-identified first-year Aboriginal students have a personal librarian who can help them access the services and resources the libraries offer in support of their academic success. The First Nations Information Connection (<http://fnic.sirsi.net>) is a collaboration between the University of Alberta Libraries, the five First Nations colleges mentioned previously, and two community resource centers in Alberta and involves a shared catalog between the institutions and access to electronic and web resources for students and faculty.

Aims

While UAL has a long history of engaging with Indigenous individuals and communities in partnerships, service provision, and professional placements, we recognized that one foundational aspect of our work had yet to be fully interrogated with regard to improving service to our Indigenous users: our descriptive practices for all of our collections, including those digitized locally. Like most large academic libraries in North America, UAL currently relies heavily on Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and Library of Congress Classification (LCC) for subject access to both print and digital collections. While the use of LC standards comes with many recognized advantages, it understandably causes challenges in terms of adequate and appropriate representation of the Canadian context. It is vital that all of our users can see themselves appropriately and respectfully represented in our metadata records. However, this is not normally the case, especially with the use of standard vocabularies in describing Indigenous peoples and contexts. In order to address this concern, in August 2016, UAL formed the Decolonizing Description Working Group (DDWG) to investigate, define, and propose a plan of action for how descriptive metadata practices could more accurately, appropriately, and respectfully represent Indigenous peoples and contexts.

Literature Review

The focus of this literature review is on libraries, with some sources on museums or archives where relevant. Resources examined include those that addressed both library catalogs and digital collections as well as efforts in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand. This review is meant to gather representative pieces discussing the challenges in describing Indigenous peoples and contexts and the initiatives that have been undertaken to address those challenges. This literature can be summarized in several overarching themes.

Descriptive Practices and Social Justice

Social justice has many definitions, but according to Morales, Knowles, and Bourg (2014) it is

a concept that encompasses more than representation and diversity, and is generally understood to refer to the ability of all people to fully benefit from social and economic progress and to participate equally in democratic societies. In other words, social justice addresses power and privilege on a structural level, as well as at the level of mere representation. (p. 440)

Freedom of information is a core component of social justice, as evidenced by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which reads, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

As Buchanan (2004) notes, information professionals have “the potential to adversely affect our increasingly large and diverse clientele by failing to act responsively, fairly, timely, and appropriately” (p. 620), and so it is perhaps not surprising that many in librarianship and allied fields have been drawn to issues of social justice for some time (Higgins & Gregory, 2013; Samek, 2007). All aspects of librarianship have been addressed through the lens of social justice, including collection development (Samek, 2007), information literacy (Higgins & Gregory, 2013), user services (Cooke, 2016), cataloging and description (Roberto, 2008), and recruitment and

hiring within the profession (Bales, 2017; Morales, Knowles, & Bourg, 2014).

Appropriate subject access and descriptive practices are social justice issues, whereby accurate, representative, and respectful subject access to Indigenous knowledge is a moral imperative for libraries and other knowledge institutions (Lougheed, Moran, & Callison, 2015; Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2016; Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2017). Moulaison Sandy and Bossaller (2017) assess appropriate subject access to resources for, by, and about Indigenous peoples according to the theory of cognitive justice, as championed by scholars such as Catherine Odora Hoppers in education and John Burgess in library and information science (Burgess, 2015). Cognitive justice respects all forms of knowledge and argues that they can and should coexist. According to Burgess (quoted in Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2017), a cognitively just approach to information science

tends to reject the language of universal human rights as following an unrealistic and particularly Western notion, and seeks to replace that language with autonomy, dignity, and a 'commons' approach to cultural authority...the object is...to promote healing and forgiveness by removing the continued burden of colonialism and legacy thinking. (p. 132)

Enabling the expression of Indigenous worldviews through our descriptive practices and standards is a step toward true reconciliation. Henderson (2000) feels that "one task of decolonization is to replace the sameness of universality with the concepts of diversity, complementarities, flexibility, and equity or fundamental fairness" (p. 267).

Our descriptive standards and practices are at the core of user services and can have a profound impact on those users. Scholars and practitioners such as Olson (2000, 2002), Berman (1971, 2013), Roberto (2008), Drabinski (2013), and many others have shown us that these tools and practices are not value-neutral. Indeed, "the way we categorize materials communicates our biases and judgments to our users and limits the accessibility of information" (Baildon et al., 2017), and so it is incumbent on institutions to critically examine the standards and practices they employ in order to revise them in ways that "heal and redistribute the wealth of knowledge in our libraries, archives, and museums" (Adler, 2016, p. 639). If institutions are committed to social justice, then they must harness the organization and description of information resources to activism, that is, "reject any notion of neutrality and actively seek ways to remedy the inequities in access to and production of knowledge through categories developed in the guise of a neutral, objective point of view" (Adler, 2016, p. 639).

Representation of Indigenous Peoples in Existing Metadata Standards and Practices

The challenges of describing Indigenous materials and contexts using existing, inadequate schema are well documented in the information science literature (Cherry & Mukunda, 2015; Chester, 2006; Kam, 2007; Lee, 2011; Martens, 2006; Littletree & Metoyer, 2015; Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2016; Parent, 2015; Rigby, 2015; Tomren, 2003; Turner, 2015; Villanueva, 2016). While there may be general agreement on the problems with current systems, there are differing views on the most effective and appropriate means of the addressing them. Kam (2007), Martens (2006), Rigby (2015), and Villanueva (2016) argue that existing practices and tools can be revised to better and more respectfully represent Indigenous peoples and contexts if there is willingness to change. Others, such as Cherry and Mukunda (2015), Chester (2006), Lee (2011), Littletree and Metoyer (2015), and Moulaison Sandy and Bossaller (2016), argue that completely new practices based on Indigenous knowledge and worldviews are needed if meaningful change is to

occur.

A related and perhaps more important theme is the need for relationship building in the creation of descriptive metadata in an Indigenous context. User-generated content can support reliable subject access through the use of folksonomies, geographic information, or other content provided by working with, and not just for, the communities that produce the knowledge (Lougheed, Moran, & Callison, 2015; Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2016; Doyle, Lawson, & Dupont, 2015). A critical aspect of working with Indigenous communities is including those communities in every stage of a project or initiative as true partners and collaborators. Social justice and library work are about putting the needs and interests of the community at the heart of the work. They are about engaging with local communities in meaningful and respectful collaborations on an ongoing basis. And they are about “embracing equality and diversity, and focusing on a needs-based service and targeting resources towards those who need them most” (Vincent, 2012, p. 350).

The Decolonizing Description Working Group

The Working Group’s Process

The Decolonizing Description Working Group (DDWG) included UAL’s metadata coordinator, cataloguing coordinator, a public service librarian, the coordinator of Indigenous initiatives, an Indigenous intern (MLIS student), as well as the associate university librarian responsible for bibliographic services. Over 10 months, the group explored the existing relevant literature, focusing on practical implementations. An environmental scan was undertaken to discover similar initiatives proposed or under way in institutions across Canada and to seek opportunities for collaborations and partnerships. An analysis of metadata from the LC’s Integrated Library System (ILS) and local digital/digitized collections was used to estimate the scope of work required to enhance existing metadata and to revise workflows for metadata yet to be created.

Internal consultations

The DDWG consulted with organizations and individuals, both locally and elsewhere in Canada, who have been active in initiatives related to appropriate representation of Indigenous peoples and contexts. These conversations were designed to provide perspective on opportunities and challenges in addressing this issue as well as to set the stage for potential future collaborations. The group consulted internally with staff in the areas of cataloging, public service, archives, and digital initiatives. Other University of Alberta stakeholders were kept apprised of DDWG activities through informal channels, such as workshops and networking events at the university, as well as informal conversations with faculty.

A small group of students and alumni, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were consulted through the use of an informal online survey. Potential survey participants were identified through an informal social media posting. Once participants gave their approval to participate in the survey, they were emailed a link to the survey. The survey participants were asked questions based on their previous knowledge of the project/working group and their feelings/reactions to potentially changing the LC subject headings that involved Aboriginal content. All of the participants but one noted that they would be directly affected by changes to the LC subject headings, and they indicated that they felt changing the LC subject headings was important for decolonization and building reconciliation within UAL. One participant indicated that they were not directly affected by the changing of LC subject headings, but they acknowledged that they knew other community

members would be affected, so the working group mattered to them.

External consultations

An in-depth conversation was held with colleagues from the University of British Columbia (UBC), who have developed and applied several custom vocabularies, such as the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) Thesaurus and the adapted Brian Deer Classification for use in the Xwi7xwa Library. At the Xwi7xwa Library, Indigenized knowledge organization is seen as key to effective Indigenous information practices, instruction, and research throughout the university. The Xwi7xwa Library's catalog is integrated with the UBC Library catalog, the Xwi7xwa bibliographic database having been mapped to MARC (machine-readable cataloguing) format. The Xwi7xwa FNHL subject headings are recognized as an authorized thesaurus by the LC, and Xwi7xwa staff worked at length with ILS vendors to incorporate the subject headings. Xwi7xwa staff are interested in sharing their existing work with partners across the country. They had important advice to offer to our group about community consultation, beginning with the work of Gene Joseph, the first chief librarian of the Xwi7xwa Library, whose research and consultation privileged Indigenous authority.

A similar conversation took place on June 6, 2017, with colleagues from the MAIN (Manitoba Archival Information Network) LCSH Working Group (MAIN, 2013), which recommended changes to LCSH to address representation of Indigenous peoples and contexts. The MAIN group consulted extensively with Indigenous experts to inform their work in developing the modifications to subject headings and offered valuable advice to the DDWG on this activity. In addition, they offered insight into the process of developing a similar list for the Alberta and Northern contexts relevant to UAL. Of note, the University of Manitoba has, to date, made one large change to their practice, which is to add "Indigenous peoples" to relevant records.

Through informal discussions with Library & Archives Canada (LAC) colleagues and LAC representatives on the CFLA Truth and Reconciliation Committee "Red Team," which was charged with examining descriptive practices, the DDWG learned that LAC is interested in working collaboratively with communities and other organizations and institutions to revise the Canadian Subject Headings (CSH). These are seen as next steps after the release of the CFLA Truth and Reconciliation Committee report (Canadian Federation of Library Associations, 2017), which occurred on April 24, 2017. The report's recommendations include a call for libraries, archives, and cultural memory institutions to decolonize access, including cataloging, classification processes, and description. Specifically, the report recommends that libraries acknowledge structural biases in existing systems of knowledge organization, make a commitment to integrating Indigenous and mainstream knowledges, and engage with Indigenous communities to integrate regionally relevant Indigenous knowledges into cataloging and metadata.

Informal conversations with colleagues at Ryerson and Memorial University of Newfoundland also demonstrated that many institutions are or have been pondering work of this nature and would be interested in becoming part of any broader initiatives within Canada. From the various conversations, it is clear that there are several activities happening in pockets across the country and that the time may be right for coordinated efforts at the regional level, which could feed into one or more national efforts.

Local Data Analysis

Within the descriptive metadata practices currently undertaken at UAL that would be impacted by any change to descriptive terminology, there are two main groupings of content: (1) cataloging records within the ILS and (2) metadata applied to the institutional repository, archives, and locally digitized collections.

Cataloging records within the integrated library system

As resources are described for use in the ILS for the University of Alberta (UA) and other members of the NEOS Library Consortium (comprised of government, health, college, and university libraries that cooperate to share library resources, technology, collections, and people), the majority of original cataloging (including LCSH assignment) is done with vendor support (BSLW, OCLC, Proquest), and LCSH are applied based on the subject matter of the resource. Similarly, UA staff will update headings to meet LCSH standards and for better subject coverage as other record sets are added to the system, and they will perform ongoing maintenance within the ILS to keep these headings up to date. Automated processes are also used by staff in Bibliographic Services to maintain subject authorities in concert with Information Technology Services, but a large portion of the work needed to keep authorities up to date is (or will be) managed through authority vendors. It is also worth noting that other access points are used across NEOS, including MeSH, RVM, CSH, and FAST.

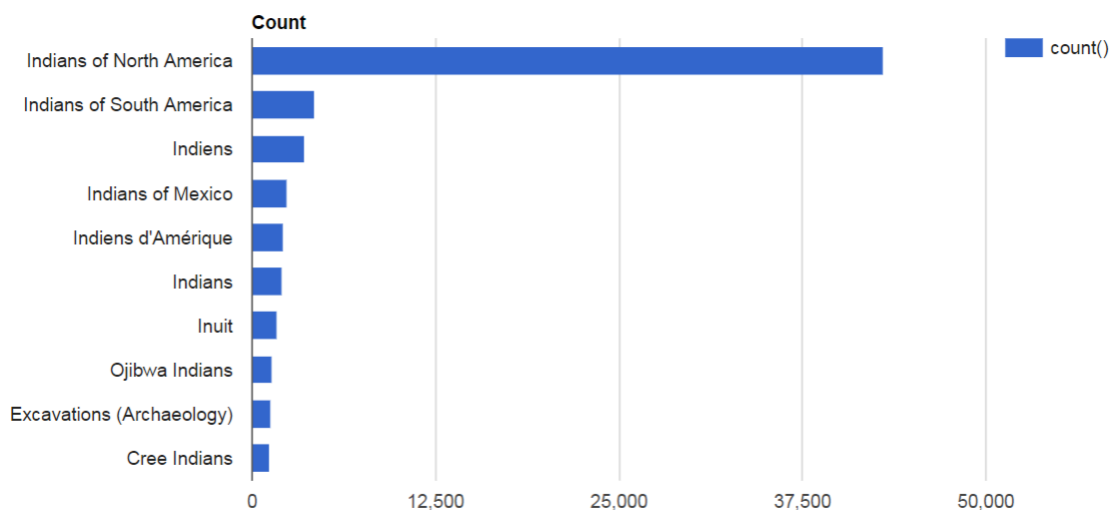


Figure 1. Subject headings by count (ILS)

Based on numbers from June 2017, there are 5,374,506 titles in the UA database and 5,737,330 titles across NEOS (including UA). The distinction between the UA and NEOS is important because LCSH terms, as controlled vocabulary, fall under authority control and as such are part of the UA's responsibility for maintenance across NEOS. Using the list of LCSH identified by the Manitoba Archival Information Network (MAIN)-LCSH Working Group as a point of comparison, 62,459

records with terms matching those on MAIN's "delete or replace" list were identified in UAL's ILS. More titles likely exist across NEOS member libraries that would add to this number. Moreover, while the MAIN list provides an opportunity to sample impact, other terms could be identified for consideration within the NEOS database as this project progresses. Looking at records with these headings allowed us to examine current usage and think about the approach and workflow for a similar project to substitute and/or remove terms within the UAL database. From the 62,459 UAL records extracted based on the MAIN headings, 9,149 unique headings associated with the titles were identified (not all of which might be considered problematic), with the most common headings shown in Figure 1.

Metadata applied to the institutional repository, archives, and locally digitized collections

UAL has substantial collections of locally digitized materials as well as UA and community-generated content accessible through local repositories. These collections provide unique challenges as well as opportunities to improve descriptive practices for materials by, about, and for Indigenous peoples.

Two of the largest and most important locally digitized collections are the Peel's Prairie Provinces collection and the Sam Steele archive. As an archival collection, Sam Steele makes limited use of subject headings; those that are used come from LCSH. Peel's Prairie Provinces makes substantial use of LCSH. Based on the MAIN LCSH Working Group's heading list, just over 5,000 records were identified in Peel and Steele that had matching LCSH terms. Metadata for these collections are normally created in-house, and we have flexible tools and workflows around these metadata processes. Of note is the fact that Peel also makes use of additional vocabularies, such as TGM (Thesaurus for Graphic Materials), RVM (Répertoire de vedettes-matière), and CSH (Canadian Subject Headings).

UAL has been digitizing materials with the Internet Archive (IA) for some time, amassing substantial collections, and will be shifting the majority of its digitization to IA in Spring 2018. When digitizing collections held by UAL, IA uses metadata records from our ILS. For those collections digitized by IA that do not make use of records from the ILS, existing consultation services and policies provide UAL substantial control over the type and nature of metadata applied.

As is common in archival practice, the UA Archives makes minimal use of subject headings in their descriptive practices. For that reason, review and revision of any existing headings will be straightforward, as vocabularies can be applied as per any UAL policies and procedures.

Perhaps the most complex local collections with respect to revisions to descriptive practices are those within the institutional repository (ERA) and the newly launched multimedia repository (ERA A+V). As is common in most institutional repositories, the metadata often come from a variety of sources and conform to different standards. Within these repositories, descriptions make use of LCSH and FAST (Faceted Application of Subject Terminology), as well as user-contributed subject keywords. Existing consultation services and policies provide a great deal of control over the type and nature of the user-contributed metadata. Based on the MAIN LCSH Working Group's heading list, just over 1,200 records were identified in ERA and ERA A+V that had matching LCSH terms.

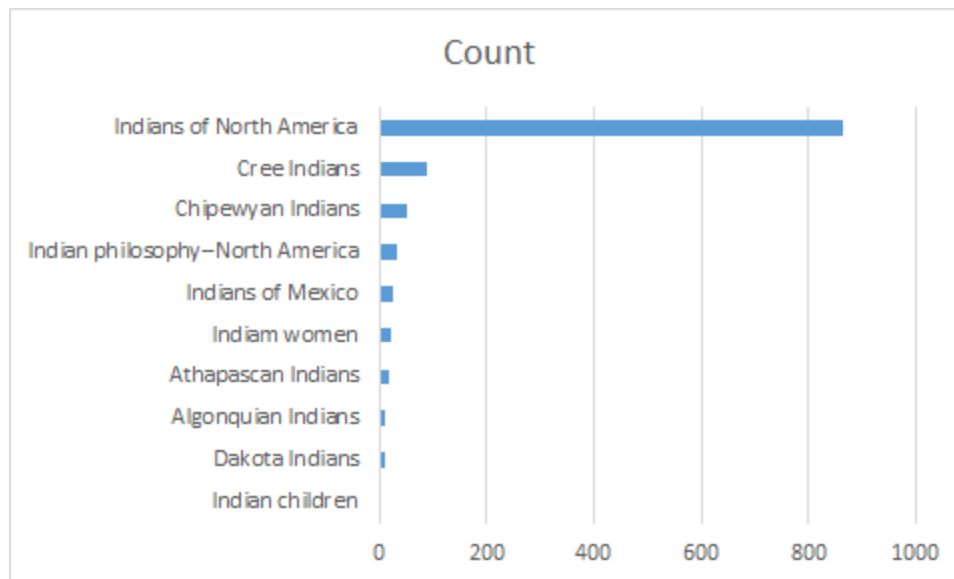


Figure 2. Subject headings by count (local repositories)

Recommendations of the Working Group

The DDWG recommended the following broad actions be undertaken by UAL in order to model new descriptive practices that will decolonize our existing systems and help the University of Alberta build a university “committed to respectful relations with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples” by developing “a thoughtful, respectful, meaningful, and sustainable response to the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada” (University of Alberta, 2016, p. 10). The senior administrative team within the libraries accepted these recommendations.

1. That UAL collaborate with other groups and organizations across Canada (Library and Archives Canada, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, regional groups, and other universities) to cooperatively develop and incorporate revised subject headings that more accurately, appropriately, and respectfully represent Indigenous peoples and contexts and that can be seen as a model for change and widely implemented.
2. That UAL take the lead on working with Indigenous communities and partners to develop revised subject headings reflective of the Alberta and appropriate Northern contexts.
3. In support of recommendation #2, that UAL engage an individual to coordinate and conduct consultation and outreach, which is groundwork critical to the success of this project. This outreach must occur before developing or applying new subject headings. We anticipate the need for a 1.0FTE temporary position for one year. This position would work closely with metadata experts and others in UAL as needed to apply

information gathered into a descriptive schema that is appropriate for the various Indigenous groups identified and into policies and workflows that are sustainable.

4. That as the work of the first three recommendations reaches completion, UAL retroactively apply revised subject headings to appropriate library resources, including all categories covered in the previous section noting UAL's existing metadata descriptive practices, such as cataloging records within the ILS, and to metadata applied to the institutional repository, archives, and locally digitized collections. Going forward, the same approved subject headings will be applied to new content added to library resources, whether done by UAL staff or our cataloging vendors.
5. That UAL work with IA and HathiTrust to retroactively apply revised subject headings as appropriate to UAL resources held in their repositories.

These recommendations also took into account financial impacts, staffing and workflow impacts, and policy impact. Risks were also considered when deciding whether to proceed with the recommendations. By not proceeding, UAL runs the risk of alienating Indigenous user communities, falling behind peer institutions in Canada, and missing a significant opportunity for UAL to contribute to reconciliation in Canada. By proceeding without appropriate consultation, UAL runs the risk of damaging important community relationships.

Implementation

As part of UAL's Academic Librarian Residency Program, a recent MLIS graduate has been hired to work on the recommendations of the working group. While reworking the metadata workflows and standards used will be a key component of this project and her work, it cannot be done without first consulting our partners, researchers, and stakeholders. One of the first steps in this process will be to host a symposium called "Making Meaning." The purpose of this symposium will be not only to gather librarians to discuss a library problem, but also to hear from students and researchers as well as those who work in our partner First Nations Colleges. This does not limit any future consultations to only these partners, but rather respects and reflects where our relationships have already been established; there will always be room for our circles to expand. By gathering together, we will be able to not only have a more in-depth understanding of these issues and some possible solutions to them, but also hear what people who use our libraries would like to see as an outcome. It will also be possible to share the first steps of these processes with other institutions that are considering such endeavors. The results of Making Meaning will also provide us with a sense of where our partnerships can expand to reflect, as well as further, community consultations that will become an ongoing part of the partnership process.

As a initial step in decolonizing the description of our collections, we plan to collaborate with colleagues by adapting and making changes to two different collections that can be used as "proof of concept"—updating both the Peel's Prairie Provinces online database as well as a small collection of print materials for the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. Each of these collections will include their own sets of opportunities and challenges, as different metadata schemes, subject headings, new classification schemes, and knowledge and expertise is shared and reassessed.

Building on our established relationships, and with Elder and community guidance, we will seek to appropriately consult with communities across Alberta and, where we are able and the need is expressed by communities, into the North. In building relationships and partnerships, we are leaving space for other projects and initiatives that may arise that we have not considered as of yet. It is not only important to understand which terminology is preferred, but also how the use of incorrect terminology has created barriers. By stepping back as we meaningfully engage, we are beginning to address ways that spaces and systems can be reimagined within the library and the academy.

As part of the activities of the working group and, more importantly, the activities going forward, we have sought out opportunities to share what we have learned to date and what we hope to achieve with others in the library community, locally and beyond. We have been very encouraged by the positive reception the initiative has received and energized by the conversations it has prompted. We are growing our connections and expanding our network of individuals and organizations interested in similar initiatives in their own regions and in working cooperatively. Working in partnership with communities and colleagues is the means by which real change will occur.

Potential Impacts

Revising our descriptive practices to more accurately, appropriately, and respectfully represent Indigenous peoples and contexts will remove many of the barriers that Indigenous communities and individuals have faced in working with established library standards and systems to find and access materials relevant to their cultures and histories. Incorporating the worldviews and voices of local Indigenous communities will allow UAL's users to see themselves in the collections and services. This is our responsibility as a library and a university. "Surely every institute of higher learning owes its students a welcoming, beneficial environment where they feel respected and recognized" (Aase, 2017, p. 154).

Working alongside local Indigenous communities will enhance institutional understanding of the needs and interests of those communities and the challenges they face in engaging with the collections and services. Developing and nurturing these relationships builds the trust needed for truly collaborative and equal partnerships and will strengthen UAL's ability to address other challenges and opportunities together in meeting the university's mission to uplift the whole people.

The focus first and foremost must be on working with local communities to collaborate on appropriate solutions to the longstanding challenges of descriptive metadata practices. However, in connecting and cooperating with others across Canada who are engaged in similar projects, the working group will contribute to a national movement that can lead to more effective change through shareable workflows and tools. Balancing the need for localization with the imperative for interoperability is a real challenge, one that can easily sideline initiatives of this nature. For example, localized efforts coming together in a broad review and revision of Canadian Subject Headings might provide opportunities for balancing these needs. Working together, we can find ways of making this balance possible, allowing more communities to benefit. In addition, the consultation processes that we make use of may be broadly applicable to others hoping to work with local communities on similar initiatives.

Conclusion

The University of Alberta Libraries has just begun the work on this decolonizing description initiative, and there is still much to be done. The practices we are seeking to change have become institutionalized over time. Key to our process is developing and sustaining relationships, building trust, and engaging in open and true consultation. All of these things take time if they are to be done properly, and we are committed to ensuring our process is respectful and inclusive of the Indigenous communities involved, leading to a new schema of description that accurately represents them.

Ultimately, we are committed to this work because it reflects our principles as librarians, committed to equity, diversity, and inclusiveness in library collections, services, and spaces. It also speaks to the broader university mission of teaching, learning, and research in service of the public good. It is one way in which we can unsettle our practices and contribute concretely to reconciliation with the first peoples of Canada, to forging new relationships founded on mutual respect and equal partnerships.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many colleagues who shared their experiences and offered their expertise throughout the early stages of this project: Christine Bone, Camille Callison (University of Manitoba); Brett Loughheed (University of Winnipeg); Anne Doyle, Sarah Dupont, Kim Lawson (University of British Columbia); Peggy Sue Ewanyshyn, Krista Jamieson, Leah Vanderjagt (University of Alberta Libraries); Diane Beattie, Pierre Gamache (Library and Archives Canada); Trina Grover (Ryerson University); and Heather Pretty (Memorial University of Newfoundland).

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