Content Warnings and Harmful Language Statements: Embedding empathy in the research process

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#dlbb
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INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON SITS ON THE ANCESTRAL HOMELANDS OF THE MIAMI, DELAWARE, POTAWATOMI & SHAWNEE PEOPLE
Content Warnings and Harmful Language

Content Warning

- A cautionary statement that alerts readers or viewers that content might illicit a strong or potentially harmful emotional response

Harmful Language

- Description or transcription of content that expresses a negative or violent bias towards a community or group of people
The Past Is Still Present

- Property-owning rights
- Citizenship rights
- Education rights
- Voting rights
- Sexual identity rights

De-center: white, male, straight, Christian, middle-class, able-bodied, Anglo view of world

Words Do, In Fact, Matter

- Metadata categorizes
- Categories express viewpoints
- Viewpoints contain biases
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EMPATHY

Understanding someone else’s experience. Beyond listening and sympathizing, empathy gives you the ability to see from someone else’s viewpoint.
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Being able to observe, analyze, infer or draw conclusions based on data, and share this information to problem solve.

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- Description is not neutral
- Cataloging is not neutral
- Metadata is not neutral
The Goal - Give energy and support to perspectives and research from people who have been marginalized. Focusing efforts to support those who have not previously been supported by our collections and our work.

Center: Identities marginalized as a result of white, male, straight, Christian, middle-class, able-bodied, Anglo view of world

This is a step towards that goal.
For Your Consideration

- Take in what we are doing and how we got here
- Consider how this can open or invite feedback and conversation about IU Libraries’ digital collections
- What does it mean to you if you encounter a content warning during your research?
- Would you send in feedback about harmful language or recommend a content warning?
Harmful Language Statement

Date of last review: September 2021
Date of next review: September 2022

The Digital Collections Services department is responsible for assisting in the curation, access and preservation of digital special collections including archival collections. We are committed to upholding the description of archival materials and special collections in a respectful and accurate manner while maintaining the historical context of the collections we manage. However, the materials we describe are not necessarily free of offensive, harmful, or otherwise outdated language in archival materials and special collections. Indiana University collects and makes freely available materials from hundreds of collections. Language and its cultural context is always changing, and so are our methods of description.

While most of our finding aids and special collections are created by staff, some reflect language that the people and organizations who created the material used. It is standard practice to maintain the description used by the creator/donor of archival materials. Language used in the original historical materials can tell us a lot about the materials. With that said, we are committed to updating language that is in our control to edit. We pledge to reflect the values of the IU Libraries Mission Statement and Diversity Strategic Plan in future description. Please use the harmful language report form to report offensive material and/or description.
Trends

- Statements with generic reference email
  - Digital Public Library of America
  - Temple University Libraries
  - Drexel University Archives
- Unique e-mail address for harmful language reporting
  - Stanford Libraries
  - Princeton University Library
- Committees for harmful language remediations and improved archival description
  - University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

The Digital Public Library of America’s harmful language statement for The Black Women’s Suffrage Digital Collection
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Series 1: President's Standing Committee on the Status of Women Records, 1989-2001

Collection Creator:
Princeton University. Library. Special Collections and Princeton University. President's Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Dates:
1989-2001

Extent:
6 boxes and 2 items

Languages:
English

Suggest a Correction button on Princeton University Library finding aid
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Conscious Editing Initiative from UNC-Chapel Hill
Harmful Language Statement
Reporting Process

Step 1: User submits report
Step 2: Qualtrics triggers e-mail notification to DCS monitor
Step 3: DCS Monitor creates JIRA ticket and assigns relevant collection manager
Step 4: DCS Monitor assigns JIRA ticket number in Qualtrics and records ticket status
Step 5: If necessary, collection manager addresses the reported item
Step 1

- User submits report
- Qualtrics
Step 2

- Qualtrics triggers e-mail notification to DCS monitor

Step 3

- DCS Monitor creates DCSLANG JIRA ticket and assigns relevant collection manager
Step 4

- DCS Monitor assigns JIRA ticket number in Qualtrics and records ticket status

Step 5

- If necessary, collection manager addresses the reported item

Harmful Language Report Form

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Please note that reporting an item does not guarantee that it will be taken down or edited. If you provide an e-mail address in your report, a collection manager may follow up about actions taken.

Once this report has been addressed, please provide its JIRA ticket ID (e.g. IUDCSSLANG-13).
**Step 4**

- DCS Monitor assigns JIRA ticket number in Qualtrics and records ticket status

**Step 5**

- If necessary, collection manager addresses the reported item
What’s next?

- Expansion to all services
- Content warnings
- Annual review

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) sensitivity message
Please consider what our digital collections are representing and what other ways we might better support research interests of marginalized communities.
References

- List of harmful language statements: http://cataloginglab.org/list-of-statements-on-bias-in-library-and-archives-description/
Thank you!