Improving the Accessibility of Archaeological Data Through Geographic Information System (GIS)

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Overview

Archaeology is a science that is often thrown in the category of history. However, archaeology differentiates itself from history by reconstructing the past based on material culture instead of strictly historical sources. Done correctly, proper analysis of material evidence can lead to solid interpretations of testable hypotheses. One way to improve the conclusions based on archaeological evidence is to present the data in a visually understandable manner.

The aim of this project was to 1) present the information gained from the Campus Archaeological Program’s 2010 Summer Field School, and 2) to present it in a visually beneficial way. This was done by utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS); a computer program that allows transformation of numerical data into real world points. GIS also allows other analyses to be performed, then presented in multiple ways that vastly increase the ability to comprehend raw data and the patterns within it.

Final Thoughts

My first impression with using GIS was that it was an overcomplicated program that was ill suited to my needs. However, as I continued to work with the program I began to understand many of its features and applied uses to the extent that I would not have wanted to use anything in place of GIS. The goals of this project, visually representing the hard data recovered from an archaeological site, were completely fulfilled by using GIS. Raw data was transformed from a disordered collection of numbers into real world points that could be seen and understood on a map.

My hope is that the Campus Archaeology Program will continue to use GIS to display data collected from future summer field schools. I think that the project could be taken a step further by including artifact densities in the excavation walls, just as it was included in the shovel test pits.

References

