

Installation April 13 – June 30, 2015

From Drones to Data Portals and Maps: A Brief History of GIS at Harvard Library

Graduate School of Design (GSD), Frances Loeb Library, Library Bibliography Wall

Over the past two decades, Geographic Information System (GIS) has become an integral part of many academic disciplines. This installation showcases the many different ways Harvard Library provides GIS services to students and scholars. Until the early 1990s, GIS at the Harvard Library was limited to a small collection of geospatial data sets on CDs. As a result of training initiatives, more formal GIS support services were introduced at the Harvard Map Collection in the mid-1990s. Soon thereafter, librarians began to make geospatial data sets more accessible through web-based discovery tools, which eventually led to the creation of today's online data portal, the Harvard Geospatial Library (HGL). In 2013, the Frances Loeb Library at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) hired a Design Data Librarian and began offering GIS support services. In addition to regular GIS workshops and office hours, the library purchases data sets and collaborates in the creation of geospatial data. The GSD's first Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) was bought by the Frances Loeb Library in 2014. It has been used to create remotely sensed data that are highly accurate and current. The data products created using the UAV include customized color-referenced 3D landscapes, tree canopy height maps, and aerial photos. This exhibit illustrates the innovative research, teaching, and learning support that libraries provide in an ever-changing information environment. Through collaborations and partnerships, librarians create and make accessible new digital collections.

Exhibition April 9 - May 15, 2015

"The Lab" and its Legacy

Graduate School of Design (GSD), Frances Loeb Library, Special Collections

1965 was a seminal year in the history of Geographic Information Science (GIS), as the Harvard Laboratory for Computer Graphics (subsequently Computer Graphics and Spatial Analysis, or LCGSA) was founded by Howard Fisher, with support from the Ford Foundation and the GSD. Harvard had been the home of a robust Geography department in the 1930s and 1940s, until 1948 when the department was disbanded. In the 1960's, several North American geographers had become interested in the application of the new technology of digital computing to the management of geographic data and the creation of maps. Against this background, Fisher and a small team of researchers and programmers, starting in the basement of Memorial Hall, embarked on a 20+ year journey of research and development in theoretical geography, computer cartography, and spatial analysis, which gave us many of today's essential ideas and early versions of tools now embedded in commercial Geographic Information Systems, remote sensing, geospatial science, and today's ubiquitous online culture (Google Maps on smartphones, e.g.). At the same time, early collaborations with GSD faculty, primarily in planning and landscape architecture, demonstrated the uses of these emergent technologies in landscape planning and environmental design and laid the foundations for the emergence in the current decade of the discipline of 'geodesign'.

This exhibition showcases computer-generated maps and graphics, both from 'Then' and from 'Now', surrounded by images, texts, artifacts, and correspondence, mostly from 1965 to 1985, that illustrate the various disciplines, viewpoints, and individuals who contributed to those heady days of experimentation and development. One wall of the exhibition is devoted to works by contemporary researchers and developers, building upon, and going beyond, the foundation laid by "The Lab", half a century ago.