Latin American news

BY JOSEPH C. HOLUB

It was once very difficult to get news from Latin America that was both current and extensive. English-language reporting was sporadic, and the wait for vernacular newspapers was long. The CIA’s Foreign Broadcast Information Service provided information more quickly, but very selectively. Today’s students and researchers serious about keeping up on developments in, for example, Mexico—whether the popular revolt in Chiapas, the unfortunate economic news, or the machinations of the ruling party—can get to more information from more sources more quickly and more conveniently than was true even one year ago. At that time the principal sources were the English language files on LEXIS/NEXIS and the abstracted articles from Latin American newspapers and magazines of INFO-South database available through DIALOG.

LEXIS/NEXIS and INFO-South are still very much available and both offer consistent formats, widely disseminated (if not always well-understood) search protocols, and a reliable flow of news—in the case of LEXIS/NEXIS, within days of the story. What one can now find on the Internet and World-Wide Web, however, is a massive jumble of information that is fast becoming a flood. The news does not necessarily appear in a regular format and it is often incomplete. Yet, its currency and immediacy provide a clear case of how national boundaries and distance matter less than ever. One no longer needs to wait for news and the source of information is not always an official news provider.

Getting to the sites

While the Penn Library gopher still reliably accesses Latin American Internet resources, the World-Wide Web via the Library home page (http://www.library.upenn.edu) offers some important sites that are only web-accessible, as well as graphics for those with the requisite software. The Library home page is an option from the Penn Library gateway menu. The path from the home page is: Internet Resources/Area Studies/Latin America. Though one need only get to the gateway to access Latin American sites, the inset on the next page lists a number of important Internet addresses.

The latest Web information

The current web page for Latin America offers six menu options. Two web-only sites that can be accessed directly are La Jornada and Mexico Out of Balance. The former is a new site that provides large parts of Mexico City’s La Jornada newspaper on the day of publication. Graphics include photos from the newspaper. One week of issues is maintained. There is no provision for keyword searching. Mexico Out of Balance is a joint project of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), the Latin American Data Base (LADB), and PeaceNet. It is a collection of articles on current Mexican politics and historical background.

Current and archival news

More substantial news files similar to those available from LEXIS/NEXIS and DIALOG do exist. Two of the more interesting Mexican examples (and thus far Mexican news sources are far more developed than any other Latin American news sources) are maintained by ITESM (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey) in Chihuahua and UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) in Mexico City. These can be accessed via another Latin American page option, Border & Latin American Information, maintained by New Mexico State University. ITESM’s site is called a summary, or Resumen de noticias nacionales, and some documents appear to be abbreviated. There are no articles on cultural subjects, the arts, entertainment, or sports. A keyword search is required to retrieve documents. Boolean searches are possible: the searches “zedillo y colosio,” “zedillo colosio,” and “zedillo y colosio” are equivalent and result in articles that mention both President Zedillo and the assassinated candidate. Searches can pull up dozens of documents from dozens of sources, mostly newspapers, but government and public documents can be retrieved as well. The earliest articles date from January 1995 and the latest are as recent as the last 24 hours. UNAM’s Noticias de México y el Mundo offers a number of news options, the richest of which is the Mexico City newspaper El Nacional (Periódico El Nacional). One can browse El Nacional by date back to February 1993 or do a keyword search. One great advantage compared to the ITESM site—and to LEXIS/NEXIS and INFO-South as well—is its coverage of wider issues. A typical menu for a given date will provide the searcher with as many as eight groups of articles from which to choose, including the front page (Primera Plana), international news (Internacionales), culture (Cultura), sports (Deportes), and the city section (Ciudad).
Other sites

Other sites offer news in more sporadic forms. There are at least three that cover news, documents, and commentary in both English and Spanish on the Zapatista Army (EZLN) and Chiapas. They can be reached through UT-LANIC, the University of Texas Latin American Network Information Center home page, and the “Mexico” menu choice. Sites in countries other than Mexico have blossomed recently as well. On the Web, for example, one can see parts of recent issues of the Peruvian newsmagazine Caretas. The UT-LANIC web home page has a “what’s new” feature that describes new sites to which it offers access. Late February and early March arrivals include the Ecuadorian newspaper Hoy and a Chilean electronic newspaper and magazine. And news—not to mention opinion—appears on newsgroup postings, of which there is at least one for nearly every country of the hemisphere.

There are other sites offering statistical data and facts about individual countries, and reports on the activities of various professional and interest groups. There is also the Castro Speech Database, compiled from the Foreign Broadcast Information Service’s translations of Fidel Castro’s speeches. It covers the years 1959 through 1994 and can be searched by keyword or scanned by date.

JOSEPH C. HOLUB is a Reference Librarian for Van Pelt Library.

Samples

The Library’s web page for Latin America (above left) currently offers six choices, including two web-only sites. One of these is Mexico Out of Balance (left), a joint project of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), the Latin American Data Base (LADB), and PeaceNet. It collects articles on current Mexican politics and historical background.