Research, reflect, revise: a survey of best practices in metadata remediation

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Introduction

Decisions are pending at Seton Hall's Walsh Library to drive upgrades in resource description, enabling rapid and effective location and retrieval, and addressing harm caused by inaccurate, biased, or dated terms. This literature review empowered technical services with next steps to support the library community and foster student success with enhanced discoverability.

Walsh Library, Seton Hall University
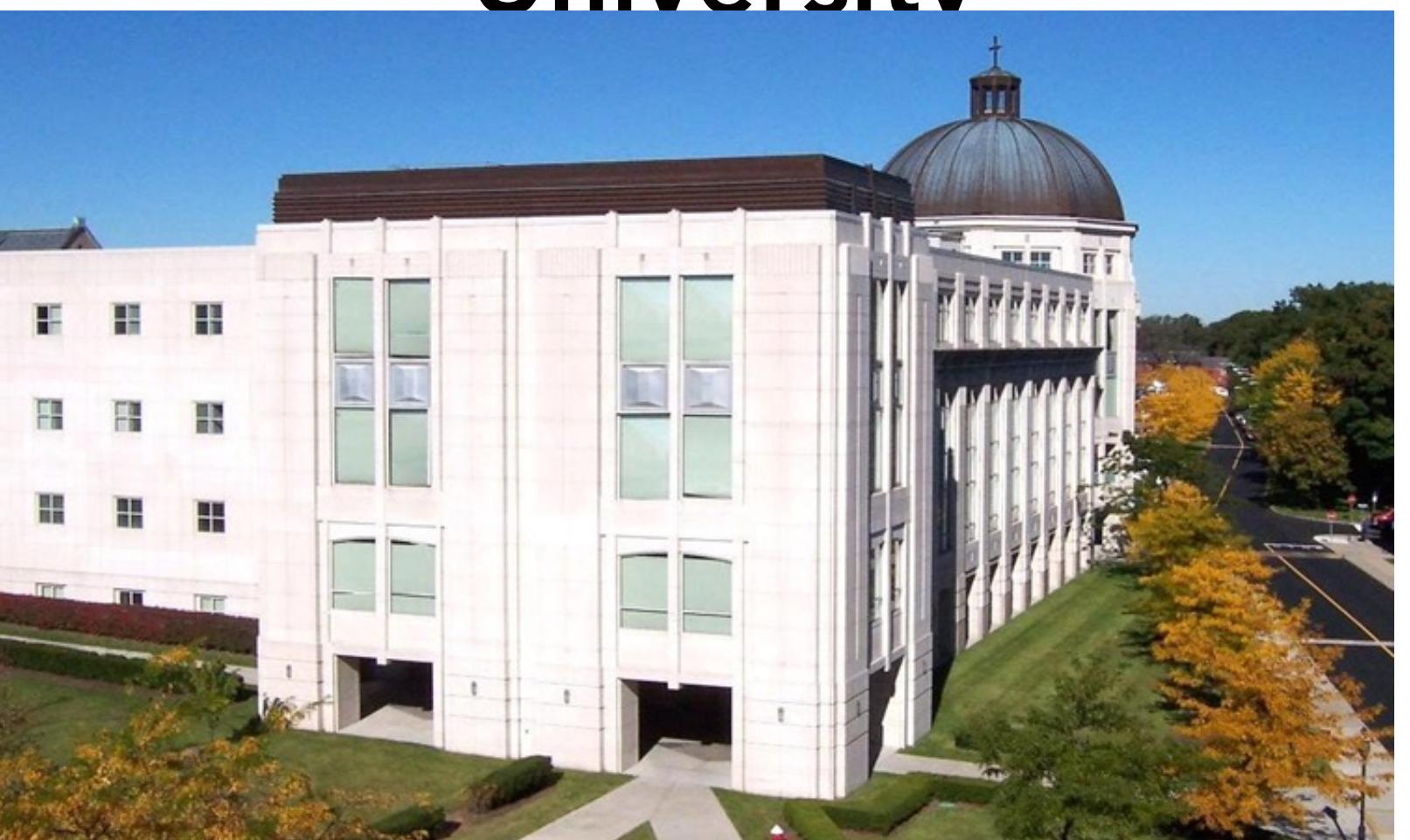
Acknowledgements

Observations

The need to upgrade metadata cannot be denied. Improved vocabularies means increased findabilty, enhancing student success and faculty research outcomes. However, one solution does not suit every community, and developing custom upgrades is a process. In the meantime, institutions have placed Statements on Descriptive Language on their websites, acknowledging the problem and pledging to address it. (In fact, harmful language will persist even after repair, as it may be needed to surface older materials.) Note that the use of Statements lags behind Land Acknowledgements at Seton Hall and its peer institutions, as seen above.
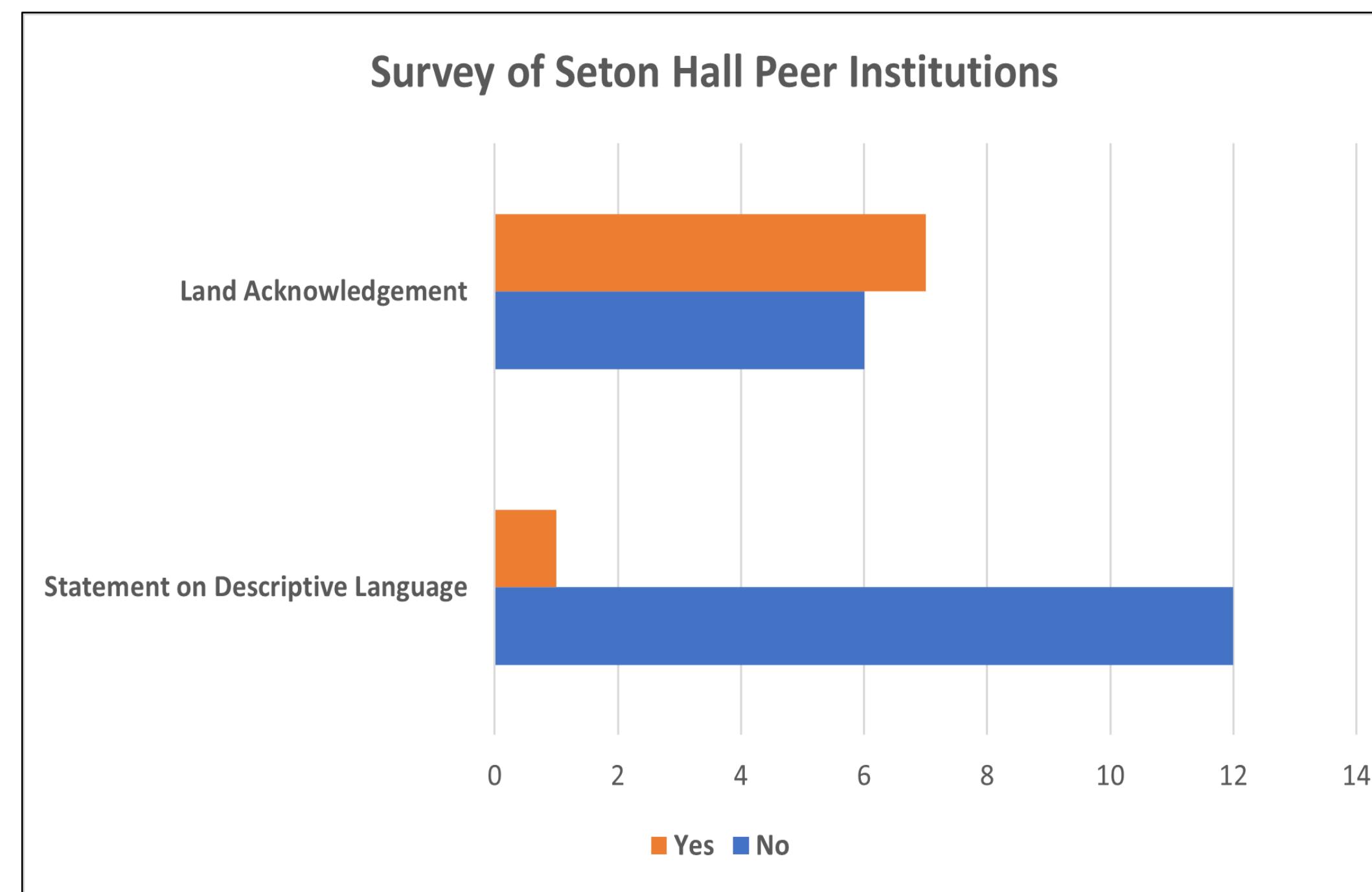
Survey of Seton Hall Peer Institutions

Technical Considerations
Not all terms can be addressed through batch replacements. Geographic terms and those relating to indigenous people need individual evaluation.
Finding aids may be useful when working with interdisciplinary materials, to identify those not collocated in the library collection.
Consider the collection as a whole, and how the stories of marginalized people are being told. Consider acts of omission as well as commission.
When replacing harmful language, think carefully about whether to suppress harmful terms, as this approach may hinder subsequent searches.
Evaluate effectiveness of changes made by analyzing usage statistics.

Selected References

Clark, B., & Smith, C. (2022). Prioritizing the people. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly, 60*(6-7), 560–582.

Hutchinson, J., & Nakatomi, J. (2023). Improving subject description of an LGBTQ + collection. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly, 61*(3-4), 380–394.

Pettitt, K., & Elzi, E. (2023). Unsettling the library catalog. *Library Resources & Technical Services, 67*(2), 44–52.

Tian, T. (Cindy), & Ratkovich, P. (2023). Serving DEI needs from an inclusive and critical cataloging perspective. *Technical Services Quarterly, 40*(3), 230–238.

Conclusions

• Be proactive. Don't wait for Library of Congress to take the lead.

• Acknowledge harm; commit to doing better. Begin with a website statement.

• Think globally, act locally. Consult locals for vocabularies.

• Collaborate with respect. Consider cultural taxation.

• Leverage work of others. LGBTQ+ improvements are well underway; apply those strategies to other groups.

• One size does not fit all. Different data requires different repair.

• Consider library collection in entirety; involve others on the team.

• Survey peer institutions.

Further information

I'm currently at work on a paper to explore this subject further, with particular focus on how advances made to improve LGBTQ+ resource description might inform enhanced description of resources related to indigenous populations. I'm at maryalice.rocks@rutgers.edu if you have a question or comment.