empathy, conceptual thinking, and design that art-making entails—is not a decora-
tive add-on to an education,” Greenblatt said in the news release accompan-
ying publication of the report. “It is central to what education, in our time or indeed any
time, is about.”

Just as the new general-education cur-
culum encourages science courses to in-
corporate lab work, the arts report en-
couraged professors—especially those
teaching courses in the “aesthetic and in-
terpretive understanding” category—to
incorporate art creation as well as analy-
sis and theory.

The task force also rec-
mended a new undergraduate con-
centration in the dramatic arts, in-
tended to “be part of a liberal-arts
education, not conservatory train-
ing.”

• New graduate programs that
culminate in a master of fine arts degree.

Establishing programs in creative writ-
ing and theater should be possible within
“a relatively short time” given these disci-
plines’ relatively well-developed state;
with regard to painting, sculpture, digital
media, music, and filmmaking, the report
said, “different time-frames are needed.”

The report recommended full funding
of all graduate-student slots in these pro-
grams, so that Harvard does not force its
graduates to embark on risky, often
unprofitable careers in the arts with a
massive debt burden. (Concerns over
graduates’ financial straits aside, Green-
blatt notes that without full funding,

Mapping Africa

These days, maps can repre-
sent far more than geogra-
phical information. When har-
nessed to Geographical
Information Systems (GIS),
they can provide new ways to organize everything known about a
place: show where power plants are located in one semi-trans-
parent layer and compare that to population density shown in an-
other, for example; even link to relevant datasets that can’t be
represented visually. But as anyone who’s used Google Earth
knows, North America and Europe are blanketed with such layers
of information, while Africa remains in this modern sense “a dark
continent,” in the words of Clowes professor of fine art and
African and African American studies Suzanne P. Blier.

No more. In December, Harvard launched Africa Map
(http://africamap.harvard.edu), designed to make data about the
continent easier to discover and explore. The project is one of
several “Web map applications” developed with public and private
financing by Harvard’s Center for Geographic Analysis (CGA; see

Blier, who oversees an image database of African art and mater-
ial culture, uses the map as both a pedagogical and a research
tool. Her students can locate artwork and forms of architecture
from her database in relationship to countries and ethnicities, for
example (the map has layers for each of these four things). Blier
can then show students a series of sculptures or masks and have
them “identify where they are spatially, and hence their relation-
ship with other works or with initiation ceremonies or the like.”

In her own research, she has traced the correlates of artistic cre-
ativity by utilizing map layers containing sociological, political, eco-
nomic, and historical information.

But the Africa Map is not just for humanists like Blier. It is a
resource that can actually “promote interdisciplinary collabora-
tion,” says Ben Lewis, the senior GIS specialist who has brought
the project to fruition under the guidance of co-principal inves-
tigators Blier and CGA director Peter K. Bol, Carswell profes-
sor of East Asian languages and civilizations. For example, as
Lewis explains, “The project layer is a start at creating a map of
Harvard projects in Africa, linked to researchers and actual
location, across disciplines.” It’s the sort of thing that might
bring an epidemiologist studying disease transmission together
with a social scientist studying the relationship between trans-
portation and population density.

Lewis has also created an index of all the Africa material in
Harvard’s map collection. An enormous number of those maps,
some historical, have been digitized and then “geo-referenced,” a
process of assigning latitude and longitude to points on the maps.
Though the index itself is already linked to the map, only one-
ten of 1 percent of Harvard’s maps have been added as visual
layers so far in the ongoing project. (The process, including geo-
referencing, costs $10 to $40 per sheet). Even so, Africa Map al-
ready provides “the most high-resolution, detailed maps of the
continent available out of copyright” anywhere, says Blier, and
more are being added all the time.

Although currently focused on Africa, Lewis says the open-
source, Web-based mapping framework behind the project
could be used to organize information for any region of the
world, large or small.

Aggregating data using maps, rather than disciplines, authors, ti-
tles, subjects, or indices can lead to fresh understanding and insight,
he points out. “We’re trying to say, maybe there is a better way.”

This map shows soil types for all of Africa. A researcher might use
it with other map layers to study agricultural productivity among
countries with similar soils, comparing, for example, the agrarian
practices of Francophone and Anglophone countries.