

# **UC Santa Barbara**

## **The UCSB Guide to the Geographic Approach**

### **Title**

The UCSB Guide to the Geographic Approach Instructor Template for GIS Ethical Case Studies

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8sg000pt>

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# Ethical Case Study Title

Created Month Year, Updated Month Year



Suggested Citation: Insert citation along with DOI.

## Template Instructions

1. Update the header **Module Title** and Month Year information
2. Use the Aptos font at size 11 for main body text
3. Delete all italicized and greyed guidelines when the script is complete.
4. Replace italicized and blue-highlighted text with appropriate text
5. Refrain from referencing relative time to extend the longevity of the materials (e.g., do not say 'last year, the IPCC released their report on climate change.' Instead say, 'In the IPCC report on climate change released in 2024...')

## Case Study Instructions (delete when complete)

- Write the case study as 1-2 pages of continuous text.
- Use clear paragraph organization for easy discussion segmentation
- The headings below are provided in the Case Study Structure are provided to help develop the text. Do not include these headings in the final document. Students are meant to discern these elements in their analysis of the case, so labeling reduces the critical thinking required.
- Include relevant figures, maps, or images when they enhance understanding. If a figure is used, include the link to the source in the draft so the licensing can be confirmed.
- Use professional but accessible language appropriate for working adults
- Write using a third person narrative perspective that maintains objectivity
- Provide a balanced presentation of multiple legitimate viewpoints
- Authentic workplace details without excessive technical jargon

### Case Study Structure

#### Opening Context (1-2 paragraphs)

- Introduce a **certified GIS Professional (GISP)** as protagonist when possible
- Establish realistic professional setting (government agency, consulting firm, etc.)
- Avoid "heroic" scenarios; focus on everyday professional dilemmas
- Present the background situation or project

#### The Ethical Dilemma (2-4 paragraphs)

- Describe a genuine ethical conflict with **no obvious "right" answer**
- Present multiple stakeholders with legitimate but competing interests
- Include relevant professional constraints (GISCI Rules of Conduct, legal requirements, employer policies). See **Content Development Guidelines** below
- Show real consequences for different courses of action

- Incorporate **real GIS technologies**, data types, and standard workflows
- Reference actual laws, regulations, or professional standards when applicable

#### The Decision Point (1 paragraph)

- End with direct questions: **"What should [professional] do?"**
- Often include: "As a certified GIS Professional (GISP), what are your ethical obligations?"
- May reference specific GISCI Rules of Conduct sections

#### Examples of Ethical Dilemmas

- **Professional obligations vs. employer demands** (data suppression, protocol violations)
- **Competing obligations to society** (public safety vs. privacy, transparency vs. security)
- **Resource constraints vs. professional standards** (budget, time, or data quality limitations)
- **Legal compliance vs. ethical principles** (following law while preventing potential harm)
- **Professional integrity vs. career consequences** (whistleblowing scenarios)
- **Client confidentiality vs. public interest** (proprietary data with public implications)

#### Connection to Pedagogical Framework

Design cases for use with the structured ethical analysis method of Davis' (1999) seven-step guide to Ethical Decision Making. This method is summarized in the **Student Guide to Ethical Case Studies**. Within step 3 of the Davis guide, the student will be asked to use the GISCI Code of ethics to identify factors relevant to the ethical decision. Within step 4 of the guide, the student will be asked to consider the Ethos Lifecycle as they develop possible responses to the ethical problem.

- [GISCI Code of Ethics](#) as primary reference point for professional obligations
- [Ethos Lifecycle](#) as an additional resource for considerations about practice

#### References (when applicable)

- Include references in the Nature citation style
- Cite real laws, regulations, professional codes, and organizations
- Include actual case precedents or news sources
- Provide functioning web links to relevant resources. Whenever possible ensure those links are stable, accessible, and ideally open-access resources.

#### Resources for educators

Instructor materials such as discussion prompts and relevant GISCI Rules of Conduct related to this case study are available on request. Use the request form available at **WEBSITE URL** to request these materials. Additional questions about this case can be directed to [spatial-geographicapproach@ucsb.edu](mailto:spatial-geographicapproach@ucsb.edu).

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