

Interactive map captures campus in detail

by Shane Arman - Tuesday, May 12, 2009

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1949/interactive-map-captures-campus-in-detail/>

The first thing Ezra Schoonover did when he started at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh was throw away every existing campus map.

Schoonover, a computer-aided drafting and design specialist for facilities management, primarily deals with planning and construction on campus. He recently branched out, initiating a unique, cross-departmental mapping project.

The Permanent Plantings Project (PPP) charts the nearly 2,000 different trees and shrubbery, along with all buildings, landmarks and other points of interest on campus.

“My first attempt at the map was a slow and difficult process,” Schoonover said. “I knew I had to make it understandable and usable for people.”

With the help of an aerial city map, GPS and biology department intern Kathryn Gabriel, precise geographic points were inventoried for the entire campus.

“Kathryn would determine the location of each tree and then identify it to genus and species, common name and diameter at breast height,” said biology and botany professor Robert Wise. “She hugged a lot of trees.”

Gabriel then organized the information from 13 different zones on campus into a database that could be used to create the online interactive map.

“I learned how to work with a very diverse group of people and make sure everybody was getting the right information at the right time,” Gabriel said.

While a mapping project of this magnitude had been on the drawing board for some time, it took state-of-the-art mapping software technology — and a dedicated team — to make it both possible and relevant.

“There has been an ongoing low level of interest in this type of project for 50 years,” Wise said. “But once underway, we quickly realized that a map was a great idea because it can be many different things.”

Schoonover also hoped the project would be multifunctional.

“I intended for anyone to figure out a use for this,” Schoonover said. “It’s a campus-wide project that doesn’t specifically belong to any one person or group.”

Geography professor Mamadou Coulibaly provided expertise on how to use ArcMap, which is the Geographic Information System (GIS) software used to view and edit geographic data.

The PPP also is useful to track the how trees and shrubs on campus affect the environment overall.

“From a sustainability point of view, the PPP really gives us an idea of what kind of water usage the trees take,” Schoonover said. “It makes us ask questions like, ‘Are we generating enough oxygen?’ and ‘Are we planting things in the right places?’”

The next step of the project involves trying to expose the project to a wide audience and use it for educational purposes.

“It could be a really incredible opportunity for students who benefit from hands-on learning,” Gabriel said.

For example, PPP could teach students how to identify trees, utilize emerging technology and learn more about their University, according to Wise.

As a continuous project, there also will be a need to track new changes in the campus landscape and update the map accordingly.

“The project is as ongoing as the trees themselves change, as the University acquires new land, as computers change and as we hire new people,” Wise said.

The PPP interactive map, along with other campus maps, can be viewed at www.uwosh.edu/map/ppp.htm

.