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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNO Launches WhoData.org

(February 1, 2011, New Orleans, La.)- The University of New Orleans Department of Planning and Urban Studies (UNO-PLUS) has launched WhoData.org, a powerful community data internet mapping service that will give citizen groups an unprecedented platform to contribute and track information on the progress of New Orleans' neighborhoods.

Since Hurricane Katrina, many neighborhood groups have independently collected property condition information. WhoData.org empowers these groups by providing them with a collaborative property mapping application that will allow residents to assess their own neighborhoods, highlight properties that show indicators of blight, create their own maps and property lists, and share this information with the public.

"WhoData.org is a public participation geographic information systems (PPGIS) program that will encourage our students to work closely with community-based organizations and municipal leaders to integrate neighborhood and regional data for mutual understanding and access," said Michelle Thompson, UNO assistant professor of planning and urban studies.

UNO-PLUS is collaborating with Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans (NHS) and the Regional Planning Commission to increase public access to current and relevant community data. NHS and UNO-PLUS train participating community-based organizations on how to collect property condition survey data that will be displayed on the mapping website. Louisiana Land Trust Option 1 and City of New Orleans blight data are also incorporated into the website.

"WhoData.org is a great tool for any neighborhood organization or community development corporation that wants to track property conditions and measure reinvestment in their New Orleans neighborhood," said David Lessinger, project manager for Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans.

WhoData.org is a unique resource that positions UNO-PLUS and its partners in the fight against blight, and supports the City of New Orleans' Citizen Participation Program.

"The WhoData.org web interface displays and shares collected neighborhood survey information developed by agencies and organizations who wish to collaborate," said Lynn Dupont, principal planner and GIS coordinator for the Regional Planning Commission. "The data display alone should help eliminate some of the redundant data-gathering efforts that have happened in the past, while it promotes a simple categorization methodology that can be used throughout the city as we track our rebuilding efforts and analyze change."

Shoreh Elhami, co-founder of GISCorps, which is a volunteer organization of GIS professionals, and programmer Rafael Ferraro were also instrumental in the creation of WhoData.org.

Phase I of the website's launch will allow UNO-PLUS to obtain public comments while continuing with Phase II programming, which includes customized data upload tools and on-line help screens.

WhoData.org is open to any organization that wishes to participate. To view the site's many features, visit www.WhoData.org or for more background on the project go to http://www.giscorps.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=91&Itemid=63.

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The University of New Orleans (UNO) is a major research university in one of the world's most fascinating cities. For more than 50 years, it has been one of the city's foremost public resources, offering a diverse set of world-class, research-based programs, advancing shared knowledge and adding to the city's industry, culture and economy. Since 1958, UNO has educated students from all 64 Louisiana parishes, all 50 states in the United States and more than 100 countries. Today UNO offers more than 60 undergraduate and pre-professional programs and more than 40 graduate programs.