



**DECOLONIZING DESCRIPTION
AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN**

**Presentation by Deborah Lee
For the Decolonizing Metadata Session
At the CRKN Access to Knowledge Conference
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Main Talking Points:

- **Introduction**
- **U of S Context**
- **Indigenous Studies Portal or iPortal – A Good Model**
- **Digitization Projects and Problematic Metadata**
- **U of S Library Catalog**
- **Potential Solutions**
- **Q & A**

Introduction

- I am a *nēhiyaw* (Cree) & Métis librarian with some Haudenosaunee roots from Treaty 6 Territory. My people come from the Lac Ste. Anne, Onoway and St. Albert communities near *amiskwāciywaskahikan* (now known as Edmonton). The Sturgeon River links all three of these communities.
- I have been a librarian at the U of S for 12 years and am currently the Subject Specialist for Indigenous and Northern Studies. I also work on decolonization and Indigenous initiatives.
- Images credit: <http://www.nswa.ab.ca/>



U of S Context:

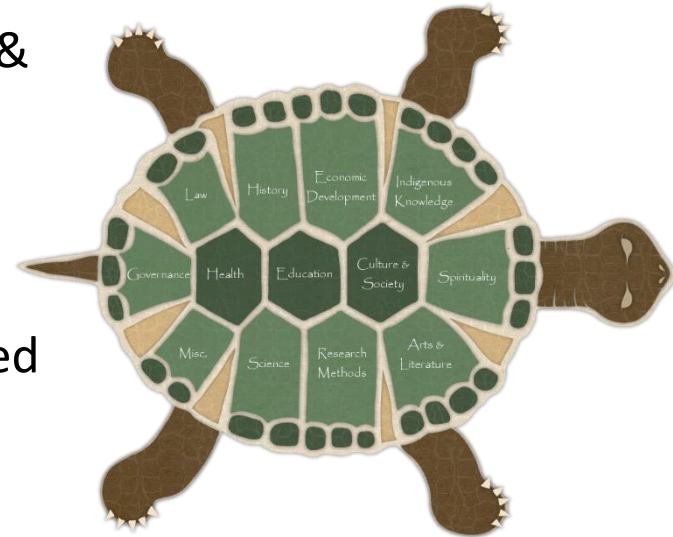
- **The U of S has approx. 3000 Indigenous students who make up about 12% of the total student population**
- **Indigenous people comprise 16% of the total Saskatchewan population and they are the fastest growing demographic group in the province**
- **The U of S has had a long history of developing Indigenous programming, i.e. Native Law Centre; Indigenous Teacher Education programs; the *kanawayihetaytan askiy* (Indigenous Land Management) program, etc.**



(image credit: Regan Ratt-Misponas, President, U of S Student's Union)

Indigenous Studies Portal or iPortal – A Good Model

- The iPortal is a virtual library that links to nearly 65,000 online resources (including peer-reviewed articles, Indigenous newspaper articles, theses, government & NGO reports, films and videos, and archival documents)
- iPortal content comes from a wide range of sources
- 2/3 of the content is open access (1/3 is vendor-based content)
- It is a decolonized research tool that helps level the playing field for many Indigenous library users, especially those who come from library-impooverished environments



Indigenous Studies Portal or iPortal – A Good Model (cont.)

- The iPortal front page was changed in 2012 to reflect a decolonized perspective:

iPortal Front Face (2005 – 2011)



iPortal Front Face (2012 -)



Indigenous Studies Portal or iPortal – A Good Model (cont.)

The iPortal uses decolonized subject terminology; some examples include:

- **Ancient Arts (not Primitive Art)**
- **Family & Kinship**
- **Family Hunting Areas, Livelihood, Subsistence**
- **Health - > Cultural Sensitivity**
- **History: Resistance 1869 and 1885 (not Rebellion)**
- **Sexual Diversity - > Two-Spirited**
- **Spirituality – > Belief Systems; Ceremonies; Sacred Sites**
- **Traditional Medicine and Treaty Right to Health**
- **Traditional Stories**

Indigenous Studies Portal or iPortal – A Good Model

- Yet, the iPortal could also be improved:
- Results from our Ithaka S+R study (a qualitative research project conducted in 2018 to determine how to improve library resources and services for Indigenous Studies scholars) provide some recommendations for improvement:
 - Our faculty would like to see more grey literature in the iPortal, including government and NGO reports
 - They would also like more Métis content added to the iPortal
- I will have more to say about the Ithaka S+R study and recommendations later. The capstone report from all 11 institutions is available here: (<https://sr.ithaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SR-Report-Research-Support-Services-Indigenous-Studies-04112019.pdf>)



ITHAKA S+R

Digitization Projects and Problematic Metadata

- Like LAC's digitized archival material, USask Library has websites containing digitized archival material with offensive and racist metadata that needs "correcting". Generally, it is the title that needs rewording
- Two sites in particular are the *Northern Research Portal* and the *Our Legacy* digitization project.
- Examples from the Northern Research Portal:
 - Original title: "Old Eskimo Man"
 - Original title: "Medicine Man"
 - Original title: "??? Secret Society"
- It was also necessary to pull down the images of some records from the website, e.g. those of ceremonial objects, funerals and cemeteries



Digitization Projects and Problematic Metadata

- **One solution was to revise the title to non-racist wording, then inserting the previous racist title into the scope note under “Original title”**
- **Another was to include both titles in the Title Field with the revised title coming first but included within square brackets – this makes for a long title**
- **One question arose as to whether the revised title in square brackets would interfere with the search function?**
- **For archival materials, so far there is not one subject that will bring both subjects of “Metis” and “Half-Breed” together, so users need to search with both terms**
- **Changing the “Survival” subject (to something like: “Fishing”, “Hunting”, “Trapping”)**
- **Also, changing the subject of “Leisure” to “Religion and Spirituality” (for ceremonial objects)**



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U of S Library Catalog

- **Recently the U of S Library cataloguing dept. and others met to “fix” some of the cataloguing records. For instance:**
- **“Indigenous peoples” LCSH was added to all records that had “Indians of North America” with a geographic subdivision**
- **Similarly, adding the term “Inuit” to all records with “Eskimo(s)”**
- **Discussion about changing a nation’s name from “Cree Indians” to “Cree Peoples”**

Potential Solutions (cont.)

- **Other changes we'd like to make (but will depend on many factors) include:**
- **“Indigenous women”; “Indigenous children”; “Indigenous philosophy”**
- **“Indigenous theatre”; “Indigenous languages”; “Indigenous authors”**
- **“Indigenous peoples in art”, or “in mass media”, or “in motion pictures”, or “in music”, or “in popular culture”**
- **“Indigenous Leaders” (not “Indian Kings and Rulers”)**
- **We are keeping in mind that there are also many kinds of Inuit people: from Nunavut, Nunavik (Québec), the Western Arctic, and urban Inuit**

Potential Solutions (cont.)

- **As per the Ithaka Report, further differentiation was requested for “Cree” materials, i.e.:**
 - - **“Plains Cree”**
 - - **“Woodland Cree”**
 - - **“Swampy (Mushkego) Cree”**
 - - **“Naskapi Cree”**
- **Geography makes a difference in a culture’s traditional or local knowledge. This can also be seen in the culture’s language dialect (regional differences).**

More Potential Solutions:

- **Frustrations arise because when our catalog records get uploaded to WorldCat by OCLC, the changes we made are over-ridden.**
- **LAC has been able to protect their changes from OCLC over-rides - being a national library has helped with this process**
- **However, UBC has also been able to protect their changes because they have a branch, the Xwi7Xwa Library, that is dedicated to Indigenous materials only. To protect descriptions of unique items, UBC cataloguers use a specialized thesaurus in Subfield 2, and a special indicator in the 6XX (MARC) field. But this occurred only after many conversations back and forth with the OCLC Metadata Quality team.**

A Few Words About Xwi7Xwa Library's Use of the Brian Deer Classification System, available here: <https://xwi7xwa-library-10nov2016.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2019/06/Xwi7xwa-Classification-ver-04March2013P.pdf>

It was developed by one of Canada's first Indigenous person with an MLIS, Brian Deer, a Mohawk from Kahnawake, when he was working for the National Indian Brotherhood (now known as the Assembly of First Nations)

One idea was to bring together Indigenous Nations that had similar cultures and languages. For example, coastal First Nations were located near each other using this scheme: Haida, Tsimshian, Tsimshian – Coastal, Gitx̱san, Nisga'a, Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth, Nuxalk, Heiltsuk, Coast Salish, then Interior Salish, followed by Ktunaxa, then the Athapascan...

In contrast, LC ordered various Nations (groups) alphabetically, so that searching on the shelf by call number did not usually bring like groups together.

Making Headway Is Possible:

We need a nation-wide and cooperative effort to advocate for all academic and research libraries to be able to retain our local changes to subject headings so they aren't over-ridden when OCLC uploads their catalogue records.

Can all the library leadership and consortia across Canada come together to help make this happen?

No researcher in Canada should have to use or be exposed to terminology that is offensive to their own people.



Thanks! / *ekosi maka*

Questions?

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