



NEWS RELEASE

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STUDENTS GAIN VALUABLE WORKFORCE SKILLS WHILE FILLING DATA GAPS IN THE WORLD'S OPEN MAP

WASHINGTON, DC; California, PA; — More than six million changes have been made recently to the world's free, editable public map, OpenStreetMap, by YouthMappers, a network of university students who have united to create and use open spatial data to directly address development challenges in the most impoverished countries on the planet. A few of those students have been selected to work directly with the U.S. Global Development Lab's GeoCenter, part of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on a set of priority projects under a Virtual Internship, running from January to May.

Kyle Snyder from California University of Pennsylvania is a part of a select group of fifteen (15) students from nine (9) universities in the US to participate in the internship, chosen for their leadership on their home campus in supporting international development projects through mapping with the YouthMappers network. The internship emphasizes the creation and utilization of open data and open source software for geographic information directly related to development objectives in unmapped places of the world where USAID works to end extreme poverty. In addition to mapping, students are encouraged to explore new technologies to accomplish mapping tasks and engage with YouthMappers chapters in other countries. They will work as a team in a virtual environment and become proficient in mapping and validating the volunteered work done through crowd-mapping. The interns gain valuable 21st century workforce skills while helping with humanitarian and development needs. They will also write blog posts about their experiences.

Snyder is a senior student majoring in GIS/Emergency Management and Land Management with a minor in Criminal Justice in the Department of Earth Sciences. He has been able to work on projects in Shinyanga (Tanzania) and Siaya (Kenya) for the PEPFAR Campaign (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief). During the course of this internship, Kyle has gained skills in interpreting aerial imagery, creating features, and also validating data created by others. An emphasis on open-sourced mapping has been placed due to the international nature of the USAID's role.

“Being a part of the GeoCenter Intern team has helped me to collaborate with other students across the country on accomplishing the humanitarian missions that are set forth by USAID” Snyder said. “I believe that these skills and insights gained through this experience have set me on a path to being a more successful geographer, and a more engaged citizen of the world.”

Previous interns have contributed to improving food security in Bangladesh, health and malaria prevention in Mozambique, and disaster preparation and assistance in Ecuador after the April 2016 earthquake, where the maps were immediately put to use by the humanitarian and relief agencies to assist victims of the natural disaster.

All new data created by YouthMappers is open and accessible to the public using the OpenStreetMap platform and tools to ensure it is freely available for the greater public good, particularly local populations planning for the welfare and vitality of their own communities.

The YouthMappers network of chapters organizes a global community of learners and scholars to work locally and exchange collaboratively to help create resilient communities. The program seeks to not just build maps, but to build mappers, supporting universities and colleges to offer meaningful global learning experiences, build a socially engaged citizenry, enhance long-term scientific capacity around the world, and foster youth exchange and leadership.

The 2017 Virtual Interns are students from Texas Tech University, George Washington University, West Virginia University, George Mason University, the University of Central Florida, The University of Southern California, Clemson University, California University of Pennsylvania, and State University of New York, Geneseo.

The United States Agency for International Development generously supports this program through a grant from the US Global Development Lab’s GeoCenter. Founding partners are Texas Tech University, George Washington University, and West Virginia University. To date, 48 universities in 16 countries have formed student-led chapters in the network.

This initiative was formally launched November 2015 on Capitol Hill as part of the national Geography Awareness Week, and the network was inaugurated in February of 2016. New chapters of students are still being formed and are welcomed to join the network.

For more information about YouthMappers, visit www.youthmappers.org.

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