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NOVEMBER 17TH IS VIRTUAL GIS DAY

November 18, 2020

By Zane Bell

With a variety of GIS (Geographic Information System) professionals and organizations in attendance, Lindenwood's GIS Day with a variety of GIS (Geographic Information System) professionals and organizations in attendance, Lindenwood's GIS Day served as a greatly beneficial forum between the university and the GIS industry of the greater St. Louis region. Though this annual event has traditionally been held in-person, Lindenwood continued to skillfully adapt to the ongoing pandemic by holding the informational event virtually on Tuesday, November 17th.

Starting at 9:30 A.M. and lasting just over an hour, the first segment of GIS Day included presentations from organizations including Ameren, the Missouri Corps of Engineers, St. Louis County, Women in GIS, and Great Rivers Greenway. Additionally, representatives from corporations such as Aerospace Link, Inc. and Environmental Solutions & Innovations, Inc. spoke to Lindenwood students, faculty, and other industry professionals about their ongoing GIS operations in the St. Louis region.

According to Professor Vansell, who manages Lindenwood's GIS lab and instructs GIS courses, there is much to be excited about in the current atmosphere of the GIS industry in St. Louis: "There's a huge movement right now in the St. Louis region because the National Geospatial Agency, which has had an office here for years, is building a brand new expanded office in north St. Louis City. It's going to bring thousands of jobs to the region."

This move by the American "geointelligence" agency exists only as a piece of a larger trend within the region. In fact, by bringing in these diverse organizations and corporations to present, Vansell looked to show Lindenwood students how GIS can be applied across a wide variety of professional fields not just in St. Louis, but also across the whole spectrum of careers.

"GIS is all around you, and you don't even realize how embedded it is into the systems and services you use every day. Whether it's a restaurant locator app or the COVID dashboard, it's just in everything," explained Vansell. "The other thing that I want them to know about our certificate program specifically is that you should continue to study what you're passionate about (like English, for example), but if you pair the GIS certificate with that, you have a career in digital storytelling.... It really does pair with just

about everything if you're willing to learn the technical skill set and then be creative enough to apply it."

While students learned about this multifaceted nature of GIS and applications, the visiting GIS professionals enjoyed the experience of GIS Day as they impart lessons from the field. "It's just this really great day of community, so the exhibitors love to get together to see each other and catch up and get out of the office. They love talking to our students," said Vansell.

However, that wasn't the only reason for excitement. Following the first session of professional presentations, six students from Lindenwood's GIS program will took the virtual stage at 11:00 A.M. to speak about their GIS internships. Titled "Lindenwood GIS Interns share their Real Experience, Real Success," this second session of GIS Day included presentations about interns' experiences with the City of Lake St. Louis, Oak Grove Cemetery, and various other institutions with GIS internships.

Lindenwood senior Meg Gold described her internship with the St. Louis Zoo as a multifaceted experience: "I learned so much from my mentors, Michael and Stephen, while working with the zoo. Not only did they help me improve my skills and abilities within the GIS software, they helped me prepare to use these skills in the future."

All the while, Gold gained real experience as she contributed to ongoing projects at the zoo. "I created maps of the North Campus, defining different zones, bodies of water, roads, and data points depicting where different animals were found so that development teams could make decisions about which areas of campus to preserve and which areas to develop into attractions," she said. "I am also the first GIS intern the zoo has ever had, which is an incredible honor."

Adding to that, Martin explained how this experience helps provide a greater professional context for interns: "There are a lot of things that you can learn in a classroom, but real experience has helped more than anything. This gives you the ability to truly see if you enjoy something, and if it could be a potential career path."

Working with another intern, Lindenwood junior Gianna (GiGi) Mitchell helped develop a map for a new park in Lake St. Louis. "Our map was used for the trailhead of the park and for the website," she explained. "This map [was originally supposed to be] physically tracked by Dr. Vansell, Moira, and I using special GIS equipment."

Similarly, Lindenwood adapted and continued on with its GIS Day events in spite of the ongoing pandemic. "I'm very excited that COVID didn't stop the event," Professor Vansell stated. "I'm kind of feeling like the post office: rain nor sleet nor pandemic shall stop us from having this event."