
Raising the awareness of the SDGs in a university GIS course

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Academic institutions can play a vital role in raising the awareness of SDGs beyond academia. The SDGs provide the thematic framework for this course, and each week is dedicated to one specific SDG. In this talk I will share my experience teaching a University-level GIS/Cartography course centered on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and reflections.

In this course students create maps using relevant geospatial data and read academic peer-reviewed papers related to the SDG of the week, critically evaluating the quality of cartographic representations in these publications. Developing strong map-making skills is one of the key objectives of the course, so each week we also critically evaluate SDG-related maps created by international organizations such as UNICEF, UN OCHA, REACH, UNOSAT, UN Geospatial. We discuss advantages and disadvantages of static versus interactive maps and atlases (e.g., PDFs vs. web maps) and emphasize the importance of balancing clarity and complexity in cartographic outputs. These weekly cartography-focused discussions foster critical thinking and help students refine their own mapping skills and style. At the end of the course students share their cartographic products as web maps and include them in their professional e-portfolios.

Focusing a cartography/GIS course on SDGs allows students to learn and apply technical GIS and cartographic skills in a meaningful context. What can we, as cartographers and educators, do to elevate the role of SDGs in the GIS curricula across the institutions of higher education worldwide? I would like to discuss this question with workshop participants.