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Mapping course for better understanding of science

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Maps help us navigate along highways and dusty back roads, through rugged jungles, across teeming oceans and even explore the moon, Mars and those pinpoints of light beyond our solar system

Now comes a new method that charts the landscape of science It's called Places and Spaces: Mapping Science, a public exhibit traveling the United States and one of its chief pilots is Katy Boerner, associate professor of information science at the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science and adjunct associate professor at the IU School of Informatics

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Its next stop is the Science, Industry and Business Library of the New York Public Library in midtown Manhattan, opening 3 April 2006 and running through 31 August 2006.

"This unique exhibition uses innovative mapping techniques to visually show what and where science is today, and how the different branches of science relate to one another," says Boener.

"An initial theme of this exhibit is to compare and contrast the first maps of our entire planet with the first maps of all of science as we know it," says Boerner.

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"The second iteration contrasts four existing reference systems with six potential reference systems and aims to inspire discussion about a common reference system for all of mankind's scientific knowledge." Mapping Science also gives viewers a chance to see where science disciplines are heading, where cutting-edge science is erupting and how it all relates back to the physical centers of research.

The exhibit is the first public display of high-resolution maps of science.

"As maps of the world help us to navigate physical places, maps of semantic and spaces help navigate and manage topics in science," Boerner notes.

Boerner shares the role of curator of the Mapping Science exhibit with Deborah MacPherson of Accuracy and Aesthetics, an organization that promotes the advancement of education, cultural heritage and science.

Together, they headed a team of information technology experts, scientists, designers and artists from various disciplines who in some cases redesigned and in most cases created these maps for the exhibit.

Other IU scientists - all of whom work in Boerner's InfoVis Lab at Bloomington - were involved in developing the exhibit.

Bruce Herr (SLIS software developer), John Burgoon (SLIS doctoral student), Todd Holloway (computer science doctoral student), and Elisha Hardy (SLIS undergraduate) are among the new map makers.

Peter Hook, a SLIS doctoral student who specializes in educational information visualization techniques, is a member of the Places and Spaces advisory board.

The first iteration of the exhibit was created a year ago for the Mapping Humanity's Knowledge and Expertise in the Digital Domain as part of the 101st Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Denver, Colo.

The second will be unveiled at the NYPL exhibit; a total of 10 iterations are planned.

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