From Pathfinder to Indigenized:
An Assessment of LibGuides for Indigenous Studies by ARL Member Institutions

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Abstract

The historical underpinnings of Indigenous Studies (IS) and its inherent interdisciplinary nature require that libraries and archives represent in their collections past and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples. LibGuides is a popular web platform to thematically curate and promote research collections and information sources. While guides bridge curricular and research objectives to collections, there is little discussion about Indigenizing content and design as a decolonization strategy. This study identified and evaluated 357 guides for Indigenous Studies (IS) created by members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). "Indigenous Studies" or "IS" is used in this research as an umbrella term to represent many interrelated academic fields and subfields including First Nations Studies, Métis Studies, Native American Studies, American Indian Studies, Inuit Studies, Polar Studies, and Hawaiian Studies. Data compiled from Springshare's LibGuides Community and ARL member webpages was analyzed for Indigenous representation, content, and user experience (UX) against a rubric of Indigenous critical pedagogical practices and protocols. The findings reveal variety in vocabulary terms to describe Indigenous peoples and subjects, organization, and topics and foci, as well as a lack of interdisciplinarity. The discussion highlights opportunities for libraries and archives to reimagine guides as Indigenized and decolonized information sources that validate Indigenous ways of knowing.

Introduction

The study assessed Indigenous Study (IS) guides produced by Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members for thematically curating and promoting research collections and information sources. "Indigenous Studies" or "IS" is used in this research to represent First Nations Studies, Métis Studies, Native American Studies, American Indian Studies, Inuit Studies, Polar Studies, and Hawaiian Studies.

Problem Statement

LibGuides bridges curricular and research objectives to collections, but yet to be undertaken was a survey of guides created for IS, or a framework to Indigenize content and design as a decolonization strategy. Three thematic areas were assessed:

1. **Representation**: To what extent do ARL institutions represent Indigenous Studies (IS) in guides? Are the purposes and intentions of the guides clearly communicated?

2. **Content**: What words or phrases most frequently appear in assigned titles, subjects, and tags?

3. **UX Design**: Is there a presence of one or more of the following: decolonizing descriptions, arrangement, and organization of sources; inclusion of a land acknowledgment, local resources, and reference terminology; links to institutional Indigenous Studies (IS) programs? Do guides align with the best practice protocols recommended in Robert Kennedy et al.,'s *International Indigenous Design Charter: Protocols for Sharing Indigenous Knowledge in Professional Design Practice* (Geelong, Australia: Deakin University, 2018)?

Methodology

Data compiled from Springshare's LibGuides Community and ARL member webpages was analyzed against a rubric of Indigenous critical pedagogical practices and protocols.

Defining Indigenous Guides: Indigenous guides in this study are guides with primary coverage in at least one Indigenous-focused criterion, in a North American context, e.g., inclusion of the phrase "Indigenous Studies" or "Native American Studies" in the title or description

Data Collection Framework: Information and data were collected in December 2021 in a shared Google sheet. Searches were performed twice for specific words and phrases and in an iterative manner: once in Springshare's LibGuides Community and once in the institution's own web page or online presence for guides. Keyword searches used common variations of the word Indigenous: Native, Native American, Indian, Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, and Métis. The UX design assessment draws from best-practice protocols articulated in the *International Indigenous Design Charter*. Crosswalks map to the protocols to practical library contexts. Voyant was used for textual analyses of titles, subjects, and tags assigned to guides. Searches were conducted on its corresponding institutional web page to determine if it offered a degree, minor, or certification in IS. The Indigenizing framework for assessment of content and UX design was organized in five columns. Each "Protocol" mirrors the 10-step best-practice protocols defined in the *International Indigenous Design Charter: Protocols for Sharing Indigenous Knowledge in Professional Design Practice*. "Crosswalked Element," is a process or activity that can bridge a "Protocol" to an Indigenized guide. It provides practical examples of content and UX attributes that transform a guide from a pathfinder to an Indigenized resource.

Findings

The findings revealed variety in vocabulary terms to describe Indigenous peoples and subjects, organization, and topics and foci, as well as a lack of interdisciplinarity.

- Guides do not fully use enhanced web design and website creation capabilities.
- Minimal integration with existing library web infrastructure and branding.
- Few cues communicate that the guide is part of a library's website.
- Challenging to locate landing pages for guides.
- Guide types (subject, topic, course, and so on) were not commonly defined.
- Many guides function as a pathfinder for general IS content, others as web pages.
- Presentation of information and library resources for social justice and related issues frequently omits context.
- Most land acknowledgments lack historical background about the land itself.
- Highlighting licensed resources as "top picks" or categorizing library materials by format rather than by subject presents incompatibilities with inquiry-based learning. This method is culturally remote and counter to Indigenous epistemological approaches.
- Little indication that Indigenous values and collaborations with local communities informed the structure, arrangement, and content selection.

Results

This study identified and evaluated 357 guides for Indigenous Studies (IS) created by members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

- 111 ARL institutions use the LibGuides platform. 87 of the 111 have at least one IS guide.
- Top producers of IS guides: University of British Columbia (26); University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (18); University of New Mexico (17); University of Toronto (17); and University of Washington (16).
- The Library of Congress - 12 guides.
- 63 percent of guides include a purpose statement.
- 72 ARL institutions offer a degree, concentration, or certification in IS.
- The word "Indigenous" appeared as a top-three term in all guide types.
- In all three categories, five of the top 10 words appear: Indigenous; American; Native; studies; and history.
- Most common assigned subjects and tags: Indigenous, American, and Native.
- Most frequently selected subjects: Indigenous studies; American studies; First Nations; ethnic studies; and social sciences.
- Despite the persistence of "Indian" in Library of Congress subject headings (such as Indians of North America), the word "Indian" only appeared in the top 10 of the title category.

Table: UX design assessment rubric using protocols delineated by the *International Indigenous Design Charter*

Protocols	Protocol Definition	Crosswalked Element
Indigenous led	Ensure Indigenous stakeholders oversee creative development and the design process.	Assigned librarian
Self-determined	Respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine the application of traditional knowledge and representation of their culture in design practice.	Land acknowledgement
		Decolonizing descriptions, arrangement, and organization of sources
Community specific	Ensure respect for the diversity of Indigenous culture by acknowledging and following regional cultural understandings.	Local resources
Deep listening	Ensure respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviours for effective communication and courteous interaction. Make sure to be inclusive and ensure that recognised custodians are actively involved and consulted.	Tone and voice
Indigenous knowledge	Acknowledge and respect the rich cultural history of Indigenous knowledge including designs, stories, sustainability and land management, with the understanding that ownership of knowledge must remain with the Indigenous custodians.	Reference terminology
Shared knowledge (collaboration, co-creation, procurement)	Cultivate respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviours for effective communication. This involves courteous interactions to encourage the transmission of shared knowledge by developing a cultural competency framework to remain aware of Indigenous cultural realities.	Authored with local community
		Links to institutional IS programs
Shared benefits	Ensure Indigenous people share in the benefits from the use of their cultural knowledge, especially where it is being commercially applied.	Indigenous methodology
Impact of design	Consider the reception and implication of all designs so that they protect the environment, are sustainable, and remain respectful of Indigenous cultures over deep time: past, present, and future.	inclusion of Indigenous language; reference terminology
Legal and moral	Demonstrate respect and honour cultural ownership and intellectual property rights, including moral rights, by obtaining appropriate permissions where required.	Indian Law; treaties; elder knowledge; citation Style; rights and permissions

Further Research

This research was limited to ARL member institutions. Future research could include: enlarging the scope to include non-ARL libraries, library systems, and non-LibGuide sites; assessing guides created outside the geographic boundaries of North America; and developing a usability study of guides from the perspective of information seekers.

Conclusion

Many opportunities exist for libraries and archives to reimagine guides as Indigenized and decolonized information sources that validate Indigenous ways of knowing.

- A majority of institutions have produced guides for IS.
- Enhancements can be made with controlled or defined vocabularies; expressions of scopes and purposes; assignments of librarians; and intuitive positioning on library websites.
- To increase awareness and accessibility, IS guides should strive to maintain currency, present both past and contemporary histories in proper contexts, and be embedded in curricular materials.
- Protocols and pedagogical frameworks can be integrated to center Indigenous knowledge and UX design principles in the arrangement, selection, and presentation of library resources.
- Land acknowledgements could direct users to sources on the peoples, geographies, treaties, and acts of dispossession influencing land ownership over time.
- Privileging Critical Indigenous Pedagogy (CIP) supports Indigenizing processes as per the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies,* eds. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2008).

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