# Using The Boston Research Map and Other Data Tools

Updated: February 19, 2015

Here are some basic instructions for using the Boston Research Map. The end of these instructions also includes brief descriptions of three other mapping tools that you might also find useful.

## The Boston Research Map

We recommend that you use the Boston Research Map to help you understand and document your visits to various parts of Boston. The map contains basic census data as well as a variety of other data and measures developed and curated by the Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) and others. You can use these data to explore various parts of the city and to create, save, and share customized maps of Boston (mainly the city but, in some cases, the region as well). Such maps should be part of what you hand in for Assignments 2-4 and for your final project.

## Viewing Basic Data

We have created a basic base map that you can use. It’s online at <http://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/new?copy=4104>

Once you open the map, you should create an account using the “**Sign-In**” **button** at top right of the map. You’ll need this to save your maps.

Now look at menu on the left of the Boston Base Map. You’ll see that it shows some basic, pre-loaded data layers to that you can use. In particular there are:

1. **Base Map Layers:** Using categories such as “Base Maps,” “Political Boundaries and Areas,” and “Place Locations,” you can create a base map that includes the location of such items as subway lines and start to explore areas by looking at things like the location of community centers, grocery stories, or faith-based institutions. You can click on various items and they’ll show up on the map. What’s nice is it’s easy to turn various layers on and off.
2. **Demographic Layers:** You can learn more about the demographics an area from sources such as the American Community Survey and the decennial census. Click on one of the general categories under this heading. If you place the cursor on one of those indicators and (a) you right click (in Windows) or (b) control-click or two-finger click (on a Mac) you’ll get a menu; go to “layer properties” and you’ll be able to
   1. Get information about what the layer is showing from the abstract, which also will note if other measures in the general category are available in the “Styles” tab.
   2. By clicking on the “Styles” tab you can select which measure you would like to view (e.g. if you look at styles for the “racial and ethnic characteristics, ACS item, you’ll see that you can look at maps showing share of people in census tracts who are Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, or foreign-born)
   3. In addition, the “Display” tab allows you to change the opacity of the display. This sometimes makes it possible to show two layers at once
3. **Layers with Other Measures:** If you click on the Other Social, Economic, and Environmental heading, you can look at a variety of measures and metrics developed by researchers associated with BARI, such as measures of private neglect, physical disorder, indicators of collective efficacy as well as the location of bicycle crashes in Boston, measures of one form of air pollution and other unique metrics. As with the demographic measures, you should use the layers tab to explore the various metrics available under each measure.
4. **Information about a Particular Place or Area:** If you right click (or Control-click) on any location in the map, a pop-up box will appear showing information about all of the layers currently showing on that map. For example, if you had the “the basic demographics” layer turned on and you clicked on a spot in the map, and then clicked on “basic demographics” in the box that appears you would see all the information about basic demographics for the census tract that includes the place you clicked on. You’d also see that census tract outlined on the map. To turn off that outline click “reset in the box.” The box will also show information identifying any specific entity (e.g. a community center) in that area as well.
5. **Other useful tools**
   1. The **“Gazetteer” tab** at the top of the page, allows you to search by address if you quickly want to focus on a particular place.
   2. The **“Google Earth”** and **“Street View”** **tabs** allow you to get different perspectives on the same area.
   3. The **“More” tab** on the top right of the map allows you to search for videos from You Tube, photos in Flickr and Picasa, and historic maps from Harvard and add them to your map as well. These will show up on the map and on the left hand menu as GeoRSS Feeds as well.

## Saving, Personalizing, Using and Sharing a Copy of Your Map

1. **Saving your work:** 
   1. If you have not yet done so, create an account using the “**Sign-In**” **button** at top right of the map.
   2. The **“Save” tab** allows you to save a personalized version of the base map (or someone else’s template) for future use. This tab requires that you (a) give your map a name and (b) put a unique tag at the end of a URL. Note if you are using a map you previously created to create a new map, you’ll need both a new name and a new URL.
2. **Annotating your map:** click on the “Note” button on the top of the page. You can add a shape, line, or point (double click to place the point, each end of the line, or the corners of your shape). You can then add a note explaining what you are showing. Turn off the add note function and then click on the item and you’ll see your note. You can also use this feature to delete an item.
3. The **“Print” tab** is self-explanatory. You can always print the map as a pdf and then insert it in a word document.
4. The **“Link” tab** allows you to send a link to other people so they can view your map.
5. The **“Share Map”** **tab** on the top right of the page allows you decide who can view and who can edit your map.
6. The **“View Map” tab** on the top right of the page allows you to search for and open not only your saved maps but also maps made by others. (If you want to modify a map made by someone else for your purposes, then follow the “Copy” tab directions above.)
7. **Getting more data and uploading your own data**
   1. While the Boston Base Map probably has all the metrics you may want, the **“Add Layers” tab** at the top left is a powerful tool that allows you to search for additional layers by keywords etc. When you find a layer you might like to add, you can
      1. Click the expand (“+”) button to learn more about the data layer (note that layers not open to other users will be listed by not have a hyperlink). Be forewarned that many seemingly promising layers may not be
      2. Check the box to the right of the item and then click the “add layer” button. You will return to the main map and the new layer(s) will appear on the list to the left.
      3. Note that if you add a layer and then decide you don’t want it in your map, you can right click (or in a Mac control-click) that item and delete it. We suspect you’ll find that many promising data layers will turn out not to have the information you want in a form you can use
   2. Note as well that while it is possible to upload new data to the map, we don’t expect you to use that feature in this class. (Information on how to add your own layers can be found in the “Help” tab.)

## Some Other Useful Tools

While the Boston Research Map should give you more than enough information, there are several other tools that you might also find useful. These include:

1. The Boston Redevelopment Authority’s **MyNeighborhood Census Viewer**: <http://hubmaps.cityofboston.gov/MyNeighborhood/> provides very basic demographic information from the 2010 census by both city planning district and by user defined areas.
   1. The red circle on the top of the MyNeighborhood Census Viewer menu links to the Boston Research Map in the exact same area detailed in MyNeighborhood Census Viewer (which gives you an opportunity to explore those areas in greater detail).
2. **Social Explorer** gives you access to current and historical extensive census data in table or map form. Online at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:socialex>. Very useful tool for examining demographic changes over time. (Note you need a Harvard ID to use the version that gives you access to historic data).
3. **Simply Map** is a relatively new tool that has some measures not available in either the Boston Research Map or Social Explorer: notably data from a variety of other government sources on a variety of topics. A Harvard ID is also required to use this tool. Online at <http://sm2.simplymap.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/login.html>
4. **Zillow** and Padmapper are very useful ways to gauge real estate values in different neighborhoods. The former gives estimates of sale prices for houses and condos; the latter aggregates a variety of rental listings. See <http://www.zillow.com/homes/Boston-MA_rb/> and [https://www.padmapper.com/search/apartments/Massachusetts/boston/#](https://www.padmapper.com/search/apartments/Massachusetts/boston/)