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As an early career librarian, my goal in attending WAML was to expose myself to the wider community of GIS and map librarians and learn new skills for the instruction and research support I currently do.

As an early career librarian, I have been seeking out conferences that will connect me with a professional community, expose me to new methods for instruction and research support, and leave me feeling creatively inspired to put what I learn into action. I found all of that, and more, at the 2019 WAML conference. Before attending, I knew intellectually that there are a wide variety of careers available to librarians interested in spatial data, but the range of presentations—from a demo of a new digital tool for displaying georeferenced maps, to a beautifully articulated narrative of mapping the Grand Canyon, to a “you heard it here first” moment with Esri’s StoryMapper of the year winners—the conference reshaped my mental map of the paths available to me professionally.

Part of my work as an NCSU Libraries Fellow has been in our Data & Visualization Services department instructing students on data and spatial literacies, and I think a lot about how we introduce data and mapping with the appropriate context and scaffolding so students can feel comfortable when encountering them on their own, or when they develop a research question that requires using data, geospatial or otherwise, to answer. The presentations at WAML gave me new tools to create learning opportunities that recognize local context, use our GIS technologies and data analysis tools in creative ways, and most of all, tell compelling stories anchored in space. For instance, Kat Strickland’s talk on “Teaching Project-Based Mapping to Humanities Students” was incredibly relevant to my work—her approaches to data cleaning, use of CSV templates, and other strategies in the classroom to improve spatial literacy were very useful in thinking through how to introduce mapping to students who haven’t been asked to analyze or manipulate data before.

The conference’s thoughtful integration of the local context—including dinner at a Basque restaurant and a lovely tour of UNR Libraries, including the Keck museum and its mineral collection—prompted me to consider how I can be more attentive to this aspect of my work. Though I am living in the South, I very much appreciated the Western specificity of the conference presentations. Michael Fry’s beautiful narrative, “How Brad Washburn Mapped the ‘Heart of the Grand Canyon,’” was the



talk I came back raving about. Giving details on Washburn’s new approaches to symbology, color, the survey process, and how National Geographic supported the project, Fry gave us a look into an important cartographic moment, and at the infrastructure required to make it happen. I had never been to a conference where storytelling was a central component—giving time and space to narratives like Fry’s was truly special, and reminded me how powerful storytelling is as a teaching tool when these days I can be too focused on step-by-step technology instruction.

That being said, the more technological sessions were just as compelling. I was able to attend the pre-conference workshop “Basic Python for Map & GIS Librarians” with Kim Durante and Phil White, which gave me new tools for working with GIS data in Python—extremely useful for someone working with a lot of students who are coming from a data science context. And learning that I can make a Leaflet web map within minutes using Folium was a game changer. I also greatly appreciated the presentation by Kevin Dyke, “Comparing Maps and Aerial Photos Side by Side (by side by side by side by side by side by side),” as his tool really fulfills the classroom and educational potential of georeferenced maps by enabling side-by-side display.

The WAML conference expanded my professional horizons in both the near and short term—I came away bubbling with lots of tools and ideas for improving my classroom instruction and special projects I could tackle, and it made me do some long-term thinking about what kind of career I want. I am extremely appreciative of the time the conference organizers, host, and other attendees spent with me; hearing about the roles they have in their organizations and the various paths they took to map and GIS librarianship was very instructive. I would like to extend my gratitude to all of WAML, and to the scholarship committee, for the opportunity to attend this wonderful conference and to be part of your professional community.

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