

# Geography 970

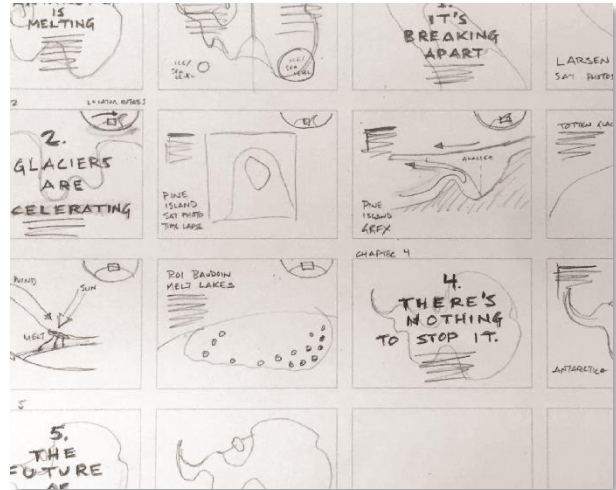
Place-based Narratives & Storytelling

## Instructor:

Robert E. Roth, PhD | reroth@wisc.edu  
375 Science Hall  
Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:30pm

## Discussion (378 Science Hall):

Thursday 2:30-5:00pm



## Course Description

**Stories**, like maps, are a method for documenting and explaining, for meaningfully abstracting our experiences, for communicating and sharing, and for asserting a particular worldview. Spatial narratives are an emerging research thrust in both geography and cartography, opening new lines of scholarship crossing the spatial sciences and digital humanities. Story maps are now a commercial platform, inviting a diverse and non-expert user group to participate in the mapmaking process. Visual storytelling has transformed the cartographer into a data journalist at major news companies, expanding the reach and influence of maps and mapmakers. But, are **spatial narratives**, **story maps**, and **visual storytelling** simply academic buzzwords or company slogans? What can storytelling actually tell us about cartography and geography?

Narrative and story offer entry points for **hybridization** in cartography, uniting technology with praxis, product with process, and design with critique. In this seminar, we explore narrative cartography and map-based visual storytelling from an eclectic range of influences and methods. Geography 970 is organized around weekly readings and map critiques, and includes experimental mapping assignments that augment traditional mapping with oral, written, and audio-visual storytelling forms. The seminar culminates in a final project of your choosing. Specifics on assignments are relatively flexible, allowing you to tell your own story.

## Prerequisites:

Graduate student standing or consent of instructor. The seminar has no other prerequisites, and thus assumes no prior technical knowledge. Students without Geography 370 or equivalent will benefit from a focused set of readings and tutorials ahead of the class.

## Programs/Breadth:

Geography 970 supports MS and PhD programs in Geography and MS programs in Cartography & GIS.

## Credit Load:

G970 is a 3-credit course, and therefore assumes ~3 hours of classroom contact per week plus ~6 hours of self-directed study and design outside of class per week.

## Learning Objectives

- Critically read and discuss scholarly literature
- Plan and lead classroom discussion
- Critically deconstruct and discuss story map examples
- Experiment with emerging and alternative story mapping techniques
- Draft and execute a research and design proposal
- Provide constructive feedback on peer projects
- Present research and design results in a formal, conference-like setting

## Target Audience

The seminar purposefully is designed to support a wide audience. Some student interests and profiles may include:

- Cartography students exploring new narrative techniques in their map design;
- GIS/science graduate students interested in critical theory, new and online media, or digital humanities;
- Geography students interested in using visual techniques (e.g., maps, graphics, documentaries, photography) in their research.
- Non-geography students working in the digital humanities that have a spatial component to their research.
- Many others!

Accordingly, this seminar is going to garner a diverse set of backgrounds, opinions, and needs. Throughout the course, **we will work collectively to ensure these differences are *productive and in no way marginalizing***. The goal of the course is not to arrive at any singular conclusion, but to help each other explore how place-based narratives and visual storytelling can support your research and career goals. Fold-in rather than cut-out.

## Reflexivity Statement: Robert Roth (he/him/his)

My research and teaching philosophies are informed by my situated experiences:

- I am white, male, and well-educated. I have color vision deficiency. I am relatively young for my appointment (but am feeling my years more every day).
- I identify professionally as an educator, cartographer, and geographer, and epistemologically as a mixed-methods social scientist.
- I received my graduate training at the two universities (Penn State and Wisconsin) perhaps the two U.S. universities historically tied to a scientific approach to cartography.

- Map-based visual storytelling is a relatively new research topic for me (i.e., post-dissertation and mostly post-tenure), but I increasingly see it as my central project.
- My new research on visual storytelling has made me appreciate much of the required reading I completed in graduate school that I was not sure if I would use at the time.
- I think it is dangerous to dismiss time-tested guidelines (e.g., “rules”) established in cartography. I also think it is dangerous if we do not continually question these guidelines as old challenges persist and new challenges emerge.
- If I had to have another job besides cartography professor, I would want to be a graphics editor / data journalist at a large international media outlet. It is far too late for me to switch, but I still find great inspiration from this work.
- I preferred lecture and lab formats over discussion sections as a student, and I tend to talk too much in a group setting. Please interrupt me, but not each other.
- I have learned far more about visual storytelling from my students than any article (academic or popular), and it is not even close.

## Evaluation

The seminar is structured around weekly, student-led critical discussion of readings and maps. Discussion and critique are paired with two experimental mapping assignments and a final project. Each evaluated item represents a percentage of the total course weight; final grades are assigned according to your composite percentage.

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Discussion &amp; Critique</b>	<b>Participation</b>	10%	Weekly reading and discussion of assigned papers (includes attendance; Week 4 check-in)
	<b>Discussion Lead</b>	10%	Preparation of one-hour discussion on assigned method readings (Weeks 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12)
	<b>Map Critiques</b>	10%	Four free-write map critiques applying readings to story map examples
	<b>Peer Critiques</b>	10%	Two peer critiques on the final project proposal and presentation (Weeks 8 & 14)
<b>Design</b>	<b>Map Experiments</b>	30%	Two, 4-week experimental mapping assignments
	<b>Final Project</b>	30%	Final project, including proposal, rubric, and final presentation (due 5/5)

\*UW-Madison encourages persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities; contact Rob at the outset of the course for accommodations.

## Grade Distribution

Because of the size of the course, grades are assigned on a set scale. Undergraduates and graduates are graded on different grade scales, per university policy.

<b>Grads</b>		<b>Undergrads</b>	
A	>92%	A	>90%
AB	89-92	AB	87-90
B	82-89	B	80-87
BC	79-82	BC	77-80
C	72-79	C	70-77
D	62-72	D	60-70

## Discussion & Critique (40% of Course Grade)

While graduate seminars vary widely based on the topic under investigation, they are united in their dual emphasis on critical reading/discussion of emerging literature and critical reflection through writing. Being a “critical thinker” as demonstrated through reading and writing is essential for successful completion of a thesis or dissertation, and may be the most valued skill in academia generally. However, reading and writing also are important to professional cartography, as positions that allow you to remain on the cutting edge of cartographic design, and to contribute back to the discipline, tend to be the most desirable. To stay relevant in cartography, a pdf reader, word process, and web browser, are equally as important as a graphic design package, GIS software, and coding.

### 1. Participation (10% overall; 2% check-in Week 4, 8% final)

The outcome of the seminar, positive or negative, depends on your dutiful participation in reading and discussion. You are expected to have reviewed all assigned readings before class and cogently discuss prompts provided by the discussion leader. You also are expected to be respectful of each other, not consuming too much airspace while being supportive rather than dismissive of each other’s opinions (even when you disagree).

Critical reading and discussion are skills you will hone throughout the seminar. As you read, think about the following aspects of each article:

- the main **purpose** of this article and the primary **contribution** the author seeks to make;
- the key **research questions** that the author is asking;
- the main **point of view** taken by the author and the main **assumptions** underlying the author’s thinking;
- the viability of the **method / technique** for map-based visual storytelling, and possible **alternatives** inspired by the technique;

- the main **conclusions** of the article; and
- the **novelty** and **significance** of the research;
- the **implications for your research or designs**, if we take this line of reasoning seriously.

The right balance between too much and too little discussion is difficult. I will provide a “check-in” grade (**2%** of the 10% for participation) following Week 4 regarding your participation level, allowing you to make adjustments as needed.

Failure to attend a period without a pre-arranged excuse results in an automatic **-1% deduction**. Arriving more than 5 minutes late, but attending most of discussion results in an automatic **-0.5% deduction**.

## **2. Discussion Lead (10% overall; Week 4, throughout)**

You will pair with a classmate to lead discussion for one seminar hour during the semester. You will select **two** papers for review by your colleagues; a third background or synthesis piece can be assigned for context, with discussion focusing on the other two papers. Additional web materials can be included as supplemental to the pair of readings.

I will lead four topics:

- Cartographic Design as Visual Storytelling (Week 1)
- Influences: Critical Cartography (Week 2)
- Influences: Data Journalism (Week 3)
- Influences: Multimedia Cartography (Week 6)

The topic and associated papers you select should bend to your team’s interest and research. However, the papers must relate to storytelling, spatial narratives, or map design in some logical manner. Some prospective topics include:

- creative geographies/pedagogies
- counter mapping
- digital humanities
- feminist mapping
- Indigenous mapping
- qualitative GIS
- participatory mapping
- reflexivity & positionality
- volunteered & contributed geographic information
- treatment of story and narrative from sibling disciplines

We will finalize the topics in Week 3, ensuring each group has a unifying theme with minimal overlap (as possible) with other themes. The discussion leaders then are expected to do a much

more comprehensive review of the discussed topic and will meet with Rob ***following seminar two weeks before*** leading discussion to choose papers and outline a set of discussion prompts or other activities.

Failure to attend your assigned discussion session results in a **50% deduction** and completion of an alternative essay assignment for the remaining 50% of the assignment.

### **3. Map Critique (10%; Weeks 4, 5, 9, 10)**

We will apply a focused critique on four story maps throughout the semester. Map critiques will include a preliminary review and 30-minute “free-write” followed by targeted discussion relating map design to the discussed material. Revised free-writes are due 24 hours following class.

Failure to attend the free-write critique and subsequent discussion without a prearranged excuse results in a **50% deduction**. You can complete the critique out of class for the remaining 50% of the assignment.

### **4. Peer Critique (10%; Weeks 8 & 14)**

The ability to constructively critique the work of others is an essential design skill in cartography. You will provide feedback for two of your peers on two different peer assignments (4 critiques total): the final project proposal and the final project presentation.

Unlike the more discount approach in 370 and 572, you will provide a comprehensive review of peer work following a rubric, with responses in paragraph form. I will provide the rubric for critique of the proposals and your peers will provide the rubric for evaluation of their own work at the presentation.

Peer critiques are due 48 hours following class and lose **20%** per day late, so please plan accordingly. No critiques will be accepted one week following class, as it is too late for your peers to utilize your feedback. Failure to attend the proposal pitches without a pre-arranged excuse results in a **50% deduction**. You can complete the proposal critique out of class for the remaining 50% of the assignment. Failure to attend the final project presentations without a pre-arranged excuse results in **loss of all points** for the second critique without opportunity for make-up.

## **Design (60%)**

### **1. Experimental Map Assignments (30%; 2/26 & 4/1)**

Critical reading, discussion, and writing on literature is complemented with the conceptualization, design, and execution of two experimental map designs.

- **Experimental Map 1 (15%; 2/26):** Exploring the Esri Story Maps platform
- **Experimental Map 2 (15%; 4/1):** Exploring Multimedia Cartography with the 4<sup>th</sup> floor recording studio

I describe these assignments as “experimental” as they do not have any supporting lab materials, but rather a small set of design constraints regarding the use of oral, written, and audio-visual storytelling forms. I also do not entirely know what to expect, so creativity and risk-taking is rewarded in evaluation.

Experimental mapping assignments are supported by: (1) an initial demo or field trip introducing relevant technology on the day of the assignment, (2) group discussion of preliminary ideas one week following assignment, and (3) an artistic statement describing the resulting map and its touchpoints to classroom readings, submitted along with the map itself.

Experimental map assignments are due the **day before class** to allow for time to complete the assigned readings. Late assignments lose **10%** per day late.

## **2. Final Project (30%; 3/12, 3/4/30, 5/6)**

The seminar culminates in a final project of your own design. It is never too early to begin thinking about your final project topic, and, once selected, to begin assembling the needed geographic datasets to tell your place-based story. The final project should support your research needs and career goals. Final projects may include:

- A story map of substantial quality and complexity, with an artist’s statement
- A literature review or other synthesis on a topic related to seminar
- A research study on the design and use of story maps (e.g., web survey, content/discourse analysis)
- A story mapping assignment or activity + accompanying pedagogical content tailored for one of our Geography’s classes
- Others?

The final project requires a series of intermediate deliverables to acquire feedback from the class. These include:

- **Final Project Proposal (5%; Draft 3/12; Final 3/26):** You are first required to submit a 5-page (single-spaced) final project proposal. The final project proposal should include the following sections: (1) Introduction & Significance, (2) Relevant Background (including 8-10 references), (3) Method Design. The proposal also will include a rubric outlining how we should mark the final project (not part of the 5 pages). Therefore, the proposal is more involved than 370 or 572, given the focus on writing of seminar courses. You will submit and present a draft on 3/12 and then submit a final proposal based on Peer Critique 1 on 3/26. Proposal draft presentations should “pitch” the project idea, introducing the previously mentioned sections of the proposal. Proposal pitches last 10 minutes split evenly for presentation and Q&A. Late proposals lose **20%** per day late.

- **Final Project Presentation (5%; 4/30):** A final project presentation, modeled after a formal, 15-minute conference talk. The final project should be approximately **75% complete** at the presentation, showing substantial progress while still having the ability to integrate feedback from Peer Critique 2. Failure to attend the final project presentations without a pre-arranged excuse results in **loss of all points** for the second critique without opportunity for make-up.
- **Final Project (20%; 5/6).** The final project is due on **5/6 at Noon**. All materials must be submitted on Canvas, including supplemental datasets, source code, etc. I will accept late final projects up to **5/11** at a penalty of **20%** per day late.



Week	Date	Lecture/Lab Topic	
W1	1/23		Experimental Mapping 1
	Hour 1	Negotiate Syllabus & Discuss Reflexivity Statements	
	Hour 2	Discuss Cartographic Design as Visual Storytelling (Rob leads)	
W2	1/30		
	Hour 1	Discuss: Critical Cartography (Rob leads)	
	Hour 2	Experimental Mapping 1: Esri Story Maps	
W3	2/6		
	Hour 1	Discuss: Data Journalism (Rob leads)	
	Hour 2	Discuss Esri Story Map Ideas; Finalize Discussion Topics	
W4	2/13		
	Hour 1	Map Critique 1: The Unwelcome Story	
	Hour 2	Topic Planning for the Remainder of Seminar	
W5	2/20		
	Hour 1	Discuss: Author- versus Reader-driven Storytelling (Bo & Tim lead)	
	Hour 2	Map Critique 2: Antarctica Melting (Static + Video)	
W6	2/27	Experimental Map Design 1 Due (2/26)	Experimental Mapping 2
	Hour 1	Discuss: Multimedia Cartography (Rob leads)	
	Hour 2	Experimental Mapping 2: Multimedia Cartography	
W7	3/5		
	Hour 1	Discuss: Feminist & Participatory Mapping (Katka & Sameera lead)	
	Hour 2	Review Esri Story Maps; Discuss Multimedia Cartography Ideas	
W8	3/12	Draft Proposals Due; Peer-Critique #1 Due (48 hours after class)	
	Hour 1	Final Project Pitches	
	Hour 2	Final Project Pitches	
W9	3/14-3/22	No Class: Spring Break	
	3/26	Final Proposals Due ( <b>3/25</b> )	
	Hour 1	Discuss: Space-Time Cartography & Geography (Atlas & Xinyi lead)	
W10	Hour 2	Map Critique 3: TBD	
	4/2	Experimental Map Design 2 Due (4/1)	
	Hour 1	Discuss: Contrapuntal & Countermapping (Carly & Kevin lead)	
W11	Hour 2	Map Critique 4: TBD	Final Projects
	4/9	No Class: AAG	
	Hour 1	Open for Final Projects	
W12	Hour 2	Open for Final Projects	
	4/16		
	Hour 1	Discuss: Migratory Cartographies (Nick leads)	
W13	Hour 2	Review Multimedia Maps; Final Project Roundtable Check-in	
	4/23		
	Hour 1	Open for Final Projects (Rob available in office)	
W14	Hour 2	Open for Final Projects (Rob available in office)	
	4/30	Final Project Presentation; Peer-Critique #2 Due (48 hours after class)	
	Hour 1	Final Project Presentations	
	Hour 2	Final Project Presentations	
	5/6	Final Reports Due 12pm Noon	