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Using StoryMaps for Geospatial Outreach

By Janet Reyes

At the University of California, Riverside (UCR), the engagement of our campus geospatial community has grown in response to the library's outreach efforts.

I often pondered how best to inform these students, faculty, researchers and staff about the latest geospatial offerings and opportunities. We have monthly meetups, but not all can attend or find the time to read the notes afterward. We have a mailing list, but emails are easy to miss or ignore. Our Maps & GIS library guide does not receive significant traffic.

An easily updated, easily shared online platform that could pull all the information together would fill the need – but where to turn? A solution eventually occurred to me: a story map! (Given how many “Introduction to Story Maps” workshops I’ve led, the idea was perhaps a bit overdue....)

Shortly thereafter, I assembled [The Geospatial/GIS Quarterly](#). It debuted in UCR's Fall 2021 quarter and has served its purpose well ever since.

Content and appearance

Built on Esri's ArcGIS StoryMap platform, the Quarterly begins with UCR Library offerings, such as meetups, workshops, and links to our library guides. Subsequent sections expand in scope: our campus, including relevant course offerings and the geospatial student club; the UC system as a whole; other campuses; conferences; software vendor news; and GIS in current events.

Some content remains static quarter to quarter; other content is added or updated between quarters or even during a quarter, such as when I learn of an event a few weeks before it occurs. The header displays the day of the latest update.

Our library's communications director created three branded StoryMap themes for the Quarterly, each using campus-approved fonts and colors. Over time, the theme, as well as the header image, might be swapped out to refresh the look.



Use Cases

The Quarterly has served as a convenient way to share announcements during our monthly meetups. I routinely include a link to it in the meetup Zoom chat.

I often supply a link to the Quarterly when responding to patron emails about geospatial resources. A shortened URL was created for ease of use. A link and brief description of the Quarterly is included in our Maps & GIS library guide. The story map has also facilitated sharing of information during orientations and class visits.

Updates and Collection

For my own reference and to chronicle the evolution of geospatial offerings at our campus, I preserve the last version of a Quarterly before updating the content for the next academic quarter.

In order to provide users with an unchanging URL for accessing the current version, I create a duplicate story map to serve as the archival version for each quarter. These older versions are placed in a StoryMap collection named “[UCR Geospatial/GIS Quarterlies](#).”

Before the creation of the Quarterly, our library had been investigating using the library’s [Omeka S](#) instance to preserve documentation of our geospatial activities such as geospatial meetups and GIS Day. Now, I also create a PDF copy of each Quarterly that can be uploaded to Omeka S.

With all of this in mind, I developed the following workflow for the end of each quarter:

- Print the Quarterly to a PDF, using the Landscape option.
 - Save the PDF to a folder.
- Make a duplicate of the Quarterly. The duplicate will have a new URL.
- Change the title of the duplicate to “The Geospatial/GIS Quarterly - [term] [year].”
- Publish the duplicate.
- Add the duplicate to the UCR Geospatial/GIS Quarterlies collection.
- Proceed with updating the original story map.



Experiences

The Quarterly attracted 900 views in the first six months, which was more than expected. Faculty, students and staff have given positive feedback regarding the content and ease of use.

Notably, maintaining the Quarterly has not required burdensome amounts of time and effort. So far, I've spent just a few hours archiving and updating each version, with small amounts of time needed for occasional updates.

One benefit of maintaining an ongoing StoryMap is keeping up to date with what's new with StoryMaps, thanks to a pop-up that appears when in edit mode. I've applied updated functionality to the Quarterly when appropriate.

Ideas for the Future

Features that could be added to the Quarterly in the future include:

- A section for showcasing student or researcher geospatial projects
- Polls – such as for preferences on meetup scheduling, suggested topics for meetups or workshops, etc.
- Spotlight on a particular geospatial tool, or on new enhancements to an existing tool
- Internship, employment, or volunteer opportunities

Upgrading graphics and overall appearance will be another ongoing pursuit.

Overall, the Geospatial/GIS Quarterly has gotten off to a good start. I look forward to further exploration of the ArcGIS StoryMap platform as a means of promoting geospatial offerings.

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