Welcome to GIS II - Contemporary Analysis with GIS - Online  
Dr. Bill Montgomery

Welcome to GIS II Online! The fact that you are here indicates that you made it through GIS I, you saw the value that GIS offers to you and your career plans, and that you are seriously considering completing NJCU’s GIS Certificate Program. Alternatively, you see this as an excellent way to complete your NJCU Area F (Quantitative & Computer Literacy) requirement once GIS II has received Area F designation (anticipated mid-2006).

As was the case with GIS I, you ultimately will be the one who makes the most of your time in the course. You have learned the basic applications of GIS, and are now ready to move to the next step: analysis. You will find similarity to GIS I exercises as you work through the GIS II exercises, but you will also see that the expectations are higher now. You know how to map the data...now, what do you do with it? What kinds of questions can you ask and answer? What kinds of analyses can you perform? How can you mold and forge this tool to help you in your chosen career?

Online GIS is an experiment for all of us, based upon the belief that we can work independently yet maintain a sense of community in the distance-learning world. I have observed excellent learning outcomes for my online Physical Geography students, in part because the online environment forces them to become more independent, to learn on their own terms, and to incorporate new knowledge in ways that make sense to them. The online environment can be at once scary yet challenging, frightening yet empowering.

The online environment causes each of us to confront learning differently, more individually. Yet much of the GIS learning experience is about helping each other, about learning new “tricks” from each other, about sharing new approaches to the display and analysis of data. The way to keep that important sense of community is to stay in touch with each other via the discussion forum, email, and especially the chat room. Additionally, there will be times that you will visit the Rossey Hall GIS Lab (R602) in order to utilize equipment or software. You will have the latest version of ArcGIS software (9.0) from your textbook, but you will still need to visit Rossey Hall in order to utilize extensions such as 3D and Spatial Analyst. We will work out, individually, what onsite work times best suit your schedule. I will also develop a “Tips and FAQs” document that will provide links to tasks that we learn but tend to forget if not performed continuously (e.g., downloading and unzipping TIGER data files). I also have no doubt that all of you will provide suggestions and feedback that will improve the course.

As was the case in GIS I, I encourage you to help and support each other, but also remind you: Don’t do the work for each other. That does not help learning; it hinders it. Stay in touch with each other through WebCT’s communication tools (chat room, discussion forum, email). Stay on schedule with your assignment deadlines. Plan out (with my assistance) your independent research project early in the semester, and keep in mind that it is perfectly OK (in fact, preferred) for the GIS II research project to evolve into one that will satisfy the research project component of the NJCU GIS Certificate. You may want to use the research requirement for this course as a “springboard” to jump-start your GIS Certificate research project.

There are challenges ahead, but I have every confidence that each of you can do a great job and learn a great deal in this course. We are in this learning community together, even if the course is online. I am pulling for you and am here to help you empower yourself. Which takes us back to the beginning: Even though this is a learning community, please take responsibility for your performance, and remember that you will get out of this course what YOU put into it.