

**Group of Experts on
Geographical Names
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Provisional Agenda Item 8

**PAN AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY (PAIGH)
Course in Applied Toponymy (Geographical Names)**

**by Roger L. Payne
Chairman Working Group on Geographical Names
Cartography Commission**

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Resolution 4 of the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (1967) urged all member nations to institute national names authorities that would establish programs for standardizing geographical names in their countries. The conference further recommended systematic collection methods and the establishment of procedures for the official treatment of geographical names, as well as a program of promulgation. Each successive conference has recognized the importance of training programs to help accomplish the goals of the fourth resolution of the first conference. Most recently, Resolution 13 of the sixth conference (1992) cited the positive effect of the geographic names training courses held under the auspices of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH).

The first course was offered in 1987 in Panama. The success of that endeavor led to the second course in 1989 in Ecuador; where a workshop and a class in automated data processing were added to the curriculum. The continued success of the course led to its being held every year in a different Latin American country.

Successive courses (offering training primarily to students from the host country but also to those from other interested nations) have been held in Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and Honduras. Thus far, more than 100 students from all member PAIGH countries (except Uruguay) have received training in national standardization of geographical names and the basic aspects of applied toponomy.

The course (see appendix A) provides an introduction to applied toponomy 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 2 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. Such a course could lead to establishing a mobile team for specific problem solving in places that have implemented their own program.

The first week of the course is predominantly lecture on various aspects of applied toponomy, 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 toponomy. 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. 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 a special topographic map 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 data bases 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 gazetteers and other special reports are explained in detail. The student attains an understanding of automated processing as a basic tool of applied toponomy.

A strong infrastructure is essential to a strong nation. An effective program of national names standardization is critical to achieving a strong infrastructure. Such a program is also in keeping with various resolutions of the United Nations that advocate international standardization through comprehensive programs of national standardization and that charge each nation to establish such a program.

APPENDIX A

A Syllabus for the PAIGH Geographic Names Course on Applied Toponymy

Duration - Two Weeks

Instructional materials are provided and include manuals and articles as well as a special topographic map for the field exercise.

I. Introduction

- A. Terminology
- B. History of Applied Toponymy
- C. Survey of National Programs Throughout the World
- D. Local guest lectures (also throughout the course as appropriate)

II. National Standardization

- A. A National Board or Body
 - 1. Authority
 - 2. Membership
 - 3. Staff
- B. Basis for Establishing Principles of Standardization
 - 1. International Agreements
 - 2. National, Regional and Local Specific Requirements
- C. Policies
 - 1. Rules for Uniform Decisions
 - 2. Standardization Implementation
- D. Procedures, Methodology, and Guidelines
 - 1. Requirements
 - 2. Implementation
 - 3. Training
- E. Exercise (performed at the end of the course)
 - 1. Mock Meeting of a National Board
 - 2. Staff Presentation to the Board
 - 3. Reversal of Roles (Board and Staff)
 - 4. Draft Resolution for Establishing National Names Authority

III. Field Exercise

- A. Techniques of Toponymic Field Work

- B. Preliminary Examination of Area
 - 1. Physiography
 - 2. Urban or Rural
 - 3. Other Cultural Aspects
 - 4. Examination of Special Topographic Map of the Area Without Names
 - 5. Preparation of Interview Questions
- C. Trip to the Field
 - 1. Interviews
 - 2. Field Notes
 - 3. Map Annotation
- D. Office Analysis and Processing

IV. Automated Processing

- A. Introduction
 - 1. Terminology
 - 2. Overview of Hardware
 - 3. Overview of Software
 - 4. Data Base Management Systems
- B. Office Processing
 - 1. Data Verification
 - 2. Loading the Data
- C. Data Retrieval Requirements and Techniques
 - 1. Three Principle Operations
 - 2. Standard or Routine Retrieval
 - 3. Specialized Retrieval
 - 4. Formatting Reports
 - 5. Products
- D. Maintenance Procedures
 - 1. Field Techniques
 - 2. Other Written Sources
 - 3. Office Processing (backups)
 - 4. Updating the Data Base
 - 5. User Tracking
 - 6. Security
- E. Workshop
 - 1. Preprogrammed Environment
 - 2. Data Base Design
 - 3. Retrieval Techniques
 - 4. Formatting Reports
 - 5. Questions and Problems

V. Summary

- A. Questions
- B. Examination of Draft Resolution
- C. Course Analysis and Evaluation
- D. Closing Ceremonies