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The Role of Libraries in Geography and GIS Education: a report on conversations about libraries, geography, GIS and education

We are so thrilled that our project on the Role of Libraries in Geography and GIS Education has taken flight and is evolving into its own community of practice. You can join the discussion at <https://groups.io/g/geolibraries/>.

Libraries have long acted as a source for accessing knowledge as well as building student skills in research and critical thinking. With the development of GIS software, which has proved instrumental to a growing number of disciplines, it is a clear knowledge of spatial data, and map literacy are key factors in student and civic learning and research. Today, the growing ubiquity of both proprietary and open-source tools for making maps and conducting spatial analysis puts these tools easily in the hands of anyone with access to a computer and the Internet. Thus, the charge of libraries to facilitate the literate use of these tools and a firm socio-contextual view of spatial datasets is paramount.

The goal of this project was to bring together people who work in libraries, educators, and data practitioners to create a network of people to discuss geography and GIS education in libraries and other informal learning environments. In recent years, geography and GIS educators have increasingly focused on the basic principles of spatial literacy, or the ability of people to read, understand, and reproduce or utilize geographic data. Over the course of the project, we hosted 11 conversations with geo-educators across the US (mostly over Zoom). This report includes many of the issues and practices we heard about in those conversations. Each conversation included guiding questions that were used to generate conversation, but we also left space open for the conversation to evolve and participants to ask their own questions.

Specific questions included:



- What kinds of professional development have you engaged in, or want to explore related to spatial literacy or GIS?
 - What are you teaching and why? What topics do you want to teach in the future?
 - If someone is doing a project that involves a spatial component, what kinds of services are they asking for and what kinds of tools are they using/trying to use?
 - What kinds of research are you doing related to informal spatial education?
 - How do we move GIS instruction online? How can we ensure we are meeting pedagogical goals through virtual and remote environments?
 - How do we advocate for open-source / open-access pedagogy (e.g. tutorials, sample datasets) and research (e.g. data sources, data management)?
 - How do we manage collections development (especially in these economically uncertain times)?
 - How can we build and maintain this community? What are the next steps towards supporting our community's interests and needs?

Over the course of the project, we identified four high-level takeaways that are referred to directly or tangentially throughout this report. These include: There are no set rules for geo-educators in informal settings, the need for spatial literacy and mapping support is growing, instruction is a key component of library geo-education offerings, and there is still a lot we have to learn from each other. We hope to use the identification of these key themes as a base for a new geo-educator community of practice. Check out our report <https://doi.org/10.1184/R1/13089584.v2> and our slide deck from WAML 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1184/R1/13132853.v1>. You can get the latest updates on our website <https://library.cmu.edu/gis/rolgge>.

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