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**Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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Item 17 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Toponymic education and practice and international
cooperation: training courses in toponymy**

**Report of the Pan American Institute of Geography
and History**

**Submitted by the Pan American Institute of Geography
and History****

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Toponymic activity within PAIGH since the Seventh Conference included publication of a geographic dictionary of Central America, and the successful presentation of five sessions of the Institute's course on applied toponymy 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 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). 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 August 1998, the course was held in Lima, Peru; Guatemala City, Guatemala in July 1999; Asunción, Paraguay in July 2000; Bogotá, Colombia in July and August, 2001; and in San Salvador, El Salvador in June and July, 2002. 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, and in 2001 there were 33 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 gazetteers and other special reports are explained in detail. The student attains an understanding of automated processing as a basic tool of applied toponymy. 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 switching from a non-relational model. In 2000, instruction was introduced for processing in an Internet, web-based environment. In 2000, 2001, and 2002, the automation workshop was enhanced to include aspects of incorporating and utilizing a spatial, graphic component in the design of a geographic names database, and future courses will 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 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
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