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DOC ROCK: MAPPING OUR WAY TO SERVICE

By Loren Collins

Dr. Amy Rock, or Doc Rock as her students affectionately call her, is a lecturer in geography and the Geospatial Certificate Program (GSP). As a lecturer, she carries a large class load, sometimes teaching for multiple departments. When Rock first arrived in Humboldt in 2014, she served as the Faculty in Residence with the Housing Department and also worked with a number of committees and fellows programs, including those related to Service Learning and community engagement. Currently, Rock serves as the director of the GSP and has taken the lead role in submitting the new Geospatial Sciences Baccalaureate Degree program for approval.

Rock did not originally intend to become a professor. While pondering her initial career path, she reflected that she “was going to go into nonprofit leadership, most likely. Academia was not off the table, but my primary goal was probably going to be nonprofit leadership because I was doing a lot of work with nonprofits, and as I was finishing up my dissertation I got recruited to teach where I had gotten my Master’s degree.”

Rock received her Baccalaureate degree in Architectural History and her Master’s degree in Geography from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. After spending a number of years working in Geographical Information Systems as a technology consultant, as well as supporting nonprofits, she decided to pursue her Ph.D. in Geography at Kent State University.

Prior to finding her love for working with students, Rock had a passion for serving nonprofits in the community and has kept this as a guiding principle in her life. She felt it was important to find a path that brought these two passions together. Service Learning became that pathway. Rock created a Community Geography course that had students working in teams to learn mapping skills while meeting the needs of local nonprofits. “It turns out that getting students excited about nonprofits is as exciting as doing stuff directly myself with nonprofits...so that’s how I got into this whole Higher Ed thing, and also how I got really addicted to Service-Learning...I would say because it’s just so much fun to connect students to their communities in that way.”

Since arriving in Humboldt, Rock prioritized building a relationship with the Center for Community

Based Learning and joined in on a number of efforts to support Service Learning across the campus. Rock's first Service Learning class at Humboldt was "Geography for Teachers" as a joint offering of the Geography department and the School of Education. Rock sent teams of students to more than a dozen schools during a special week dedicated to geography to conduct activities with large floor maps and excited K-12 students.

Rock also teaches Community Geography at Humboldt as a way to embed students in the nonprofit sector as emerging leaders and consultants while applying their mapping skills to meet the needs of the organizations they serve. She shared that her students are "doing a lot more active problem solving [and] critical thinking about how their data is messy and they need to figure out how to make this work in order to get to the end result."

Whether they are mapping the location of water bottle filling stations, the local murals and galleries for artists, or all of the locations of invasive species for Friends of the Dunes, Rock's students are learning the ins and outs of how nonprofits work. In her lessons, she incorporates modules focused on topics such as nonprofit management, consulting, and social change models. She then follows each group as they participate in their community projects to mitigate any issues or concerns that may arise.

Rock recognized digital mapping as the perfect space for service and curriculum to complement one another. "They get to get a broader view of what geospatial looks like in our world, and how they can use it." She explained that sometimes her students have a certain vision about their projects and the community partner has a different vision, so they have to find a place to meet in the middle. She said, "So they're not just practicing the geospatial skills at that point, they're practicing some of the skills that they would encounter in the workforce, like when they're working with a client or they're working with an organization and they have to really be able to think around the project, not just kind of tunnel through the data to get to the end... I think that's so fantastic and rewarding and it makes it worth the extra work."

Rock feels that the work her students do in the community multiplies the service she wants to provide for nonprofits. Instead of just providing her own individual contribution, she can support a dozen students serving half a dozen nonprofits. "Fundamentally, my intention is always to help nonprofits build capacity, and so a lot of these projects are targeting that, but sometimes, it's not so much about capacity as it is just about awareness." More importantly, it often leads students to commit to service throughout their lives. Rock explained, "Students get involved with these organizations, and sometimes they'll say things like 'Oh, I didn't know there was an organization that did this, this is really fantastic!' Or 'You know this is what I want to do with my education but I didn't know that there was really a way that you could legitimately do that... I thought I was going to have to sort of compromise on what I wanted to do.' Those are the fun ones, I think, when the students come back and they're like, 'this is really my dream and I'm getting to do it, and this is awesome.'"

Rock has continued to demonstrate her commitment to providing meaningful experiences and education for her students. Over the past year, she has handled the submission process for one of Cal Poly Humboldt's new programs, where students have the opportunity to earn a Baccalaureate degree in Geospatial Science and Technology. This program will provide students with the opportunity to stay within the Humboldt community while they earn this sought-after degree, and hopefully, some will end up staying long after they graduate. Rock and her colleagues have ensured that the degree includes an internship component for academic credit. This is wholly consistent in Rock's belief that hands-on service is one of the best ways to learn, and that commitment to your community is an investment that continues to grow even after you have moved on.

To see some of the great work students have done in Rock's Community Geography Course, here are some of the projects from past years.

[Cooperation Humboldt Food Resource Maps](#)

[CA Parks Marine Protected Areas](#)

[Humboldt Botanical Garden Native Plant Tour](#)

[Zero Waste Humboldt Bottle Washing Stations](#)