Department Talk
Amanda Cox
New York Times

Friday, February 11, 2011
12:30pm - 2:00pm
Computer Science Building, Room 150

"Data Visualization at the New York Times"
The New York Times graphics desk researches and creates charts, diagrams and maps for the paper and the Web site. We'll talk about what we do and why we do it, focusing on what we know (distributions are more interesting than averages, sliders are awesome) and what I'm still hoping to learn (how to turn uncertainty into a strength, how to resolve the conflict between interactivity and storytelling).

This video is similar to the talk she gave at Umass:

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- Overall Impressions
- Five Things I know
- Three Things I don't know

- Other thoughts and notes
- some video call-outs

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Overall Impressions - Main Points

What NY Times Graphics really do (or are uniquely positioned to do)
- Reveal Patters
- Provide Context
- Describe Relationships

In Amanda's words: *** Create a Sense of Wonder ***. But NYTimes must maintain clarity - clarity is always important. NYTimes Graphics = Clarity Multiplied by Awe

Format - yikes

- Print
- Web
- Mobile
Amanda organized her talk as “Fives things I do know, and Three things I don’t know”

[Fives things I do know]

1. Distributions are more interesting than averages
   - Mariano Rivera Dominates Hitters
   - Melting the Internet

2. All Great Songs have good background singers (provide context, sense of scale) (also includes “use of time”)
   - Unemployment Rate (what if scenarios)
   - Path to Top Home Run Hitters
   - Downhill Skiing
   - Fractions of a Second: An Olympic Musical (Provides Context - e.g. “what is 0.3 seconds?”)

3. Connecting to something is good
   - Historic Shift [7:00]

Published: November 9, 2010

A Historic Shift

Almost all Congressional districts voted more Republican in this election than in 2008.
The “annotation layer” is often the most important/fun. Sometimes provided by others, it elevates the data sets.

Cotton Picking to Picking Presidents  [http://bigthink.com/ideas/21383](http://bigthink.com/ideas/21383)

4. Form is important

A great example is comparing a classic presentation of exit poll results. These numbers are useful, but a user must know exactly what they are looking for to discover the story. Compare it to this interactive, which lets the outliers stand out and the gives prominence to the surprises the data reveals.

“The form wants to depend on the story you are trying to tell. Form is super important. Form really matters. It reveals things that are different in each one.”

5. Sliders are fun

- Oil Spill
- Olympic Medals
- Inauguration Words
- Buy or Rent
- Electoral Explorer
June 2: The attempt to cut the riser pipe was delayed today when the wire saw got stuck.
How big is the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill - Google Earth Viz by Paul Rademacher

Three things I don’t know

1. How to make models more accessible (reveal patterns - background story)

Netflix Map  ~ Coraline in Boston
Coraline

There are many scenes and images in "Coraline" that are likely to scare children. This is not a warning but rather a recommendation, since the cultivation of fright can be one of the great pleasures of youthful viewing. As long as it doesn't go too far toward violence or mortal dread, a film that evokes a tingle of unease or a tremor of spookiness can be a tonic to sensitivities dulled by wholesome, smoky, school-approved entertainments.

Read Rest of NYT Review »

2009 Superbowl Twitter Chatter
2. How to turn uncertainty into strengths instead of weakness

3. Where are the templates for telling stories with data?

Steppers - basic form
Timelines

[Video Call-Outs Time Stamps]

7:00 - Historic Shift to the Right Map!! (bring my copy!!!)

8:00 - Annotation Layer: "southern crescent shape for election map" - bring my stuff.

9:45 - Context -
  - A) provide sense of scale (Haiti);
A) provide sense of scale (Haiti);
B) 11:13 - Oil Spill (adore sliders) * add the "If it were my home - mashup"
C) Size of Olympic Swimming Pool in China;
D) Background Singers - Jobless Rate for People Like You

16:35 - Form
- Exit Polling New Hampshire Voters - phonebook mentality; not good at illustrating patterns. vs
- Democratic Primary Obama vs. Clinton - e.g. "Super Educated People in Arkansas voted for Clinton"

~ 21:00 - 22:00 - Reveal Patterns
- honor a simpler approach "fatalities in Iraq". Not "Tricked Out"

25:00 - use of time
- skiing - Bode Miller (use of time)

Some Links referenced in video (also see below)

2010 Winter Olympics

Other notes and thoughts/nuggets

How to Describe a Process

Both examples below use what are called "steppers"
- NY Times Tracking US Airways Flight 1549
- Crane Collapse in Manhattan
- Data Vis - tell a story - How Americans Spend Their Day