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**Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism Engagements at the UW Libraries:
A Report on a Presentation Given at the Committee on Technical Processing Session,
March 23, 2022**

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Keiko Hill, University of Washington Libraries

Introduction

The presentation, “Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Engagements at the UW Libraries,” was delivered by Jian Lee, Chinese Cataloging and Metadata Librarian, and Keiko Hill, Japanese Cataloging Librarian/East Asian Serials & E-resources Cataloging Librarian from the University of Washington (UW) Libraries at the Committee on Technical Processing Program session during the virtual 2022 Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) Annual Meeting. Addressing the theme of the program, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) and Cataloging/Metadata, the speakers shared their experiences with equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism (EDIA) work particularly in the areas of cataloging at their institution.

The presentation was divided into two parts. First, Lee spoke about EDIA discussions at the Tateuchi East Asia Library (TEAL) and the Cataloging Policy & Practice Committee (CPPC) of UW Libraries. Second, Lee and Hill spoke about actions taken to address offensive and harmful language in bibliographical and archival descriptions at the University of Washington.

EDI discussions at the University of Washington Libraries

In light of the Black Lives Matter Movement in the summer of 2020, the UW Libraries Staff Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Committee organized a series of open conversations for staff to discuss and reflect on the police brutality against Black people across the US, followed by a two-session discussion on actions to be taken towards anti-racist work at UW Libraries. EDI has been increasingly important for the UW Libraries and is embedded in the UW Libraries' strategic plan. The responses to the Black Lives Matter Movement, however, accelerated EDI work at the UW Libraries.

Inspired by the library-wide EDI open discussions from July to December 2020, TEAL held monthly EDI discussions. TEAL staff read articles and watched webinars on related EDI topics. Staff were responsible for selecting these and for leading discussions. Since not every staff member was aware of how EDI entered into their work, participating in these conversations helped staff to have a deeper understanding of EDI and how it might impact what they do. Lee indicated that having the EDI discussions provided opportunities for staff to learn what EDI is and helped to raise bias awareness and EDI engagement in the workplace.

The UW Libraries Cataloging Policy and Practice Committee also kicked off a series of discussions on cataloging ethics and critical cataloging around this time. Lee shared some highlights of the discussions. The first recurrent theme was bias in the Library of Congress

Subject Headings (LCSH). Catalogers recognized and acknowledged that historically and structurally, the LC Classification System (LCC) and the LCSH are biased. The majority of literature cataloged in the U.S. is American-centric or Eurocentric. LCSH are based on literary warrant, using the most commonly used terms in the existing literature about the subject for the authorized LC heading. Accordingly, LCC and LCSH have imported this bias from their reliance on American and European literature. Lee provided examples of problematic and harmful LCSH, such as “Illegal aliens” and “Japanese American–Evacuation and relocation, 1942–1945.” The first term has been replaced by “Noncitizens” and “Illegal immigration” and the second term has been revised to “Japanese Americans–Forced removal and internment, 1942–1945.”

Lee emphasized the importance of choosing subject headings critically when cataloging resources. If problematic subject headings are identified, catalogers have the option to suggest revisions through the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO), one of the components of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) that contributes to the creation and revision of LCSH. For LCSH related to East Asian area studies, catalogers may also suggest revisions through the CJK SACO Funnel Project. Though the process can be slow and may not always be approved, participating in SACO is a crucial way to improve and make changes to the existing system.

Catalogers and libraries may also use alternative vocabularies, like local subject headings and other controlled vocabularies, such as Homosaurus. One controversy regarding controlled vocabulary is who gets to decide which terminology is acceptable. Preferred terms change over time; for example, the term “American Indians.” In the United States, “Indians of North America” is the currently established heading in LCSH. Canada, however, uses the currently established headings of “First Nations,” “Inuit,” and “Métis” in the Canadian Subject Headings to describe Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

To eliminate offensive and harmful language in bibliographic descriptions requires collaborative efforts from library communities. Catalogers cannot do it alone. Catalogers need buy-in and support from their institutions and cooperation and collaboration with stakeholders within other national and international institutions and consortiums.

Ethical concerns regarding name authority records are another controversial topic discussed in the CPPC EDI discussions. Name authority records are created by catalogers to facilitate the searching and browsing of authors and contributors. These records are maintained collaboratively by all members of the PCC’s Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) in the LC/NACO Authority File, and they are available to publicly view with online access. A name authority record contains preferred names and variant names and may contain more sensitive information such as gender, birth date, place of birth, residence, etc. One of the issues discussed when creating a name authority record is how much information is too much. Catalogers need to consider and be mindful of the impact that recording personal information might have on the authors being described in records, such as the effect of recording real names for authors using pseudonyms. In some cases, authors use pseudonyms to cover their true identity. Exposing this identity unintentionally may pose risks or create unwanted attention for them.

Possible solutions were discussed to address potential issues, such as catalogers contacting authors and asking for consent when adding sensitive information. This only works if catalogers have the contact information and authors choose to respond to the request.

Actions addressing EDI in cataloging and archival description work

Two major efforts to address and remediate harmful language in cataloging and archival description at the UW Libraries were reported on by the speakers. The first effort was to replace the controversial LCSH “Illegal aliens” in their local system. The UW Libraries is a member of the Orbis Cascade Alliance consortium and uses Ex Libris Alma and Primo as the Shared Integrated Library System (SILS) and discovery solution among other Alliance libraries. Changes to the SILS are addressed by the appropriate Alliance programs or groups. Prompted by the documentary “Change the Subject,” the need to provide alternative subject headings for “Illegal aliens” at the local level or the consortial level was first discussed in a 2019 discussion paper¹ by the Alliance Cataloging Standing Group (CSG), a group that reviews and makes recommendations to address cataloging and metadata issues within the Alliance. This was followed by a community-wide survey from April 2020 on whether the Alliance should provide the alternative headings centrally or leave the decision up to individual members. Based on the results, the CSG made a recommendation to implement an Alliance-wide alternative to the LCSH “Illegal aliens” in June 2020.² Then the Alliance Normalization Rules Standing Group, which manages the way in which bibliographic records are displayed in Primo, carried out the recommendations and implemented the changes in January 2021.

Hill spoke about the second effort, which was the formation of the Critical Cataloging and Archival Description Statement working group (hereafter, the group) and its work. The ad hoc group was formed by staff in Cataloging and Metadata Services and Special Collections in the winter of 2021. Erin Grant, Director of Cataloging and Metadata Services, and Crystal Rodgers, Labor Archivist for Processing in Special Collections began discussing how to address bias in archival description and catalog records.

The Alliance’s Unique and Local Content Program’s (ULC) Unique Materials in the Shared Integrated Library System (UMSILS) standing group, which Rodgers was a member of, and the Archives West Standing Group raised the issue of harmful language in archival metadata at an Alliance “Open Call” meeting in 2020. Grant brought the issue to CSG for discussion on how to address harmful bibliographic descriptions in MARC records. At the University of Washington Libraries’ level, Rodgers, Conor Casey, Head of the Labor Archives of Washington in Special Collections and Chair of the Alliance Archival Collection Discovery & Management Standing Group, and Kat Lewis, Special Project Curators from Special Collections and Chair of the UMSILS Standing Group, had discussed the issue, and Grant had

¹ Grant, E. et al. “Providing Alternative Subject Headings for Controversial Library of Congress Subject Headings in the Alliance Shared ILS.” Portland: Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2019. Accessed August 2023 from <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/45609>.

² Grant, E. et al. “Recommendation to Implement an Alliance-wide Alternative to the LCSH ‘Illegal Aliens’ Subject Terminology.” Portland: Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2020. Access August 2023 from <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/45608>.

worked on a statement on harmful language in cataloging separately. Therefore, Grant and Rodgers combined efforts to create a shared statement and thus the working group was formed. Casey, Lewis, and Keiko Hill from TEAL joined this group, which worked on a statement to support the University of Washington Libraries' commitment to anti-racist work.³

The group met monthly over Zoom beginning in March 2021, working on a draft statement in a shared document where they could also take meeting notes, make suggestions, add insights, ask questions, and share resources. The initial goal was to acknowledge the existence of problematic descriptions; to note that humans are biased and may bring their biases to the descriptive work, and to acknowledge that existing descriptive systems are also biased. To align with the goal, the core points of our discussions were one, what to include in the statement, two, how to create a mechanism for the public to point out problematic descriptions, and three, where to publish the statement. What the group discussed on each point is below.

1. What to include in the statement

To start, the group referred to the statements issued by other institutions with which we shared values, such as “Metadata for Everyone: Inclusive Description” at the Duke University Libraries, “SCRC Statement on Potential Harmful Language in Archival Description and Cataloging” from Temple University Libraries, and “Statement on Harmful Content in Archival Collection” from Drexel University Libraries. What they have in their statements in common with our values is “Critical librarianship.” “Critical librarianship” is rooted in an acknowledgment that libraries and archives are not neutral, and that our practices are influenced by society and culture, including phenomena such as white supremacy, partiality, heteronormativity, and classism. Further, there is acknowledgment that every librarian and archivist brings their own biases to the work, consciously or subconsciously, and that the language we use for describing collections may be unintentionally impacted by our own perspective.

Our goal in implementing critical librarianship and archival practice is to be more transparent and accountable in how we describe our materials. Taking a critical approach to descriptive practices means that we question the status quo and seek alternative controlled vocabularies and ways of organizing knowledge in order to be more inclusive and equitable.

Additionally, we acknowledge that remediating legacy descriptions can be a time-consuming process because of limitations beyond our control. For example, the process of changing Library of Congress Subject Headings can be complex and lengthy and is not always successful. We have little-to-no control over Knowledgebase records distributed and managed by publishers and Ex Libris. We have more control over MARC records in OCLC, and the consortial implementation in Alma and Primo ILS systems. However, it should be recognized that the MARC records in OCLC can be changed by other OCLC members as well.

We also acknowledge that there are times when problematic language must be retained,

³ Wilson, L. “Responding to the Call: George Floyd, Black Lives Matter and Systemic Change.” University of Washington Libraries Blog. Accessed August 2023. <https://sites.uw.edu/libstrat/2020/06/05/responding-to-the-call-uw-libraries-response-to-george-floyd-black-lives-matter-and-systemic-change/>.

for instance in archival descriptions where creator-provided language adds valuable historical context to collections. Retaining legacy descriptive language, even when problematic, is also a form of transparency and professional accountability in alignment with archival ethics.

2. Create mechanisms for the public to point out problematic descriptions, and to respond to this feedback

One of the goals is to increase transparency to users. It is essential to include some mechanism to receive feedback when library users and/or staff encounter a problematic description and to respond and work on these issues.

There were several potential methods to allow users to alert us to problematic descriptions. First, we considered the “Ask Us!” email form on the Libraries home page. The form could be set up so that alerts will be delivered to the working group’s email account. The next consideration was a Google Form. Google Forms allow us to decide on the questions we will ask users and collect information in a more focused way. Once the form is submitted, it generates a spreadsheet and updates each time feedback is submitted. Extra columns can be added to the spreadsheet; for example, adding information useful for internal communication and tracking the process. Therefore, the spreadsheet becomes a centralized point in the group’s workflow. With that consideration, we decided what kind of questions to include in the feedback form. The form asks users to provide the problematic descriptions they encounter, links to records in the library catalog or archival collection, brief descriptions of these issues, contact information (name and email address) where a response may be sent, and alternative terminology to replace the harmful descriptive language.

3. Where to publish the statement

The statement could be linked to the Special Collections and/or Cataloging and Metadata Services web page. However, this option may bury the statement resulting in less prominence to users. Moreover, the UW Libraries had established groups to address its EDI commitments, and there was already an existing “EDI” hub under the “About the Libraries” page, including other similar statements. Therefore, publishing the statement on the “EDI” hub page seemed more natural. Additionally, Special Collections and Cataloging and Metadata Services provide links from their departmental pages to the statement on the “EDI” page.

The group brought the draft statement to Special Collections and Cataloging and Metadata Services for feedback. Feedback topics included the necessity of developing departmental workflows, establishing points of contact for handling requests, and providing a mechanism for making remediation decisions transparent to library staff and users. A common concern was how to handle any requests received about problematic content of materials, rather than their metadata. What is “offensive” changes according to a specific user or institutional context. A similar concern is how to handle the fact that some users don’t necessarily criticize the metadata but may be more concerned about the titles themselves being “offensive.” Additionally, the question was raised about the phrase “creation and use of alternative controlled vocabularies.” Catalogers have been using other vocabularies such

as Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT), LC Genre/Form Terms, LC Demographic Group Terms, LC Medium of Performance Thesaurus, but those vocabularies are not meant to supplant LCSH, rather to provide different/extended scopes. Moreover, not all of these alternative vocabularies are displayed in Primo without some institutional customization. Another consideration was the impacts of the Alliance Shared ILS and OCLC system architecture on local UW cataloging practice. OCLC record updates are automatically exported daily to the Alliance Shared ILS, replacing our copy of the records. This means that we can't guarantee that the language we change in records in our ILS will remain, or that other cataloging institutions won't use problematic language that will show up in our system.

With careful consideration of feedback from colleagues in each department, the statement was published in summer 2021.⁴ After that, the group published a post on the UW Libraries blog⁵ as well as announced through the Library's Weekly Online News to all library staff and the related standing groups in the consortium. TEAL included an article in its Autumn 2021 newsletter.⁶ Subject specialists also need to be included in issues pertaining to a specific subject area, so the group gave two presentations to promote their work in February 2022. One was at a meeting of the Association of Librarians of the University of Washington, and the other was at a forum for all library staff which Information School faculty and students also joined.

Questions

The presentation evoked questions from the audience. One attendee asked whether any subject headings related to East Asian studies have been replaced or any related issues raised. Both Lee and Hill answered that "Japanese Americans–Forced evacuation and relocation, 1942–1945" was the only such LCSH that they were aware of. The subject heading was revised as "Japanese Americans–Forced removal and internment, 1942–1945" and approved by the Library of Congress in June 2021. After LC approved the change, OCLC automatically updated all of its records with the new subject heading. Since updated OCLC records are automatically imported into UW's Alma and Primo ILS systems, UW Libraries did not have to implement any local changes on OCLC records.

Another question was how the UW Libraries process cases when there are no clear alternatives or when there are conflicts between differing recommended terms. At the time of the presentation in 2022, the speakers hadn't participated in many projects where alternative terms were used to replace existing language. Lee and Hill responded in an email after the meeting that they would consult with subject specialists first, and then consider proposing a new term to the Library of Congress. An additional question was how the UW

⁴ "Critical Cataloging and Archival Description." Critical Cataloging and Archival Description, University of Washington Libraries. Accessed August 2023. <https://www.lib.washington.edu/about/edi/critical-cataloging-and-archival-description>.

⁵ Casey, C. "Words Matter: Critical Cataloging and Archival Description at the University of Washington Libraries." University of Washington Blog. Accessed August 2023. <https://sites.uw.edu/libstrat/2021/09/07/words-matter-critical-cataloging-and-archival-description-at-the-university-of-washington-libraries/comment-page-1/>.

⁶ Hill, K. "Critical Cataloging." *Tateuchi East Asia Library Newsletter*, Autumn 2021 (2021): 7-8. Accessed August 2023. <https://www.lib.washington.edu/east-asia/news/past-issues/autumn-2021/view>.

Libraries would work with Ex Libris on conversion for replacing a large amount of records. The implementation that the UW Libraries had done was changing to “Undocumented immigrants” from “Illegal aliens.” As indicated in the presentation, the conversion was done by the Alliance Normalization Rules Standing Group which is composed of staff from Alliance libraries. Lee and Hill emphasized that changes were made to the shared integrated library system or Primo, so that it was not only for the UW Libraries but also for other libraries within the Alliance network. The change appeared in Primo only for displaying the alternative term. However, the Library of Congress revised “Illegal aliens” in November 2021, which allowed bibliographical records to be updated accordingly in Primo and Alma and removed the Alliance normalization rule changing the display of the LCSH.

One critical point was raised about the possible impact of changing subject headings locally on searching beyond local collections; for example, in other institutions’ discovery services. How would the UW Libraries communicate with users that they may need to use different subject headings in other library catalogs? Lee answered that this was a great question, and it was a good point to be considered. Lee further explained that she does not work with users directly thus she was not clear if there is such communication. But if there were changes made to subject headings, subject and reference librarians should be notified. They could then advise users on search strategies.

Finally, a member of the audience asked, when subject headings are replaced, would they be archived or simply removed? Is there a place to archive changes so that information about these changes will be accessible in the future? Or perhaps an authority control file that could provide information or redirect user searches made using replaced terms? To the speakers’ knowledge, for changes initiated by the feedback form created by the Critical Cataloging and Archival Description Statement working group, the changes would be documented in the feedback form internally. The UW Libraries may archive the document for external use in the future, but the speakers were uncertain about how it may be used at this point. For locally replaced subject headings, such as “Illegal aliens,” the discussion and decision papers are archived in their institutional repository.

The above questions from the audience were insightful and thought-provoking, which prompted the speakers to ponder what the CEAL community could do to improve communication and reporting on possible problematic and harmful subject headings and/or propose new subject headings that related to East Asian studies. As Lee previously stated, there is a SACO Proposal Form within the CJK SACO Funnel Project Wiki.⁷ A more centralized platform could be used within CEAL’s website to promote the form and encourage collaboration among technical services and public services colleagues.

⁷ “CJK SACO Funnel Project.” RDA & CJK Workshop / CJK SACO Funnel Project. Accessed August 2023. <http://rdaandcjkworkshop.pbworks.com/w/page/132381078/CJK%20SACO%20Funnel%20Project>