

Data and GIS Users Discussion Forum
Summary of Discussion
November 6, 2007

The meeting began at noon in 150 Hodges Library with 13 attendees:

UT Libraries: Eleanor Read, Moderator (Hodges), Jane Row (Hodges), Teresa Walker (Hodges), Gregory March (Map), Eric Arnold (Map)

Faculty: Bruce Ralston (Geography), Joanne Logan (BESS)

OIT: Bob Muenchen (Statistical Consulting Center), Ann Reed (Statistical Consulting Center), Chris Hodge (Sunsite)

Center for Business and Economic Research: Joan Snoderly, Vickie Cunningham

Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment: Brandon League

Ellie Read welcomed the attendees and explained the purpose of the meeting. This is a time for data and GIS users, support staff, and other interested parties to have an informal discussion about current activities, services, resources, and support needs with regard to secondary data and/or GIS research at UT.

Greg March (map librarian) gave an update on the pending map library move and other activities. The Map Library is scheduled to begin its move to the ground floor of Hodges Library on December 4th and should be in place and operational by January 9th. The map library will have four dedicated GIS workstations with appropriate software and data resources installed. Greg would like to also offer GIS services in the Commons (part of the new Commons World). This may require hiring a student or part-time staff person to help handle the GIS consulting. This expansion of GIS services is timely, as Greg has been getting more requests for assistance from non-traditional GIS areas such as plant biology and social work.

There is potential to install ArcGIS on the new OIT Citrix server. This would extend usage of the ESRI software to off-campus users.

Chris mentioned that OIT and the Libraries are working on getting additional storage space for research data.

Greg is planning to conduct a survey that asks questions about the sharing of data across campus. It would help determine what types and levels of services needed by UT researchers.

The map library website is in the process of being updated and converted to the new UT web template. This will include some updates to the GIS@UT page. Joanne suggested that the list of UT courses that teach GIS should be updated.

Through an NOAA grant, the library is trying to get an Omni Globe for the library. If successful, it would be located on the ground floor across from the map library. It has projectors inside, which will project anything that is put on the globe, including maps and Powerpoint slides. This is a joint effort with ISSE.

Next week is Geography Week. The map library will have a display in Hodges Library and will be giving out free topo maps. GIS Day is November 14th; UT is not having a GIS Day event this year.

Joanne went to the East Tennessee GIS Users Group last week. About 200-300 people were there as well as many vendors.

Greg reported that Lawson McGhee Library is giving the map library a full set of color topo maps from 2004-2005 that they received from KGIS. They are organized by school district. The College of Architecture is going to digitize them and put them into a database.

Joanne thought it would be nice if a central map web server with ArcGIS and a data repository could be set up so individuals at UT wouldn't have to spend time setting up their own (reinventing the wheel every time). They could all take advantage of the value-added features and tools of a single system. Teresa said that she thought the library might be able to work something out to provide that service. Perhaps it is a good candidate for a Digital Library Center project.

Greg mentioned that many of the students he helps with GIS come in with their data in Excel files and the data need a lot of tweaking before being analyzed. The data might also be bad depending on the quality of the GPS system that was used. He has requested a high-end Trimble GEO XH GPS system which would provide much more accurate readings.

Chris mentioned that the proposed media wall for the library could be used for table top visualization.

Bob reported that there is a major upgrade to the Citrix server underway, and should be ready by next semester (8 CPUs, 16 GB, 64 bit system, 50 user licenses, ESRI software, data to be shared). The Linux cluster has been expanded to 200 CPUs. QDA Miner now does qualitative analysis of images. It is available on the download page now. SPSS 16 is now available on all three platforms.

Bruce Ralston gave a brief demo of his new Census Mapper. In his own words...

I am currently working with a grad student (Josh Streufert) to develop a Census Mapper for KML compliant viewers, like Google Earth. Our goal is to develop a web service where users can choose a geographic area (eg, Tennessee), a level of geography (eg, census tracts), and a variable or variables to map. We would then generate the appropriate KML file and ship it back to the client. This involves 3 major tasks. The first is to develop a database of selected census variables for various geographic levels. We have done this for counties, tracts, and ZCTA (zip code tabulation areas) for the entire US. The second task is to develop the KML files that correspond to census geography. That has been done. The last step is to develop a web interface to allow users to specify their mapping options. We hope to have this done by the end of the year.

Bruce also showed us some slides from a recent presentation (ppt attached to the e-mail) on open source GIS, mashups, arcserver, and the census mapping work mentioned above.

We will meet again in the spring.

EJR
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