

**Ninth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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**Toponymic education and practice and international cooperation:
Training courses in toponymy**

**Pan American Institute of Geography & History
(PAIGH) Report**

Submitted by the Pan American Institute
of Geography & History**

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Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH)
REPORT

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Toponymic activity within PAIGH since the Eighth Conference includes the successful presentation of five sessions of the Institute's course on applied toponymy or geographical names.

Applied toponymy is the use of geographical names as a direct or supplementary means of analysis and problem solving relating to events requiring analysis and solution. Also, "geographic names" is recognized internationally as a required or essential data layer of framework within a country's National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI), which also is in support of a Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI). The course in applied toponymy provides an introduction that should establish a sound basis for each student to further his or her knowledge of the subject, and that should enable students to make valuable contributions to their national programs of names standardization. The two weeks devoted to this effort can only give an introduction to each of the major requirements for implementing a program. The possibility of offering an advanced course on specific aspects of implementing procedures is being examined. In July 2003, the course was held in Quito, Ecuador; Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in August 2004; Panama City, Panama in August and September 2005; Santiago, Chile in August and September 2006; and in Rio de Janeiro in May 2007. These courses were highly successful with students from various civilian agencies of the National government, from the military, and from academia. Each course is limited normally to about 20 to 25 students although by special request, the course in 2006 enrolled 31 students, and the recently completed course this year enrolled 33 students. The specific activities, issues, and problems within and particular to each host country are examined, and the course's various modules are modified to address local issues and concerns. Modifications and particulars regarding each course are detailed in a report at the end of each course, which is available from the Secretariat of PAIGH, the Chairman of its Cartographic Commission, or the Chairman of its Working Group on Geographical Names.

The first week of the course consists predominantly of lectures on various aspects of applied toponymy, concentrating on the requirements for establishing a program of national standardization. The student is introduced to appropriate terminology, and provided with a short history of the development of applied toponymy. An analysis of the merits of national standardization is given, along with precise guidelines for establishing a national committee and developing principles, policies, and procedures. Additionally, alternative methods of implementing and achieving standardization of geographical names are explored until such time as a national committee can be established; often a more lengthy process. Also, staff requirements and office procedures are thoroughly examined. Finally, in an exercise students portray a names staff that interacts with a national names authority in applying principles and policies of standardization.

A comprehensive field exercise offers students the opportunity to gather, process, and analyze data in accordance with established toponymic field procedures. The students gain experience in solving problems associated with raw data gathering (interviews), such as local variations in naming and cultural toponymic bias. They use special, large-scale topographic maps without names created

especially for the exercise. Upon returning from the field, the students receive extensive instruction in data analysis and preparation, especially regarding automated processing.

The second week is devoted to a workshop in automated data processing in which the students design databases and files, and retrieve and analyze toponymic data in a microprocessing environment. Every aspect of design is addressed to enable efficient data retrieval and analysis. Additionally, the design and production of digital and conventional gazetteers and other special reports are explained in detail. The student attains an understanding of automated processing as a basic tool of applied toponymy. The automation workshop is continually modified and enhanced to include the latest developments, and is continuing to expand the presentation of aspects of incorporating and utilizing a spatial, graphic component in the design of a geographic names database. Also, the value and dangers of using the internet as a source of material for compilation and corroboration are presented, examined, analyzed, and discussed. The course continues to expand upon new concepts of data collection shifting the burden from standard methods of collection to those of local support and database maintenance in support of an integrated, seamless national digital map series.

Chronology of PAIGH Training Courses

1987	June - Panama City, Panama	2001	July – August – Bogotá, Colombia
1988	– no course	2002	June – July – San Salvador, El Salvador
1989	April - Quito, Ecuador	2003	July – Quito, Ecuador
1990	November-December - Santiago, Chile	2004	August – Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
1991	November-December - Aguascalientes, Mexico	2005	August – September – Panama City, Panama
1992	October-November - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	2006	August – September – Santiago, Chile
1993	October - Tegucigalpa, Honduras	2007	May – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1994	- no course		
1995	June - Lima, Peru		
1996	May - Asunción, Paraguay		
1997	May - La Paz, Bolivia		
1998	August - Lima, Peru		
1999	July - Guatemala City, Guatemala		
2000	July – Asunción, Paraguay		