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**UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS  
ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**

**WORKING PAPER  
NO. 12**

**Thirtieth session  
New York, 7 and 18 August 2017**

**English**

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**Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda\***

**Reports of the liaison officers**

**Report of the Liaison officer with the Pan American Institute of  
Geography and History (PAIGH)**

Submitted by the Liaison Officer, PAIGH \*\*

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\*\* Prepared by: Roger L. Payne, Chairman, Working Group on Geographical Names, PAIGH

## **Overview (course presentation)**

The traditional onsite course was not presented in 2015 or 2016 and there is no course scheduled for presentation in 2017. The importance of applied toponymy is evident worldwide, and has been noted to be essential in local, regional, and national planning as well as emergency response and preparedness, national security, environmental analysis, and a variety of similar applications. In short, standardization of geographic names is a major factor in support of a nation's spatial data infrastructure. Originally, the *two-week* course was designed to provide an introduction and basis for national standardization of geographic names and a program of applied toponymy. The first week was predominately lecture and addressed various aspects of applied toponymy, and concentrated heavily upon all requirements involved in establishment of a program of national standardization, while exploring conventional and alternate methods of achieving this goal.

Normally, there was a comprehensive field exercise offering students the opportunity of actual data gathering, processing, and analyzing in accordance with established toponymic field procedures. The second week of the course was devoted to a workshop in automated data processing where the student designed databases and files, as well as acquired the ability to retrieve and analyze toponymic data in a microprocessing environment. Finally, there was an exercise where a names staff interacted with a mock national names authority in applying principles and policies of standardization.

The course now has been altered considerably for a variety of reasons, and the new format was presented in 2013 and 2014. Instead of the traditional two-week period the course is now shortened to one week (realizing considerable savings in resources) as a result of the advanced status of the situation of applied toponymy in most member States. Further, the module on methods of establishing a program of national standardization is usually altered considerably because such a program is established in varying forms in most member States and usually functioning accordingly. The focus of this module then has been redirected to have the students examine the existing committee's structure, secretariat, and policies; and then to make presentations regarding the nature of the administrative organization and a complete analysis of the existing policies based upon lecture and exchange of ideas and analyses. The field exercise has also been eliminated in this course (unless requested directly) because most member States have an active, well-developed, and well-established program of field collection and verification although there is a designed and meaningful exchange between the students and instructors regarding methodology and experience in field work.

Additionally, the course now focuses on requirements as well as design and development of a national automated system for the national geographic names program since most member States are in various phases of development of such an automated system.

As ever, and since the course has evolved into a well-structured set of seven interrelated modules and with specific adjustment indicates that the course continues to be an excellent forum for sharing common problems and defining solutions. The flexibility in the curriculum of the course continues to be a major asset to advancing programs of national name standardization and the overall implementation of applied toponymy in support of national mapping programs and in

support of national spatial data infrastructure. Importantly, differences and commonalities between and among various agencies are normally discussed and solutions for optimization of effort and resources are offered.

As part of the course now, the changing role of the name layer (one of the eight identified essential layers of a national digital map program) in a national spatial data environment, and the increasing requirements for digital mapping, both general and thematic are examined and discussed with a meaningful exchange.

As part of the discussion of either the existing extensive program of data collection or beginning such a program in preparation for populating the newly developed national name database, techniques of collecting data, extant and otherwise, are examined thoroughly where various techniques are examined with special emphasis on source type, value, and reliability (provenance)

### **The future online web course**

The Cartographic Commission's Working Group on Geographical Names at the Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH) has completed its major project of developing more than 100 pages of ancillary explanatory text to accompany the almost 350 PowerPoint slides for the online version of the course. The timetable for implementation of the online course has been redefined several times because of changing priorities and redirection by the developing organization, the Instituto Geográfico Nacional (Spain). Certain milestones have been achieved, but the projected completion date has been rescheduled and is not yet able to be announced.

So, the PAIGH Working Group on Geographical Names expects to have various forms of the training course made available. Specifically, an online version in the near future, and shortened onsite versions concentrating on specific country needs and requirements. The full version of the course can still be made available onsite if necessary and requested. The conventional version of the course will become periodic (shortened to one week), have a changed focus, and with special application once the full online version is available. The conventional version is available as the introductory two-week version (as in 2012) or the advanced version of one-week duration (as in 2013 & 2014).

### **Integrated geographic names data system for the Latin American Community**

As we continue to report, the Working Group is most interested in pursuing and even directing or assisting in the establishment and development of an integrated geographic names data system for the Latin American Community to serve as the single authoritative source for users requiring standardized names for use in any project or task and also for toponymic support of national and regional spatial data infrastructures.

### **Working Group Membership**

There are five members of the Working Group:

1. Roger L Payne, Chairman USA
2. George Troop, Vice Chairman USA
3. Ramón Rivera, Honduras
4. Iris Bolivar, Venezuela
5. Christina Morandi, Argentina.

The members are in periodic contact and consultation on business matters of the working group and specifically current developments that affect the course. Consultatory services are offered by the working group as needed.

Please direct questions to the Principal Member, Roger L. Payne at [rpayne@usgs.gov](mailto:rpayne@usgs.gov) or Alternate Member, George Troop at [troopg@nga.mil](mailto:troopg@nga.mil)