



ABOVE Jorge Meneses, president of the San Diego chapter of the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, talks about the Haiti, Chile, and Mexico earthquakes.



Specialized Workshops Benefit Latin American Journalists

BY LYNNE T. FRIEDMANN

In May, disaster struck twice in Guatemala. A day after the government declared a “state of calamity” following a spectacular eruption of the Pacaya volcano, deadly tropical storm Agatha bore down on the Central American nation. Journalist Tulio Diaz was uniquely qualified to bring the news to his countrymen. Just weeks prior, he had attended a five-day workshop in La Jolla, Calif., specifically designed for Latin American journalists, on covering natural disasters.

During the workshop, journalists from eight countries in Latin America heard from geologists, scientists, physicians, and other earthquake experts about responding to a crisis, with special emphasis on new technologies that provide real-time reporting for international audiences.

The training was offered by the Institute of the Americas (IOA), a 25-year-old non-profit organization located on the campus of the University of California, San Diego. Under the leadership of Jeffrey Davidow, a former U.S. Ambassador to Mexico and Venezuela, IOA has a reach in 35 countries throughout the hemisphere and is in the vanguard of U.S.–Canada–Latin America cooperation in energy, climate change, and clean-technology development.

In recent years, the number of IOA professional journalism workshop offerings has increased significantly under the direction of veteran newspaper journalist S. Lynne Walker, who joined the institute in 2008 after serving 15 years as the Copley News Service bureau chief in Mexico City.

“Latin American journalists use the word ‘hunger’ for professional training,” she said. “Like every journalist in the world, they want to tell their stories better and more effectively. Coming to the institute was an opportunity to expand beyond



Journalists attending a workshop on natural disasters interview experts, such as Jorge Restrepo, a UC San Diego engineering professor with the Jacobs School of Engineering.

what I was doing on Mexico, Central America, and Cuba.”

One of Walker’s goals is to capitalize on IOA’s strategic location, just 30 miles from the U.S.–Mexico border. With that in mind, the first workshop she organized was The Migration of HIV/AIDS, which included cross-border visits to medical clinics in Tijuana, Baja Mexico.

A successful outcome of that effort was participant Erika Cebreros, associate editor of the San Francisco weekly newspaper *El Mensajero*, receiving a Northern California Ethnic Media Award for a series of stories based on interviews she conducted during the workshop.

Among other programs Walker has developed are: Freedom of Expression and the Rights of Journalists in Latin America, Covering Natural Disasters, Pandemic Preparedness, Climate Change, Cross-

LYNNE T. FRIEDMANN IS THE EDITOR OF SCIENCEWRITERS.

LEFT Eric Frost, director of the Visualization Laboratory at San Diego State University, explains new technologies that help scientists predict and understand climate changes.

RIGHT Journalist Ines Nogueiras interviews a staff member at Los Angeles Pierce College as part of a digital-reporting workshop.

BELOW Institute of the Americas vice president S. Lynne Walker (left) talks with Latin American journalists receiving digital reporting training.



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Border Investigative Journalism, and Digital Reporting. The workshops are conducted in Spanish, filling a niche in the region.

The Digital Reporting workshop included classroom instruction and field visits designed to provide journalists from 10 countries in the Western Hemisphere with new tools for reporting and producing video, audio, and photographic reports for their online publications.

After completing the training, a journalist from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico redesigned his news organization's website; two Colombian journalists returned to Bogota intent on organizing an association of young journalists who are making the transition from print to digital reporting; and a Venezuelan journalist held his own digital-reporting workshop in Caracas to share what he had learned with his newspaper colleagues.

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"We also have journalism professors join us at these workshops," said Walker. "This gives us a multiplier effect. They take what they learn back to their students."

According to workshop attendee Sergio Rene de Dios Corona, a journalism professor at the University of Guadalajara: "The

institute has all the necessary elements to promote good journalism in our countries, for the betterment of justice, democracy, human rights, and something even more fundamental—the right of people to be informed and to know what is happening in their respective countries."

Sponsorship for journalists to attend IOA workshop comes primarily from home-country embassies, some newspapers support, and private corporations. It often falls short of satisfying the training need. And, while workshops on the IOA campus have much to offer journalists, Walker concedes it is expensive to get to La Jolla.

"This, by its very nature, limits the number who can come," she said. "The next step is to go out into the region."

Taking that next step, Walker recently conducted a journalism workshop in Bolivia.

This year marks the 7th Jack F. Ealy Workshop on Science Journalism. To date, upwards of 150 Latin American journalists have participated in this IOA program instructed by leading scientists from UC San Diego, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and The Salk Institute,



Journalists learn to build slideshows in a computer lab at Los Angeles Pierce College.

among others. In addition to access to cutting-edge research, participants build a network of contacts in the region, and receive a solid grounding on a variety of green issues. A strong emphasis this year is climate change and its effects in Latin America; making global issues understandable and relevant at a local level; and a special panel discussion on the Gulf oil spill.

[NASW members who have participated in Ealy workshops as speakers and trainers include Kim McDonald, Jim Cornell, Jon Cohen, and yours truly, with simultaneous translations for those of us who are not proficient Spanish speakers.]

Nicolás Luco, former science and technology editor for the Santiago, Chile newspaper *El Mercurio* has sent two reporters to prior Ealy workshops.

"As an editor, I must say they returned reverberating enthusiasm, thrilled at having been exposed to top science labs and scientists and delighted with the colleagues they met," he said. "The journalists gained in experience, contacts and, mostly, in outlook. Thenceforth, they took more risks in reaching out internationally; a great plus in their publishing." ■