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PROFESSOR TARA VANSELL RECEIVES GSTEDC CERTIFICATION

November 4, 2020



By Amanda May

GIS Lab Manager and Geography Instructor Tara Vansell in the School of Humanities is one of only 22 instructors in the nation to receive Geospatial Technology Educator Certification (GSTEdC). She participated in a pilot project curated by The National Geospatial Technology Center of Excellence (GeoTech Center) and funded by a supplemental grant from the National Science Foundation.

Professor Vansell first found out about the project when participating in a workshop with Esri (the world's leading GIS software company) back in 2016. The pilot project was founded due to a need for a more education-focused certification relating to geographic information systems.

"The requirements of a GISP (Geographic Information Systems Professional) are designed to judge the expertise of working professionals employed in geospatial industries," Professor Vansell explained. "These same skills, however, do not match the skill or competency requirements needed by educators. The GSTEdC certification combines the foundational competencies required for a GISP with the added rigor of how to teach the geospatial competencies and technology to students. Teachers,

empowered by a recognized certification, are more likely to be supported by their administrators and local industry.”

Over 60 instructors applied to the project, but only 33 were accepted. Of the 33 applications accepted, seven were educators for four-year universities, seven were from two-year institutions and the remaining 19 were middle and high school educators. While 31 instructors started the work to obtain certification, only 22 educators, including Professor Vansell, received certification.

The pathways consisted of an eight-week Geospatial Technology Massively Open Online Course (MOOC) that took roughly 95 hours to complete. The course included eight concept modules, a capstone project, and an application for certification.

Professor Vansell’s capstone project featured Lindenwood’s campus and involved students thinking of ways to make campus more pedestrian friendly by means of a parking plan. “The project involved students thinking through how to create an assigned parking plan and then performing some simple analysis steps to determine whether their plan makes sense or not,” Professor Vansell said. Her capstone project, along with the other certified instructors’ capstone projects, will be added to an OER (open education resources) repository.

Lindenwood students are already benefiting from Professor Vansell’s new certification. She has been implementing OER materials she was introduced to (including video lectures) while completing the course certification and using chapters from free online textbooks. “This all results in a cost savings for students where they are using the most up-to-date resources and labs written by (now certified) subject area experts and the resources are all digital!” Professor Vansell said. “This is a huge benefit when considering our hybrid and online learning models that we are all adapting to.... There is a recognition in our region that there is a shortage of GIS professionals in the area and a need for students to be exposed to these technologies during their K-12 years, but before that can happen these geospatial competencies and the GIS technical skillset have to get into the hands of our educators; this certification is a big step in recognizing that teachers need this support/recognition to promote the use and investment of these technologies in their classrooms.”

Congratulations to Professor Vansell! With drones purchased through a generous grant from the Harmon Foundation, her classes truly provide real experience and real success.