

The Word Hunt: Problematic Language in the Finding Aid



The Plan:

Audit the Special Collection finding aids at the University of California, Santa Cruz and identify problematic or offensive language.

The Results:

Three broad types of issues identified:

1. Patently offensive, inaccurate or outdated language
2. Misleading or inappropriate language, including issues with capitalization
3. The use of Mrs. followed by a husband's first and last name instead of that individual's name, and the use of Miss followed by a last name instead of using the first and last name of an individual

The Process:

Explore relevant literature to compile a literature review and develop a conceptual framework. Extensively review selected finding aids, followed by targeted keyword searching across all finding aids. Document results and discuss findings and recommendations in a white paper for UCSC.

Recommendations:

1. Issues within the finding aids ranked according to urgency: how should archivists at UCSC begin addressing problems identified by this audit?
2. Further directions for the project: engage in outreach and collaboration with community groups represented in the finding aids (and compensate accordingly).

Highest Priority

1. Mrs. followed by husband's name
2. Patently offensive/outdated terminology
3. Misleading/innapropriate language in titles of finding aids

Medium Priority

1. Misleading or innapropriate language **within** the finding aids
2. Capitalizing terms like **Black** and **Indigenous**

Lowest Priority

1. Review titles of documents to determine if they were assigned by **archivists** or titled by their **creator**
2. Standardize the use of **Mrs.** and **Miss**



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