UCSB DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
COLLOQUIUM

Date: Thursday, February 26, 2009
Time: 3:30pm
Location: Buchanan Hall 1930
Title: The Role of Geographic Categories & Spatial Cuing in Global-Scale Location Estimates
Speaker: Alinda Friedman
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Abstract: Data from several experiments in which the goal was to discover how people represent and reason about global-scale geography and how it is that their representations are or are not biased will be discussed. The first part of the talk will briefly describe what these biases are, and illustrate them with data from Canadian, American, and Mexican observers. The main part of the talk will describe methods that were used to discover whether the biases could be ameliorated. The next part will next briefly describe two theories that are pertinent to numeric and spatial estimation processes, and finally, discuss data from independent groups of individuals who estimated the location of North American cities using both spatial and numeric response modes and a variety of perceptual and memory supports. These supports included having location markers for each city color coded by nation and identified by name, giving participants the opportunity to see and update all their estimates throughout the task, and allowing people to respond directly on a map. No manipulation entirely mitigated the influence of geographic categories on the judgments, but some manipulations improved within-region ordinal accuracy. The data provide evidence that the city and regional levels of representation are independent, spatial and numeric response modalities affect accuracy differently at the different levels, biases at the regional level have multiple sources, and accurate spatial cues improve estimates primarily by limiting the use of global landmarks to partition the response space. However, these cues do not change the non-overlapping nature of the categories. Results support and extend a theory of spatial location estimates to the domain of real-world geography.

Host: Daniel Montello