<div align="center">**Law Repositories Caucus Sandbox Series 2021**</div>

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TITLE: Reflections on Critical Librarianship & Creating a Controlled Vocabulary

DESCRIPTION: During the summer of 2020, several members of the Cardozo Law Library collaborated to create a controlled vocabulary (CV) for LARC, our institutional repository. During the creation of this CV, there was no explicit intention to consider critical librarianship teachings while making decisions about what words "belonged" in the CV nor in drafting policies relating to the CV. This presentation will reflect on how *beginning* the project with critical librarianship in mind may have impacted the CV and will attempt to consider changes to the current policies to mitigate biases that are undoubtably embedded in the CV as it stands.

OUTLINE:

- Introduction
    - **What is LARC?**
        - LARC is the Lillian & Rebecca Chutick Scholarly Repository & Institutional Archive at Cardozo School of Law.
        - Goals of LARC are to:
            - Make the scholarly life of the Law School accessible and discoverable to all
            - Preserve and highlight the life and culture of the Law School
            - Support the efforts of the Law School's scholars and departments to advance their missions & goals
        - Currently, LARC contains the following:
            - Materials from clinics and centers
            - Recording of events
            - Faculty, student, and alumni scholarship, including articles, book chapters, briefs, testimony, and more
            - Institutional history, like event invitations, graduation booklets, student handbooks, news, yearbooks, and flyers
    - **Why did we need a CV?**
        - Our news, flyers, and scholarship collections were the largest. As they were created, individual entries were given keywords. The existing keywords came from (1) law faculty and (2) library staff. There were no guidelines for selecting or assigning keywords, and thus no uniformity across collections or individual works.
        - One of LARC's goals are to *make the scholarly life of the Law School accessible and discoverable to all*. It became clear that a CV was necessary to make our collections accessible and discoverable.
- Creating the CV
    - Preliminary steps: Download the data for each collection (flyers, articles) to create a **master list** of all keywords in use in LARC. Remove duplicates. Sort the

keywords into four subcategories: words, organizations, places, and names. Using Excel, indicate which collection used which keyword.

- o **Step 1: Make Guidelines.**
    - This was an informal first step before the sorting of the keywords began
    - General principles for the *words* sub-list included: combine similar phrases; shorten, if possible, long phrases; eliminate words or phrases that were too "niche"; eliminate words that were too "general."
    - The general principle for the *organizations* sub-list was: standardizing the names of organizations by using their official name and acronym, if any.
    - General principles for the *names* sub-list included: removing all titles and honorifics (Professor, Doctor, Judge, etc); removing names that could not be verified (single-word names like Warren).
    - The main principles for the *places* sub-list was providing a state's acronym for most cities.
- o **Step 2: Make Decisions**
    - This phase required deciding which words and phrases belonged in the CV, using the general guidelines above.
    - I sorted through the list of *words* – 1,419 of them – and decided which should stay, which should be changed, and which should be eliminated. In all, 665 words were kept in the CV; 383 were changed or merged with a different word or phrase; and 369 were eliminated.
    - *Organizations:* 111 were kept in the CV; 127 were changed or merged with a different organization; and 12 were eliminated.
    - *Names:* 467 were kept in the CV; 134 were changed or merged with a different name; and 8 were eliminated.
    - *Places:* 26 were kept in the CV; 15 were changed or merged with a different place; and 3 were eliminated.
- o **Step 3: Make a Policy**
    - *After* the decisions were made, we decided to create a policy for adding new words to the CV, expecting it to be a living CV.
    - The current CV policy can be read in its entirety on LARC, here.
- The State of the CV today
    - o The CV is by no means a comprehensive CV. Because the keywords only need to attach to a limited set of resources, there are not many.
    - o The current CV has 860 *words*, 41 *places*, 216 *organizations*, and 557 *names*. You can view the current CV on LARC, here.
    - o The CV also has 564 *proposed additions* as of June 4, 2021. Those proposed additions include duplicates, per LARC policy. The majority of the proposed additions are *words*.
- Critique of CV project in light of critical librarianship and critical legal research
    - o **What is critical librarianship?**
        - Classifications and categorization necessarily and inherently reflect the dominant biases of society.
    - o **What biases came into play while creating the CV?**
        - I decided what was correct, necessary, and important – it is inevitable that my own biases have informed our CV.

- - Examples of words that I chose to eliminate include: criminal justice system; economically targeted investments; falafel dinner; legitimacy; nonprofit organizations; planning; social investing; student; tort theory; underrepresented entrepreneurs.
    - Examples of words I chose to change include: alums and alumnus (both merged into *alum*); asylum applications and asylum policy (both merged into *asylum*); gay rights (*LGBTQ Rights*); HIV (*HIV/AIDS*); Native Americans (*American Indian, Indigenous American*); and race discrimination (*racial discrimination*).
    - Examples of words I chose to keep include: access to justice; death penalty; diversity; ethics; gay; harassment; incarceration; internship; legal research; Libertarian; and polygamy.
  - **How might the CV look if we considered critical librarianship before starting the project?**
    - What words would I have kept? Changed? Eliminated?
    - Would I alone make decisions, or would we have created a panel or committee or working group of some sort?
    - Because we have a small team working on LARC and the CV, and because the CV itself is small, we can more quickly (a) sort through the keywords; (b) assign new keywords; and (c) make changes to the CV. This puts us at an advantage over other classification schemes, like the Library of Congress subject headings, which can take between 2 and 6 months to change.[1]
- The future of the LARC CV
  - How can we change our policies to be more mindful of critlib in the future?
    - Those who are responsible for updating the CV should "be aware that they most likely have unconscious cultural biases and acknowledge them and their origins."[2]
  - How can our policy reflect the theory that keywords and information are not neutral?
  - What changes can we make to the new words policy?
  - What impact would these changes have on the findability of our resources?
    - If we do not use the terms that researchers would use – in a Google search, for example – then what is the usefulness of the CV?

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[1] Crystal Vaughan, *The Language of Cataloguing: Deconstructing and Decolonizing Systems of Organization in Libraries*, 14 DJIM 5 (Spring 2018).

[2] Crystal Vaughan, *The Language of Cataloguing: Deconstructing and Decolonizing Systems of Organization in Libraries*, 14 DJIM 11 (Spring 2018)