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REPORTS OF THE LIAISON OFFICERS, REGIONAL MEETINGS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH) Report

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Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH) REPORT

Roger L. Payne (USA)

Toponymic activity within PAIGH since the last session of the Group of Experts included publication of a geographic dictionary of Central America, and the successful presentation of two sessions of the Institute's course on applied toponomy or geographical names.

The Diccionario Geográfico De América Central was published in 1999, and was a joint effort of the Pan American Institute of Geography & History, the National Geographic Institute of Honduras, and the National Geographic Institute of Spain. The volume provides the names of physical features and some administrative entities. Included in each entry is the name, extent of feature, geographical coordinates (degrees and minutes), and in many entries, there are descriptive phrases regarding the feature's relation to other features. Also, in some entries for civil areas, a range of geographical information is provided. The dictionary is not comprehensive, but is designed to be a general reference.

Applied toponomy is the use of geographical names as a direct or supplementary means of analysis and problem solving relating to events requiring analysis and solution. The course in applied toponomy 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 August 1998, the course was held in Lima, Peru, and in Guatemala City, Guatemala in July 1999. These courses were highly successful with students from various civilian agencies of the National government, and from the military. Each course is limited normally to about 20 students although by special request, the course in 1999 enrolled 35 students.

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 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 gazetteers and other special reports are explained in detail. The student attains an understanding of automated processing as a basic tool of applied toponomy. For the first time, the course held in July 1999 offered training in the use of a relational database management system operating in a microprocessing environment.

Chronology of PAIGH Training Courses

1987 June	Panama City, Panama
1988	no course
1989 April	Quito, Ecuador
1990 November-December	Santiago, Chile
1991 November-December	Aguascalientes, Mexico
1992 October-November	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1993 October	Tegucigalpa, Honduras
1994	no course
1995 June	Lima, Peru
1996 May	Asuncíon, Paraguay
1997 May	La Paz, Bolivia
1998 August	Lima, Peru
1999 July	Guatemala City, Guatemala