Mapping Theses to Facilitate Discovery of Master’s Research
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The Humboldt State University Library in Arcata, California, uses Google applications to facilitate access to HSU master’s theses archived on Humboldt Digital Scholar, HSU’s institutional repository. Repository metadata is enhanced with location-related fields to produce a Google Fusion map for visualizing and exploring the wealth of field research done by HSU students in Humboldt County, Northern California, and beyond.

Project Highlights
- We were inspired by the fact that many HSU master’s theses include a “Study Site” chapter with maps. We were eager to provide a holistic picture of graduate research at Humboldt State.
- Each semester, we examine new theses to identify candidates for mapping. These are assigned location data: study site/area; study state/region; study country; and geographical coordinates. Each mapped thesis becomes a map point searchable from three geographical levels.
- We found that some thesis authors identify their research location(s) by longitude and latitude—they’ve done the geocoding work for us; when they haven’t, we obtain coordinates with a geocode app or Google Maps. Because field research sometimes covers extensive or scattered areas, our map points sometimes only approximate the locations of research. We’re not aiming for perfection.
- The U.S. Board on Geographic Names GNIS database is very useful for locating coordinates by place name or topographical feature. The searchability of place names is improved when study sites are named consistently.
- Automated assignment of coordinates is possible using a geocoding script.
- Metadata is easily managed in Fusion using Card and Spreadsheet views.
- I.R. records may be enhanced with a link to the Fusion map.
- Fusion’s filters provide nicely segmented views of metadata (e.g., program name, advisor, issue date, etc.).
- For maximum impact, advertise to students, faculty and university marketing: it’s great P.R. for programs and the university.

Resources of institutional and regional significance, such as student and faculty research, and historical aerial photography and maps, are excellent candidates for discovery via a graphical map-based interface.

Subject terms used in library catalogs and A&I databases lack geographically precise terminology to identify specific locations or areas of interest such as “northwest corner of Cedar and Shaw.”

Map-based discovery tools provide critical geographical context for, and increase the discoverability of, place-based materials. CSU Humboldt and CSU Fresno are using and adapting different off-the-shelf, map-based, user-oriented discovery tools to increase the findability and use of their often overlooked and difficult to find collections. The projects have value as a library marketing tool as they showcase not only the library’s newly-accessible collections but also an innovative spirit. These projects demonstrate the core library values of facilitating information discovery and access.

Do you have map or aerial collections? MALT is expanding, and will include more aerial photo and map collections, including collections from throughout the CSU system and California. Please contact us if you have collections that would benefit by being discoverable in this tool.

Map and Aerial Locator Tool (MALT)
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Fresno State has a large collection of aerial photos, mostly flights of Fresno County between 1937–1998, but also including photos of the Sierra National Forest and locations around the San Joaquin Valley. There is strong demand for these photos, from real estate developers, researchers, and community users. But finding aerial photos of a particular location and from a variety of dates is difficult using individual flight indexes or digital collections platforms, and often requires extensive assistance from library staff.

The Map and Aerial Locator Tool (MALT) was developed to make it easier for patrons to quickly find what maps and aerial photos are available for their locations of interest, either by selecting locations on a web-based map or by searching the map with addresses, place names, assessor’s parcel numbers, or coordinates.

MALT provides links to digitized versions of the photos where available, or to location and access information. This discovery tool can be adapted for any collection of materials that can be referenced to polygons (or “footprints”) on a digital map.

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http://malt.library.fresnostate.edu/