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Representing Communities through Descriptive Practices in the Archives

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Representing Communities through Descriptive Practices in the Archives

How can we create and implement descriptive metadata practices that are inclusive of the individuals and communities who create, use, and are represented throughout our collections?

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 the Special Collections Department at Florida International University implemented new practices working for creating and remediating descriptive metadata practices to be inclusive of the individuals and communities who create, use, and are represented throughout collections. We are performing periodic reviews of project decisions and requesting feedback in the hopes that our experiences will provide a model with recommendations for an ethical archival practice and lead to broader access of important manuscript collections. Specific examples of our new descriptive practices and the remediation steps we have taken in the past two years are outlined here.

ANALYSIS

COLLECTIONS

Analysis of Collections –
Scan for materials in languages other than English
- Spanish
- French
- Create
Scan for harmful language – ableist, racist, homophbic, lewd, offensive, sexist, religious discrimination
- Completed in 2021 by FIU Libraries Digital Collections Center

Related Literature –

COMMUNITY - population we serve

METHODOLOGY

Participate in trainings and collection reviews of language used, subject use as members of the FIU Libraries conscious metadata initiative. Focus on remediation and new descriptive practices that address the following:
- We are aware there is harmful language in our collections.
- The views within the harmful material do not reflect the views of the FIU Libraries.
- Communicate the reasons why the harmful language might exist.
- Distinguish between historical content and FIU staff created descriptions.
- Address language justice within processing and describing collections in our finding aids and digital collections.

FINDINGS

- Continual introspection, review, and training needed
- Create a local controlled vocabulary with community
- Benefit from a community advisory board
- Need for multilingual subject headings
- Be open to opportunities and possibilities
- Share experiences with colleagues and scholars

NEW PRACTICES

HARMFUL LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION NOTE IN FINDING AIDS AND DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

General
Please note: Transcriptions of handwritten notes on photographs in the collection and their English translations have been provided for context. This text may reflect biases and prejudices or terms that are outdated, offensive or insensitive.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

FEEDBACK WELCOME
FIU Special Collections welcomes your feedback on the description of its archival collections. Staff are currently implementing practices to address offensive or harmful language that may reflect biases and prejudices or terms that are outdated, offensive or insensitive. In addition, we encourage users to provide feedback to help us tackle this issue. Please email us, spccoll@fiu.edu to report errors or omissions or if you encounter harmful or offensive language.

NEXT STEPS

- Collect statistics on use and discoverability, for funding infrastructure, similar projects, and staff.
- Develop a sustainable model
- Multilingual keywords - subject, geographical, genre
- Transcription and translation

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