Recently Ethiopia has become the twelfth most populous country in the world, yet the only published geography of the nation was published in 1972. Since then Ethiopia has seen extensive changes in its population and economy. However, the lack of recent data contributes to the problem of “data poverty” that Ethiopia and many other developing nations face. Data has either not been collected or it has not been made readily accessible to those who could use it. As a result the academic community, along with other organizations, is often put at a disadvantage as they lack data and resources for their own country. Without the needed data it can become difficult to assess what difficulties a country may be facing and the best steps for dealing with them.

New technologies and geospatial data have made it possible to expand the potential and usefulness of maps and geography. Our study focuses on updating the geography of Ethiopia and making geospatial data publicly accessible by providing it online and thus, to combat “data poverty”. This data will be extremely useful for the Ethiopian academic community. The twenty-nine geography departments in Ethiopian universities have recently synchronized their curriculums. There are now twenty geography courses that are taught at all the geography departments throughout Ethiopia. Using online web maps and storytelling templates, we are building material that correlates with this new curriculum.

First, we met with a team from the Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri) to brainstorm, learn more about their products they had available and determine which apps would be most useful. They also provided us with demonstrations and hands-on instruction for some new products that had not yet been released but would be extremely helpful for our project. These included interactive story maps, which we create and then compile into Story Map Journals. The creation of these maps and journals has been the main focus of our research. During his time in Ethiopia, Professor Bascom acquired a number of datasets from Ethiopian government agencies. This summer we began transforming some of that data into interactive web maps, which we then post online and, ultimately, will be accessible to Ethiopian university students. The goal is to create Story Map Journals that correspond to as many of the core classes in the harmonized geography curriculum as we can. As of August 1st, we have completed an introductory Map Journal as well as one on Population. A biogeography Map Journal is currently being developed, and, a Map Journal on geology is next on our agenda.

This project has provided me with a number of benefits. The first was the experience of meeting with the Esri team in Washington DC. This provided me with an example of a professional environment in a career field that I am interested in. Another benefit has been the hands on data work I have completed. My initial task was data management. I sorted through and documented a number of data sets. Finally, this summer has also provided me with phenomenal working experience using Esri products such as the story maps and Map Journal app. These skills will be very valuable in my future education and work experience.