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Community Geography: A Partnership Between HSU Students and the Humboldt Community

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Community Geography: A Partnership Between HSU Students and the Humboldt Community

By Professor Amy Rock (aka: Dr. Rock)

Geography is not just about maps. Service Learning in geography can also look at cultural elements, environmental issues, and social justice through a spatial lens. The Community Geography class is not a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) class, but it is about making maps to bring this spatial lens to a larger audience. Students learn about the role of nonprofits in the community, how to identify community needs, and the importance of capacity building to meet them. Political advocacy and grant writing are lightly touched on within the course, and then the students work with their partner organizations to develop a project proposal.

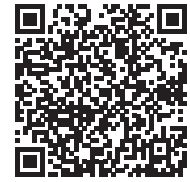
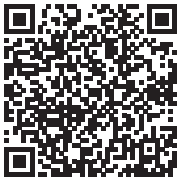
The pedagogy of Service Learning is rooted in community. Students engage in work that enriches their curriculum, while also meeting a community need. This can take a variety of forms, from direct service to capacity building. Geography can bring a fresh perspective to the work that nonprofit organizations do and leads to more efficient services to the community. Spatial problem-solving might help improve outreach and service, by identifying gaps and opportunities. Mapping out historical data, or existing and proposed activities, can also raise community awareness and involvement, which can benefit an organization in countless ways. It can be a crucial part of justification for public and private funding or advocacy efforts.

Bringing mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to the nonprofit sector, requires a skillset that is often lacking in smaller organizations. This is beginning to change, however, as GIS education becomes more accessible, and GIS students are introduced to nonprofit organizations before

graduation and actively seek them out for volunteer opportunities or work.

Throughout the semester, students work together to find or collect spatial information and use it for the benefit of the organization. Many of them developed a Story Map, which is a platform that allows maps to be integrated with text, images, and videos to create a multimedia website. This website can then be used by the organization to build capacity, raise awareness, and advocate for the important work that they do. In the process, the students get to learn more about their community and the organization, while developing technical and consulting skills that will help them long after the course is over.

Spring 2020 saw an unprecedented shift to online learning; many Service Learning courses were struggling with how to make the transition while still cultivating a meaningful experience for all involved. The nature of the work for the Community Geography course meant that students did not need to be onsite to complete their projects, which was the first hurdle they overcame. Some projects transitioned quite smoothly, as the data and media were already in digital form and could be transferred via email or Google Drive. A few required a shift in scope, or some extra effort on the part of the organization, to help with collecting GPS points or taking photos. While not all projects were perhaps completed to the degree hoped for by students and partners, all projects met some of their goals and afforded value to the participants. A profound thanks to all our community partners for their grace and flexibility when working under rapidly shifting circumstances.



Christopher Jones (aka: Jonesy),
Community Geography Student
in Spring of 2020

Geography 471 & ZWH

**Bottle Washing Facility Feasibility
Study in Humboldt County, CA**

By Chris Jones & Kelly Fortner

"75% of Glass is in Landfills: 75% of all glass that enters the waste system ends up in landfills. That's 110,000,000 glass bottles going into US landfills every single day!"

-SioNeer.com



A comprehensive story map by Chris Jones & Kelly Fortner partnered with Zero Waste Humboldt: "Bottle Washing Facility Feasibility in Humboldt County, CA"

Ever since I began my academic journey at HSU, I felt a lingering sense of guilt that my involvement in the Humboldt community had been almost entirely one-sided. This community has given me countless opportunities, instructional stimuli, and landscapes to learn from, facilitating my growth as a student while nurturing me to become a better person. I felt that my relationship with Humboldt had been more "take" than "give," and I needed to find a way to reciprocate this community's benevolence. In the 2020 Spring semester, I enrolled in the Community Geography class, Geography 471 (Geog 471), which involved working with local organizations and individuals within Humboldt by assisting them in some capacity through the realm of Geography.

During my first day attending the Geog 471 class, I discovered that it was the first time this specific course was going to be taught and formatted in a way that partnered students with a local non-profit organization. While there, it dawned on me that this class's educational approach was that of Service Learning. Having done several stints in various

AmeriCorps programs, I credit most of my strongest skills and personal characteristics to having been developed through Service Learning; long story short, I am a huge proponent of Service Learning.

We were given a list of local non-profits to rank in order of personal interest. Depending on how we ranked the organizations, we were then assigned to a partner organization, as well as fellow classmate(s), to work with. The collaboration with the organization partner was key, as they assisted and dictated what work needed to be done, acting as our consultant. While the list was composed of many interesting local non-profits, all of which would have been worthy choices, there was one that stood out to me in particular.

Zero Waste Humboldt (ZWH) was my first choice and, to my delight, the organization that I was partnered with. I have always considered myself an advocate for waste cognizance and highly enjoy practicing and spreading knowledge of sustainability. The mission of ZWH is to implement proactive waste prevention strategies to reduce the amount of waste generated,

while working to reuse, recycle and compost already used materials. My class partner, Kelly Fortner, shared my passion for Service Learning and was not only involved with ZWH, she was a member of their board who had inside knowledge of the program's goals and what they could accomplish. Our ZWH organization liaison, Maggie Gainer, had numerous great ideas for potential projects that we could assist with. We all agreed on an idea that interested and intrigued both Kelly and me; the project's goal was to implement a reusable "wash and return" system of beer bottles for local breweries and their community. Implementation of this project has many moving parts, requiring buy-in and support from the breweries themselves in addition to public community support.

During the time of generating ideas and conceptualizing a plan to bring this project to life, the Covid-19 pandemic began to take its toll on everyday life, as well as academics. We were all forced to transition to solely virtual learning and avoid any in-person conversation; none of us-- professor, student and organization partner alike--were prepared for this new hurdle and disruption. Luckily, Dr. Rock promoted a "steadfast" mentality in each of us, encouraging us not to give up and to continue to press on with our projects as best we could. Through adamant communication, Kelly, Maggie and I adapted; with the help and guidance of Dr. Rock, we were able to construct and design a comprehensive and effective survey. The survey measured the feasibility of the bottle wash and return practice and also determined the local interest for possible buy-in from members of the community. We began to reach out to various local breweries to see if they would be on board and received mostly positive feedback. We also had a strong response to members of the community who were happy to take part in our survey and liked the proposed idea of implementing a bottle washing system.

Once completed, our survey needed to be approved by

the HSU Institutional Review Board (IRB). This was required to check the ethics and merits of our survey, for IRB to decide if it was acceptable and safe to send out to the public. We received approval from the IRB, only needing to make a few minor modifications. I was amazed and inspired by the dedication of Dr. Rock to not only assist us at the drop of a dime but also to keep the entirety of the class moving forward with barely a hiccup. I was also incredibly lucky to have Kelly as my partner on this project, we both kept each other motivated and had constant communication throughout this project. The Story Map that Kelly and I put forth was well received by Maggie and ZWH; it will be used and built upon in the future for the further advancement of this project.

At the end of the Spring term, the entire Geography 471 class got together to present the work we had all completed for our respective local organization partners. It was impressive to see the diversity and hard work that went into these projects despite the challenges and restrictions of distance/virtual learning. This style of class turned out to adhere and adapt to virtual learning far better than I could have imagined. With flexibility, communication, and a guiding beacon of a professor, this class was a huge success for all parties involved. This Service Learning structured class had us students engaged in potential real-world vocation skills that I feel none of us would have received without the advent of this class; I learned a host of new skills and abilities that I feel will have lifelong applicability. I also felt proud to help such a wonderful organization in ZWH and will continue to be involved in their endeavors. This style of Service Learning class, when partnered with local nonprofits, can transcend boundaries of academic fields. It does not matter what the class or area of study is, the mutualistic and enriching benefits are applicable in all fields. It is also important to note that, whether it is taught in person or virtually, success can be had, skills will be learned, and all parties involved can benefit!



Arvel Reeves, Community
Geography Student
in Spring of 2020



I felt that Geog 471 provided an enriched learning experience by allowing us to apply our geography skills and our critical thinking abilities in a practical manner. [For our project, my partner and I helped digitize the plaza tour for the Historical Site Society of Arcata \(HSSA\)](#); we updated photos and helped reformat the website used by HSSA. We had to meet both academic and professional standards and

deadlines, while making sure that we communicated in an effective and timely manner. Geog 471 helped us students develop our abilities by giving us real world experience.

Dr. Rock's special topics course, Community Geography, will be offered again during the Spring 2021 semester at HSU.



Faith Rehagen, Community Geography Student in Spring of 2020



The project I worked on for Geography 471 met local transportation needs for HSU students. We made an interactive web map for the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL), which helps to connect students to community partners. The map visualized bus routes for the cities of Eureka, Arcata, Fortuna and McKinleyville, while depicting all the community partners based on genre: Non-profit, Business, Religion, Health etc. This project helped me build my resume, while also providing the campus with a new tool that could be used for anybody on campus or in the community.

I enjoyed connecting with my organization partners for the project; however, it was a shame that due to distance learning we could not meet certain goals beyond the interactive web map. Yet, the connection to my project leaders at CCBL still stands and, in light of the craziness of our times, it is awesome to know that we have cultivated a project that has endless possibilities. I loved working with a team all semester and having a project to focus on that we all cared about. I'm a hands-on learner, and so for me, this style of learning helped me grow my collaboration, communication and GIS skills.



Faith Rehagen's GIS Map, partnered with Center for Community Based Learning: "CCBL: HSU's Community Partners throughout Humboldt County." Displays many community participants who have a working partnership with Humboldt State University. Bus routes are provided for transportation purposes.

Additional Story Maps and GIS Maps from the Spring 2020 GEOG 471 class partnerships:

Arcata Arts: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d4dd99252d3944aea3bcf23c3a535c05/preview>
 Cooperation Humboldt: <https://arcg.is/1erimL0>

Friends of the Dunes: <https://arcg.is/09PLHT0>
 Humboldt Botanical Garden: <https://www.hbgf.org/native-plant-garden-tour>
 Jacoby Creek: <https://arcg.is/1yuOO8>
 Mid-Klamath/Western Klamath Watershed Councils: <https://arcg.is/1nDrfr>