COMPUTERS AND STUDENT MOBILIZATION: A Response to the Global Mapping Project
By Robert Coleman

It doesn't take much effort to imagine the future impact on student mobilization of the Global Mapping Project. (Let's avoid the proposed "Global Information Network" -- I'm not sure the evangelical community is ready for the acronym "GIN"!)

Urbana, 1987. Students crowd around 20 color mapping terminals, waiting their turn to query the computer. The questions are tapped into the keyboard: "Where is the largest known unreached people group?" "Pinpoint the churches in India." "Zoom in on central India." "Graph the growth rate of the twenty largest denominations in Guatemala." "Indicate the villages with no churches." "Map the people groups of Nepal, and shade those not yet "adopted" by churches." "What skills are known to be needed in Mauritania?" After each question, the computer draws a map or graph or list....

A tool such as the Global Mapping Project, the fruits of which could perhaps be available on large campuses within five years, would address two pervasive, paralyzing mobilization problems:

1) *The Invisible People*: As long as the Hidden Peoples remain hidden, they will remain unreached. Mankind's visceral and intellectual mechanisms respond to visible needs. A single crying child in the next room evokes more immediate response than ten thousand starving children ten thousand miles away. The Global Mapping Project proposes to systematically raise the Hidden Peoples into view, bringing the world's mosaic of peoples closer to the students we are challenging, making these peoples, in short, more "real".

2) *The Impossible Task*: Most people shy away from a task that is just too big, too overwhelming, too unthinkable. World evangelization can be viewed as such a task when considered as a whole. The GMP will not only break the task into bite-sized pieces, but will also unveil the unrealized strength and size of the global Christian movement. It will allow a church or an individual student to choose a piece of the task, confident that the whole is being kept in view. It will thus provide *hope* to future potential mission activists, a very valuable asset indeed in mission mobilization.

The Global Mapping Project's contributions to the solution of these two problems will greatly aid the cause of mission mobilization. But the GMP has an impact for us right now.

The Impact Now
All of the above is a direct extension of the dreams of the Global Mapping Project into the student mobilization world. That is the future, and it promises to be very exciting. But there is something we can do now which will help ensure future success. We can *recruit* for the GMP.
How many of us have been frustrated in the attempt to help students with secular training get involved in missions, only to find avenues for involvement limited for many with particular, specialized skills? Now we are presented with a project which could tap hundreds of students who have what are often seen as "mission-peripheral" skills. The technological achievement of the Global Mapping Project, involving as it does networking, global communications, massive database implementation, sophisticated graphics, intelligent question handling, severe financial constraints, computer cartography, anthropology, and more, rivals in difficulty many of the technological challenges of the secular world.

Dataserve, the technical service mission charged with accomplishing the technological part of the GMP, could likely use several hundred technically skilled people for both the GMP and its other projects. Meanwhile, cartographers, human geographers, photographers, journalists, data input personnel, and others will be needed for other parts of this massive global project.

Finally, any students considering graduate study might well consider the in-depth cultural studies which will be needed by the GMP. Indeed, a project of this scope could likely absorb and help direct the cross-cultural field research of several thousand graduate students, research which would not only count toward an advanced (secular) degree, but would also lay the foundation for new mission work among the unreached peoples of the world.

Thus, the GMP opens up many new doors for direct frontier mission service by those not necessarily gifted or trained in church planting. Let's be sure to suggest it for many of the students we meet with hearts for missions and advanced secular training.

The Hidden Challenge
Now let's hike through more dangerous territory. There is a hidden message in the Global Mapping Project, a challenge thrown casually from one generation to the next like a grenade with the pin pulled. The hidden message is *cooperation*. Notice in the preceding article on the Global Mapping Project how casually the cooperation of many research groups is mentioned. This cooperation, as we all know, is not lightly achieved. Information is the lifeblood of a research group; what possible incentive would there be to share that information with other groups? Practically speaking, it is the possession of unique information which proves the value of the research agency to potential donors. Yet somehow, the *immense benefit of having all we know of the harvest field and harvest force at our fingertips* has been great enough to overcome normal barriers to cooperation.

Indeed, the new technology has provided not only the incentive but also the capacity for cooperation. Sensitive information can be protected according to the desires of each agency. Information contributed is "tagged" with the source; a user will find a list of sources on his screen with the list of information -- rather like a market distributing pre-packaged food for a variety of growers. The GMP potentially will make the information -- and the research agencies from which it came -- far more accessible to church leaders and lay people.

In other words, the GMP technology makes possible cooperation on the level of a *network*, rather than a "top-down" *hierarchy*. It will not be one research group dictating to the others, but rather all sharing information, insights, and technology with each other at whatever level each desires. The new technology makes possible new, non-threatening levels of cooperation. And therein lies the hidden challenge to our generation. Researchers are overcoming many real barriers to cooperation for the sake of great advantages. Can we?

A Global Mobilization Project?
What kinds of cooperative projects might the new technology make possible to student mobilizers? Let me sketch a few ideas:

Communications: It won't be long before small, capable, highly portable computers are within financial and geographical range of student leaders and student groups around the world. Already,

portable computers weighing seven pounds and costing about US$600 are available. Price and size will continue to shrink. This allows three striking possibilities in communications:

1) The *electronic letter* provides a capability different from either telephone or letter. It is transmitted computer-to-computer with the immediacy of a phone call, but has the advantages of a well-considered letter. It is a hybrid that could well make feasible extensive, detailed, global communications among those of us willing to be a part of such a network.

2) The *electronic conference* is another fascinating possibility. The 1980 Edinburgh conference brought young people together from many parts of the world--an exciting, expensive undertaking. Would it not be marvelous to be able to continue world-level discussion of many crucial issues during the years between such gatherings? The electronic conference allows this. By designating one large computer as a "meeting place", *anyone* with a contribution to the discussion can dial that computer and send their document in for all to read at their leisure. Every so often, a condensed bulletin on paper would be circulated as a summary of contemporary discussion.

3) The *electronic bulletin board* allows a more informal setting. While the electronic conference proposes global-level issues for group discussion, the bulletin board would allow a single student or group to ask of the whole network: "Does anyone have information on solar stoves for Morocco?" and so on. This last function, allowing more informal linking between students and field personnel, for example, provides healthy "cross-talk."

Mission Resources: I am convinced we could cooperatively come up with an impressive list of mission mobilization resources. One office has indexed 600 of the best books on Muslim evangelism. Others have evaluated many outstanding short-term programs. Still others have extensive journal holdings. A subject-indexed list of books, tapes, journals, films, programs, classes, even undeveloped ideas, allowing students to ask through their own computers for "resources on language learning", for example, would be another worthy and helpful cooperative venture which would allow students access to up-to-date information for prayer, study, planning, or field preparation.

Tracking: How many students are intrigued by an Urbana event, an introductory missions class, or a short-term experience, and then slip through the cracks in the four years of college and afterward? Here's a proposal that might take a great deal of trust and cooperation, yet could be of immense value: Taken all together, the many student mobilization offices have much to offer: prayer groups, study classes, short-term experiences, monthly encouragement, magazines, books, prayer guides, conferences, traveling speakers, and so on. The programs and materials together make a lovely string of pearls able to maintain and increase the depth of understanding and commitment of a student from initial world Christian decision to entry on the field. Yet separately, we are not often able to provide on-going growth and encouragement to "our" students under "our" ministry. Wouldn't it be remarkable if the various lists of students involved in missions through many avenues--magazine subscriptions, mission action groups, short-term programs, and so on, were pooled into one computer which could then keep all these students fed with the whole *range* of opportunities potentially available to them?

For example, the 20,000 U.S. high school students who annually graduate after discipleship under Young Life and Youth for Christ could be helped to make the transition to one of the groups in their new colleges and simultaneously be encouraged to get involved in a mission experience.

(Many such students currently "disappear" from active Christian discipleship.) They could be given the name of a prayer group leader there, encouraged to attend Urbana or SCOWE or IIS or STIM, told about subscriptions to *World Christian* or the *Global Prayer Digest*, informed of the Caleb Project, and so on. The "disadvantage", of course, is that InterVarsity students would learn of Navigator mission activities, IIS course participants would discover the Agape training program, magazine subscribers would hear of other magazines, and international student involvement might compete with (and enrich?) a prayer meeting. But would that be so bad?

We student mobilizers often hold on to "our" students even more closely than researchers hold on to their data. We are often burdened by the tragic misperception that to share is to lose blood, to die. Yet the researchers have begun to cooperate under the gentle bonds of a network, as proposed by the Global Mapping Project, in order to achieve new strength and capability. In light of the massive task of mobilization for frontiers, dare we cooperate less?