

Recommendation to Implement an Alliance-wide Alternative to the LCSH “Illegal Aliens” Subject Terminology

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Orbis Cascade Alliance Cataloging Standing Group:

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Recommendation

The Cataloging Standing Group and Network Zone Manager recommend that the Alliance establish a central mechanism for replacing the Library of Congress Subject Heading “Illegal Aliens” with the recommended alternative term “Undocumented immigrants” by the end of calendar year 2020. The mechanism should be based on Primo normalization rules and should affect Primo display and faceting fields. If Primo normalization rule changes are not sufficient to implement the heading substitution, then metadata changes in the Alma NZ and IZs should be investigated.

- The use of Primo normalization rules to achieve the heading substitution (following the pattern of [changes established by the California State University system](#)) will allow records in Alma to retain their original metadata, and will eliminate the need for local staff to implement the substitution.
- These rule changes replace the terminology in the Details section of Primo record display, but retain it in the search and browse fields so that users can still retrieve applicable records using the original terminology.
- Implementation of these norm rules would require testing by the Alliance Norm Rules Standing Group to make sure they work in an acceptable way before being implemented on Primo production.
- The CSG plans to write a short explanatory statement about the change to help members inform Primo users why the change was made (similar to this [California State University statement](#) and this [Villanova University blog post](#)).

Priority

Implementing this change should be a high priority to support the Alliance 2019 - 2024 Strategic Agenda item to “Curate physical and digital collections that foster diversity and inclusiveness in research, scholarship, and teaching”¹, as well as to support member institutions’ individual commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

¹ <https://www.orbiscascade.org/2019-2024-strategic-agenda/>

Supporting Input from Alliance Membership

This recommendation to move ahead with the heading substitution is based on the following input from Alliance membership:

- Community-wide review and local discussion of the Cataloging Standing Group's [discussion paper](#) on the issue, entitled "Providing Alternative Subject Headings for Controversial Subject Headings in the Alliance Shared ILS".²
- A community-wide survey from April 2020 on whether the Alliance should provide the alternative headings centrally or leave the decision (and the heading changes) up to individual members³.

Rationale for a Central Solution Over Institution-Level Action

- Adding the alternative heading would be streamlined (i.e., no duplication of effort).
- Local implementation would be significantly more difficult and time-consuming than a central solution.
- Action at the Alliance level signifies more solidarity/action on this issue.
- Ongoing maintenance for new records could be handled centrally. This would eliminate the need for individual member libraries to perform duplicative ongoing work.

Threshold for Other Requests to Change LCSH Terminology

The CSG recommends exercising extreme caution in the future before considering whether to take a similar approach to change other potentially controversial Library of Congress Subject Heading terminology in the Alliance shared ILS. Libraries are able to realize significant technical services efficiencies and systems interoperability by using standardized, nationally developed subject heading vocabularies like LCSH. The official pathway to recommending changes to LCSH terminology should continue to be employed⁴ before considering changes at the Alliance level. Devoting the necessary amount of technical work to make these kinds of changes to our local systems falls outside of official pathways, provides limited return on labor investments, and should be thoroughly and carefully considered in relation to competing Alliance priorities before proceeding.

The circumstances surrounding changes to this particular subject heading are truly unique and unprecedented, resulting in legislation enacted by Congress restricting the Library of Congress from moving forward with their planned changes. The threshold for making similar future changes in Alliance systems to LCSH terminology should only be met if comparable restrictions to deny or stall the Library of Congress in making terminology changes to their vocabulary occur. Because of the uniqueness of this particular situation, the CSG anticipates that requests to the Alliance for similar changes to LCSH terminology will be infrequent.

² The discussion paper was written by the CSG as a response to the Alliance receiving an email request in March 2019 from Evergreen Library to consider the option of "enhancing" bibliographic records containing the authorized Library of Congress Subject Heading (LCSH) "Illegal aliens" with the additional local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants." Around the same time as the email request from Evergreen, librarians at the University of Washington inquired about the same issue.

³ Survey responses in Appendix 1.

⁴ Via the Program for Cooperative Cataloging [Subject Authority Cooperative Program](#) (SACO).

Additional Information to Supplement the Recommendation

User Impact

The term “illegal immigrants” can have a negative emotional impact on our user community, and users may presume the LCSH terminology is a deliberate choice made by our library staff. According to a list⁵ compiled by UW librarians of Alliance members’ undocumented student support resources, an overwhelming majority of member institutions offer some sort of support for future or current students. Both Washington and Oregon have passed [bills where undocumented students receive financial assistance and in-state tuition to attend public universities](#). In 2016 Idaho passed [SB1280](#), offering in-state tuition for DACA recipients. Since a majority of Alliance institutions welcome and support undocumented students, our libraries should demonstrate our support and commit to this widely-accepted practice of changing local catalog records to inoffensive and inclusive terminology.

The initial formal request (2014) from Dartmouth College to the Library of Congress to change the subject heading "pointed out, in part, that 'Illegal alien' is a 'dehumanizing, inaccurate, offensive, and inflammatory term,' and requested that LC replace 'Illegal alien' with 'Undocumented immigrant.'"⁶ The 2019 documentary film *Change the Subject*⁷ shares the story of Dartmouth College students’ advocacy and efforts. In it, Melissa Padilla, '17, describes, "My gut reaction to seeing the subject heading here at Dartmouth was disgust and also, like, perplexed... I thought this place would know better or do better. Wow, I can't believe you think these things... I know there are undocumented students here on campus and you recruit them, and you still subject them to this sort of thing, and it's not okay."

Hugo Garcia Villa, Coordinator of Leadership Without Borders⁸ at the University of Washington adds, “One of the biggest misunderstandings to talk about an “illegal immigrant” and not even their simple existence or humanity is to highlight the first half of the term, the word “illegal”. How we talk about immigration is important and if we looked more closely at these terms and understood the damage that it can cause with these varying labels we could start to understand the nuance of this language being used. No human is illegal and using that reference is neither accurate or neutral. Words matter and using it to intentionally describe people is irresponsible, offensive, and dehumanizing. The people of this issue are children, parents and families and they too have names, hopes and dreams that deserve to be respected.”

Support for These Changes

Making these changes has widespread support from librarians and professional associations. In 2016 the [Resolution on Replacing the Library of Congress Subject Heading 'Illegal Aliens' with 'Undocumented Immigrants'](#) was submitted to the American Library Association Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), which voted to bring the resolution forward for consideration by ALA Council. The Resolution gained the support of several ALA groups beyond the SRRT, including the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking

⁵ See Appendix 2.

⁶ Peet, Lisa. [Library of Congress Drops Illegal Alien Subject Heading, Provokes Backlash Legislation](#). *Library Journal*, 2016.

⁷ [Change the Subject](#)

⁸ [Leadership Without Borders](#)

(REFORMA), the Ethnic and Multicultural Exchange Round Table (EMIERT), the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials (SALALM), ALA's Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC), the Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT), and the Subject Analysis Committee. ALA Council passed the 2016 Resolution unanimously and SAC formed a working group to determine an appropriate replacement heading for the LCSH "Illegal aliens." At the same time, Twitter campaigns were launched using the hashtags #DropTheWord (by the racial justice initiative Race Forward) and #NoHumanBeingsIllegal.

Institutions Who Have Made These Changes

According to responses from a September 2019 survey⁹ on this issue from the [ALA ALCTS Subject Analysis Committee Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH "Illegal aliens"](#) (hereafter referred to as SAC Working Group), 34 public and academic institutions or consortia have already made these changes¹⁰, including the California State University consortium, Yale Law School, and Yale University Library. Four additional institutions¹¹ were planning or in the process of making these changes at the time of the survey.

Response to Libraries Who Have Made These Changes

The overwhelming majority of respondents to the SAC Working Group survey reported positive or neutral responses to the changes they made to their catalog. Of the 34 respondents who replied to the question "Have you received any response to the changes? If so, was it positive or negative?," 26 expressed hearing only positive comments, primarily from staff or administration. Very few libraries reported hearing any comments from the public. Six institutions reported that they had had no response to the changes, and three reported mixed results.

Comments received about the changes included questions about the scalability of similar projects and finding/prioritizing other offensive LCSH. Negative responses to the changes included one library that received questions from a conservative news site: after emailing the site with information about the proposal and the alternative vocabularies used, the library did not hear from the site again.

The SAC survey asked participants "What would you do differently if given the chance to make these changes again?" The most frequently given answer was "Nothing," with the second most frequent comment being, "Make the changes sooner." The SAC Working Group suggests that any change institutions can make to implement less offensive language in their catalogs is better than doing nothing, because it is unclear when LC will move forward with changing the LCSH.¹²

⁹ [Report of the SAC Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH "Illegal aliens"](#)

¹⁰ Autry Museum of the American West, Bard College, California College of the Arts, California State University consortium, Chicago History Museum, Cornell University, Dakota County Library, Denver Public Library, Flintridge Preparatory School, Frances C. Richmond Middle School, Greater Victoria Public Library, Hennepin County Library, Hull City Libraries, Lawrence (KS) Public Library, Linn-Benton Community College, Madison (WI) Public Library, Michigan State University, The Newton School, North Carolina State University, Regis University, San Diego Community College District, Texas State University, Thomas J. Harrison Pryor Public Library, University of California at Berkeley, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Colorado Denver, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, University of San Francisco, University of Sussex (UK), Villanova University, Westminster Presbyterian Church Library, Williamsburg Regional Library, Yale Law School, and Yale University Library.

¹¹ Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Simmons University, University of Kentucky, and Stanford University.

¹² [Report of the SAC Working Group on Alternatives to LCSH "Illegal aliens"](#)

Summary

We believe that the overwhelming support within the library community for these changes, combined with their implementation at other academic consortia and libraries across the country provide substantial support to the CSG's recommendation that the Alliance should replace the "Illegal aliens" subject heading with the alternative term "Undocumented immigrants".

Appendix 1 - April 2020 survey on whether the Alliance should provide the alternative headings centrally or leave the decision (and the heading changes) up to individual members

Institution	My institution supports the following approach to the controversial LCSH "Illegal aliens":	Additional comments
Central Washington University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Chemeketa Community College	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	Thank-you for all of the work and patience that went into this project.
Eastern Washington University	We would prefer an Alliance-level implementation of alternative headings, however, we are concerned about the workload this would entail.	Our institution is conflicted on the appropriate approach to this issue. While we prefer the alternate term, we do not have the staff time to maintain the alternate heading locally, and we are concerned about the level of work required of our NZ Manager if this were implemented Alliance-wide.
Evergreen State College	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	Although, I personally agree completely with comment 1 below. LCSH has a very long history of being slow to adopt what we might consider more culturally appropriate subject headings and this is a very slippery slope to start upon. I see this as largely a symbolic gesture that ultimately will have very little practical effect on record retrieval for most patrons.
Lane Community College	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	I hope that the committee will look at other controversial headings!
Lewis & Clark College	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Linfield College	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Mt Hood Community College	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	

OHSU	Leaving the option of enhancing bibliographic records up to each library	LCSH is riddled with outdated and offensive terminology -- following this strategy is doomed to spend a lot of energy accomplishing relatively level. Term maintenance needs to be as high level as possible. This really needs to be done at vocab level, but if we must do something at a lower level, centrally implemented norm rules seem a better mechanism.
Oregon Institute of Technology	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Oregon State University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
PCC	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	thank you for your work on this!
Portland State University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Reed College	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Saint Martin's University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	This seems like a small way to support one of our most vulnerable populations. Words matter!
Seattle Pacific University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Seattle University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
University of Idaho Library	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
University of Oregon	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	We are wondering why the suggested policy is only for the "Illegal aliens" heading. Is there a reason not to add all seven terms from the SAC report as local subject headings in the NZ? That seems like a more complete solution unless there are reasons why it will not work.
University of Puget Sound	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
University of Washington	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	

Walla Walla University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Washington State University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	We vote for the option -- Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level
Whitworth University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	
Willamette University	Creating an Alliance-wide Policy to add the local subject heading "Undocumented immigrants" to records at the network level	

Appendix 2 – Alliance members’ resource pages or statements of support for undocumented students

Alliance Member	Resource page or statement of support for undocumented students
Central Oregon Community College	https://www.cocc.edu/departments/multicultural/latino/undocumented-student-resources/default.aspx
Central Washington University	https://www.cwu.edu/diversity/undocumented-students
Chemeketa Community College	https://www.chemeketa.edu/students/student-services/student-resources/daca-students/
Clackamas Community College	https://www.clackamas.edu/about-us/accreditation-policies/student-rights
Clark College	https://clarknow.clarku.edu/2017/02/08/clark-reiterates-support-for-immigrant-international-and-undocumented-students-scholars/
Eastern Oregon University	https://www.eou.edu/dacamented/
Eastern Washington University	https://inside.ewu.edu/diversityandinclusion/resources-for-undocumented-students/
George Fox University	https://www.georgefox.edu/education/become-a-teacher/bachelors-degree/degree-completion/how-do-i.html
Lane Community College	https://www.lanecc.edu/undocumented-students
Lewis & Clark College	https://college.lclark.edu/student_life/multicultural_affairs/resources/undocumented-and-daca/
Linfield College	https://www.linfield.edu/career/diversity/resources-daca-students.html
Mt. Hood Community College	https://www.mhcc.edu/ResourcesforUndocumentedStudents/
Oregon Health & Science University	https://news.ohsu.edu/2017/01/30/all-are-welcome-at-ohsu
Oregon Institute of Technology	https://www.oit.edu/admissions/tuition-equity
Oregon State University	https://osucascades.edu/diversity/students/undocumented-students

Pacific University	https://www.pacificu.edu/about/media/message-president-hallick-1
Portland Community College	https://www.pcc.edu/dream/undocumented/
Portland State University	https://www.pdx.edu/student-finance/undocumented-students-dreamers-daca
Reed College	https://www.reed.edu/diversity/resources/immigration-undocumented.html
Saint Martin's University	https://www.stmartin.edu/news-events/news/saint-martins-president-signs-letter-supporting-students-protected-federal-deferred
Seattle Pacific University	https://spu.edu/current-students/undocumented-students
Seattle University	https://www.seattleu.edu/undergraduate-admissions/apply/undocumented-students/
Southern Oregon University	https://sou.edu/admissions/apply/uid/
The Evergreen State College	https://www.evergreen.edu/undocumented
University of Oregon	https://www.uoregon.edu/dreamers
University of Portland	https://www.up.edu/admissions/faqs/index.html
University of Puget Sound	https://www.pugetsound.edu/student-life/resources-for-undocumented-persons/
University of Washington	http://depts.washington.edu/ecc/lwb/
Warner Pacific University	https://www.warnerpacific.edu/news/daca-statement/
Washington State University	https://undocumented.wsu.edu/
Western Oregon University	https://wou.edu/daca/
Western Washington University	https://www.wvu.edu/undocumented-students
Whitman College	https://www.whitman.edu/campus-life/diversity/undocumented-students-and-immigration-resources
Whitworth University	https://www.whitworth.edu/cms/administration/student-life/resources-for-undocumented-students/