

Taxonomy Alignment in the iSchool Knowledge Organization Curriculum

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Relevance and significance

Mapping or alignment of taxonomies and controlled vocabularies has been an active research area for decades, and the increasing variety of resources tagged with competing, publicly documented descriptor sets presents new challenges to information professionals every year. Entire conferences are now dedicated to reconciliation problems that are narrowly scoped in comparison to the range of methods proposed and tested during the last fifty years. What role does (or may) this rich history and current practice inform our courses on knowledge organization and resource description? The appeal of this event will be an opportunity to explore these questions by drawing on choices made and lessons learned during a shared hands-on exercise.

Purpose and Intended Audience

The main audience for this activity will be those iSchool faculty actively teaching classes in knowledge organization, classification, metadata, thesaurus construction, ontology development, and principles of resource analysis and description. It may also be of interest to faculty who teach broader required survey courses or who participate on iSchool curriculum committees. Participants will be invited to share a taxonomy alignment exercise during the months leading up to iConference 2018, and to use the outcomes, results, and lessons from that exercise as foci for a discussion of what our students should know about reconciling competing description standards. Goals for the session include:

1. Prompting a discussion of how current vocabulary alignment and reconciliation problems do or should inform the broader learning outcomes of our graduate education programs;
2. Eliciting a comparison of methods, tools, and interchange formats employed by participants in the alignment exercise and a discussion of their potential for enriching student experiences in the classroom;
3. Informing reflection on learning experiences outside the classroom, such as student participation in research and practice.

Proposed Activities

The exercise involves a small set of related vocabularies and an invitation to employ any tools, strategies and choices participants wish for aligning or mapping those languages to each other. The data consist of sixteen OWL ontologies all related to conference organization, and collected as part of the OntoFarm Project ¹. Participants may work with any two or more of those they wish. Participants may take advantage of as much expressive power of the original files as they choose, or reduce the data to a simpler form, such as generic hierarchical and associative relationships (e.g., SKOS). They may even choose to discard all term relationships, and base their alignment on lexical resemblance alone.

The project website (<https://taxalignmentworkshop.github.io/>) will go live on November 1, with instructions for participants, links to the data, a repository for sharing results, and a forum for coordination and discussion. Participants may join the activity and discussions at any time during the months of November through February, but alignment preparation will discontinue after February 28, and we will devote the first two weeks of March to wrap up forum discussions and prepare a discussion agenda for the iConference session.

We request one 90 minute session during iSchools 2018. The repository of illustrations and examples that emerge from participants' alignment work will remain online after the conference concludes.

¹ Zamazal, O., Svátek, V. (2017). "The Ten-Year OntoFarm and its Fertilization within the Onto-Sphere." *Web Semantics: Science, Services and Agents on the World Wide Web*, 43, 46-53.