

Presentation Title: “Map Projection Education in World Atlases: A Survey”

Fritz Kessler, Professor

Frostburg State University

Historically speaking, most mapping professionals learned about map projections by reading textbooks during their college years. How did the general public learn about map projections? One approach would have been to examine world atlases. Past research on world atlases has primarily focused on map design. Yet, the utility of world atlases as a way for the general public to learn about map projections has not been examined. This presentation focuses on a survey of 235 world atlases that examined the different ways the topic of map projections was conveyed to the general public. This survey specifically examined whether or not map projections were discussed, what specific map projection topics were covered, and the presentation format that was used to convey map projections. Only a small portion of atlases surveyed included a discussion on map projections. Atlases affiliated with individuals (e.g., John Bartholomew) or organizations (e.g., National Geographic) that were associated with developing map projections were likely to include a discussion on map projections. Atlases also showed substantial variation in their topical coverage. Some atlases limited their discussions to naming popular map projections while others presented comprehensive overviews of the map projection process (e.g., a mathematical treatment of the map projection process). World atlases also showed significant alternatives in the presentation format. Some atlases discussed map projections using only text while other offered full-color illustrations. Overall, there was no consistency among atlases in their presentation of map projection information.