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Vienna, 2-6 May 2011**

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Reports of the liaison officers and international organizations

Report of the Pan American Institute of Geography & History*

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Report of the Pan American Institute of Geography & History
Cartographic Commission
Working Group on Geographical Names

26th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names (UNGEGN)

2-6 May 2011

Roger L. Payne, Chairman

The primary focus of the geographical names activities of the Pan American Institute on Geography & History since the last UNGEGN Conference has been directed toward preparations to present the courses in applied toponymy (geographical names) annually. Therefore much time has been spent in research and action to assure the course is current with regard to the most up-to-date methods of geographical names standardization and processing. A major effort during the course each year is devoted to assuring that the automation module is absolutely current regarding new technical developments for application and development, and to make sure the students are at least introduced to the latest in relational database design and development (often with individual instruction because of the varying levels of expertise in database design and skills in automated data processing), but every student receives the required instruction.

The twenty-second José Joaquín Hungría Morell Geographical Names Course in applied toponymy offered under the auspices of the Pan American Institute of Geography & History was scheduled in Belmopan, Belize for the second quarter and later the third quarter of PAIGH's fiscal year 2010 (corresponds to the calendar year), but scheduling difficulties from both the host country and the teaching team regrettably forced the cancellation of the course in 2010. The course is now scheduled for August 2011 in Belmopan, Belize. This will be the first presentation of the course in English.

The twenty-first José Joaquín Hungría Morell Geographical Names Course in applied toponymy offered under the auspices of the Pan American Institute of Geography & History was presented 19 - 30 October 2009 at the Instituto Geográfico Nacional in Spain. This was a departure from normal procedure in that the course has always been presented (until now) in a member State of the Pan American Institute (Spain has observer status). The presentation in 2009 was in Spain by special request of the Instituto Geográfico Nacional and approved by the Secretary General of the Pan American Institute, and is evidence of the close cooperation between the Latin American Community and the mapping institute in Spain.

Since the last UNGEGN session, there has been one course presented; the twenty-first course was comprised of 18 students from Spain as well as three students respectively

from Brazil, Panama, and Ecuador. As requested, and as desired, the students represented a mixture from the various agencies of the National government, the autonomous States, and also included students from the academic community. This version of the course was altered somewhat in some modules and significantly in some modules because it was clear that a high level of progress in Spain has been achieved. Specifically, a national committee for names standardization had been established in 2002 and is functioning. Further, at least four of the autonomous States are in various stages of developing or have developed policies regarding the standardization of geographic names in their respective States. The level of expertise and understanding regarding automation in general, and specifically database design and data manipulation was in every case at a high level of development and comprehension.

The Working Group reports that the full complement of the teaching team was not available for this course. The member from Honduras was not able to participate this year because of a political situation. Without question this impacted the presentation of the course. The two instructors who were present are qualified fully to present the course, but the analytical abilities, insightful means of problem-solving, smooth and professional delivery of lectures, highly developed skills of field investigation, and a host of additional professional attributes and skills of Sr. Rivera were sorely missed by the team.

The module where development of principles, policies, and procedures of standardization is introduced was altered to analyze, discuss, and refine the policies already developed at the national level in Spain. There were more than 25 presentations and papers delivered by experts from national and State governments as well as representatives from the academic community engaged in formal agreements for database design and development with both the national government and the various State governments. The course offered a convenient means for all to review and contrast the work of these individuals and groups as it applies to the overall goal of national standardization and development and population of a national geographic names database (in its infancy of populating in October 2009), and provide a convenient forum for meaningful analysis and suggestions from other points of view.

The course and its presence served to facilitate further the coordination of these efforts, and provided a forum and platform for meaningful dialog where the instructors served as advisors and facilitators. The Instituto Geográfico Nacional leads a consortium of national and State agencies in implementing the national geographic names standardization program and a national geographic names database with all relevant national and State organizations represented on the national committee whose role presently (October 2009) is one of non-binding arbitration although this could change as policies and procedures become more developed and tested. Much time in the course was devoted to analyses regarding existing policies as to how they function, and whether the present policies are effective, and whether additional policies are required for situations not yet addressed. The same was accomplished for the autonomous States, and the facilitated discussions and exchanges were highly beneficial to all.

Also, the automation workshop was accelerated to be commensurate with the overall more advanced level of the students regarding database design and associated functions. Some functionality not normally presented was discussed. In fact, little traditional training was required as the students were already at a satisfactory level so that the exercises could be launched almost immediately allowing additional time for more thorough analysis of the nature of the questions in the exercises as well as a discussion regarding the reasons behind many of the more advanced questions.

Aspects of the internet as it applies to geographic names research were explored thoroughly and much time was devoted to the web-based maintenance program for geographic names in the United States (at the U.S. Geological Survey for the official national names database in the United States). As indicated, the mechanism and policies are in place nationally and throughout regional Spain, but maintenance has not been implemented (October 2009) or even developed in many cases. In fact, the students (representing their respective organizations) are just beginning this all important process, and the process of development and implementation in the United States was examined and dissected thoroughly providing insight as well as a sound basis for discussion and exchange. This was accomplished in detail, and the timing was just so.

As ever, while the course has evolved into a well-structured set of seven inter-related modules, it continues to be an excellent forum for sharing common problems and defining solutions. Importantly, differences and commonalities between and among various agencies were discussed and solutions offered. The team of two instructors (in this case two, see above reference) from the USA & Mexico (originally) – the instructor from Honduras was absent - are well versed in team teaching, and the course is easily altered to address specific advanced needs and requirements. Only the linguistic module remained introductory; all others were elevated beyond the introductory level. Even though some material was altered to be considerably more than introductory, it remains clear there is need for more time specifically in one or more particular modules.

The changing role of the names layer in a national spatial data environment, and the increasing requirements for digital mapping, both general and thematic were examined, discussed, and even debated. While the students were at an advanced level in every way, techniques of collecting data, extant and otherwise, were examined thoroughly where various techniques, some known and some not known, were examined with special emphasis on source type and value.

A secondary function of the Working Group has been to encourage and support by whatever means the work of the Latin American Division here at the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). Assistance includes, when sought, collaborating, counseling, and training for other countries in developing principles, policies, and procedures for internal use in standardizing geographical names. Since countries have specific and special problems, (even within a specific geographical area or linguistically related group), general advice is often tailored to individual needs.

Throughout each year, the members of the working group collaborate on all issues of importance regarding geographical names throughout the member States of PAIGH, and offer consultation to others if approached. One goal of the Working Group is to assist in establishing an integrated data system for geographical names for the Latin American community. The course has concentrated in cultivating an environment for implementation (eventually) of this integrated geographical names system, which will be a seamless application available to all, and serve as an automated names system of official names, and which the primary purpose is to solve problems before they can inhibit other major projects or to cause loss of the allocation of valuable resources.

So, in summary, almost all of the available time of the Working Group is devoted to keeping the annual geographical names course current and meaningful, technically and otherwise, and which includes all aspects of the goal of a seamless, integrated geographical names network for the Latin American community specifically in support of national and regional spatial data infrastructures (and any other applications from the user community that are needed and warranted). Remaining time is allocated to support for the Latin American Division of UNGEGN and its work.

**Roger L. Payne – head instructor (USA –member since 1989, Chairman since 1993)
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Other Members:

**George Troop – instructor (Vice Chairman, USA, né Mexico – member since 1997,
Vice Chairman since 2007)**
Ramón Rivera – instructor (resource development, Honduras – member since 1993)
Iris Bolivar (Venezuela – member since 2002)
Ana Bustamonte (Brazil – member since 2007)
Christina Morandi (Argentina - member since 1995)

Pan American Institute of Geography & History Chronology of Geographic Names Courses (Applied Toponymy)

Panama City, Panama
April 1987

1988 - no course

Quito, Ecuador
April 1989

Santiago, Chile
November – December 1990

Aguascalientes, Mexico
November – December 1991

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
October – November 1992

Tegucigalpa, Honduras
October – November 1993

1994 - no course

Lima, Peru
June 1995

Asunción, Paraguay
May 1996

La Paz, Bolivia
May 1997

Lima, Peru
August 1998

Guatemala City, Guatemala
July 1999

Asunción, Paraguay
June – July 2000

San Salvador, El Salvador
August 2002

José Joaquín Hungría Morrell Course
(used for the first time)
Quito, Ecuador
June – July 2003

Santo Domingo, Dominican Rep
August 2004

Panama City, Panama
August – September 2005

Santiago, Chile
August – September 2006

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
May 2007

Quito, Ecuador
March – April 2008

Madrid, Spain
October 2009

Belmopan, Belize
Scheduled 2010 (not held)
now scheduled for August 2011

Bogotá, Colombia
July – August 2001