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REPORTS OF LIAISON OFFICERS, REGIONAL MEETINGS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Report of the Pan American Institute of Geography & History*

*** Prepared by Roger L. Payne , Unites States**

Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH)
REPORT

Roger L. Payne (USA)

Toponymic activity within PAIGH since the 21st United Nations Group of Experts on geographical names (UNGEGN) included the successful presentation of one session of the Institute's course on applied toponymy or geographical names. For the first time, the course has the distinct honor of being afforded the name the **José Joaquín Hungría Morell Geographic Names Course**. This is an honor to the success of the course, but also a direct recognition and honor to a man who gave tirelessly for more than 50 years to the Institute. His contributions were many and substantial, well-known**,** and far-reaching. We are truly honored to have his name associated with the course.

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) as well as a country's digital mapping efforts, and digital cartography in general. 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 June and July 2003, the course was held in Quito, Ecuador. The course was highly successful with students from the national mapping agency, and from the military. Each course is limited normally to about 20 students although by special request, this course enrolled 31 students.

The first week of the course is predominantly 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. 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 gazetteers and other special reports are explained in detail. The student attains an understanding of automated processing as a basic tool of applied toponymy. Although instruction was introduced for processing in an Internet, web-based environment in 2000, that aspect has now been expanded and made more formalized. The students are now introduced to the concept and techniques of data mining, and the importance and proliferation of geographic names as a key word in such processes as well as techniques of identifying secondary source material for data compilation and verification. Also, the automation workshop has been enhanced to include aspects of incorporating and utilizing a spatial, graphic component in the design of a geographic names database, and future courses will further enhance and fully integrate this activity. The latest course also introduced, and future courses will 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

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 - Asunción, Paraguay

1997 May - La Paz, Bolivia

1998 August - Lima, Peru

1999 July - Guatemala City, Guatemala

2000 July – Asunción, Paraguay

2001 July – August – Bogotá, Colombia

2002 June – July – San Salvador, El Salvador

2003 June – July – Quito, Ecuador