LIS 882 Discussion Post

Reflect on the Week 1 and 2 readings and answer both of the following questions:

What definitions of metadata do the writers give? What do they have in common with each other? How do they differ?
How would you define metadata if you had to describe it to a colleague, fellow student, friend, or family member?

Kalon Ridley
Sep 7, 2023

The most consistent definition given about metadata is "data about data". To me, especially with regards to LIS, this means a collection of information about information. Although "information about information" is essentially the same as "data about data," it differs from the computer/written standard set by multiple authors of many of our readings. For example, in the Christmas-themed post, the picture would be considered visual information, and the mom can offer information, which I would posit is a form of metadata (though verbal), but once it gets written, it becomes a more standardized form of metadata. Another similarity seems to be the function of metadata: Metadata is a map. Metadata is a means by which the complexity of an object is represented in a simpler form. The goal is to enable users to locate a copy of it if they wished to do so (Pomerantz, 2015, p. 11). Miller (2022) takes this a step back to searching, stating that "Descriptive metadata can be seen as serving the two overarching functions of identification and retrieval. It allows users to identify the content, context, and meaning of digital resources, both individually and in relation to one another, and it allows users to retrieve individual resources and sets of related resources based on any number of shared characteristics. Metadata supports both the searching and browsing methods of information retrieval". Metadata's main goal is to help people find what they're looking for, and as much as a standardized form would help with that, it doesn't actually change that function.

As for differences, there weren't any glaring distinctions, but there is variability in the level of granularity needed, which depends solely on the institution and not metadata itself. The absence of significant differences in what metadata is points to both the freshness of the topic regarding digital collections and its dependency on users, indicating that the basic building blocks are universal. If I were to describe metadata to someone familiar with LIS, I would simply say that it's cataloging information based on its attributes (title, subject, type of resources, date, etc.). When explaining to someone unfamiliar with LIS, I would suggest they look at a picture on their phone, click "more information," and explain that all of that information is metadata. I'd then say, It's basically data used by a system to make a resource easily available and retrievable, or information about your information.

Megan
Sep 9, 2023

Kalon-

I really like your point that "Metadata's main goal is to help people find what they're looking for, and as much as a standardized form would help with that, it doesn't actually change that function." I feel like LIS professionals get very focused on definitions and standardizations and maybe sometimes loose track of the actual purpose of metadata: to help library patrons, researchers, and GLAM staff in

locating the most useful resources. (Of course, standardization in theory helps us reach this goal, but it's the hyper-focus on finding the "perfect" metadata solution that I critique.)