

How might location awareness and analytics enrich online learning across disciplines?

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Employing spatial technologies and thinking in online education may offer even more learning opportunities than in residence education. Why?

More Geography

A field data collection activity for most high school and college residence GIS courses means everyone works in roughly the same geography, either on campus or nearby. In an online course, that data collection may cover many states, countries, soil types, climates, business environments, etc. Discussions about the resulting data and patterns further highlight how geography matters, at a variety of scales, to the discipline under study.

Users and Makers - Authentic Learning

Educators can direct online students to be users of existing online applications including interactive maps and story maps. Alternatively, educators can invite students to create new applications or add to existing ones.

In either case, focusing on authentic learning, linked to the location of the learners, individually or in location-based groups, will enhance engagement. Online learners should share their work with the local community, news outlets, civic groups or other interested party. In short, students should think geographically about the discipline specific topic (history, economics, etc.) and act locally.

Key Workplace Skills

The use of location awareness and analytics in online learning across disciplines must address, and should indeed enhance, course and lesson learning objectives. Two skills found more and more in these objectives, across all disciplines. Effective communication and the critical thinking are two high demand workplace skills popping up in these objectives. These two, and other skills are directly related to creating, enhancing and using location aware applications to tackle real world challenges.

The Challenge: Selling Location Awareness and Analytics to Educators

The geospatial education community has been working hard to bring its technology and associated skills to educators' teaching, whether online or face to face. To date, our major outreach efforts promote "how to use the tech" rather than "how the tech further course and lesson objectives." 2014 may be the year to shift our outreach efforts from the former to the latter.