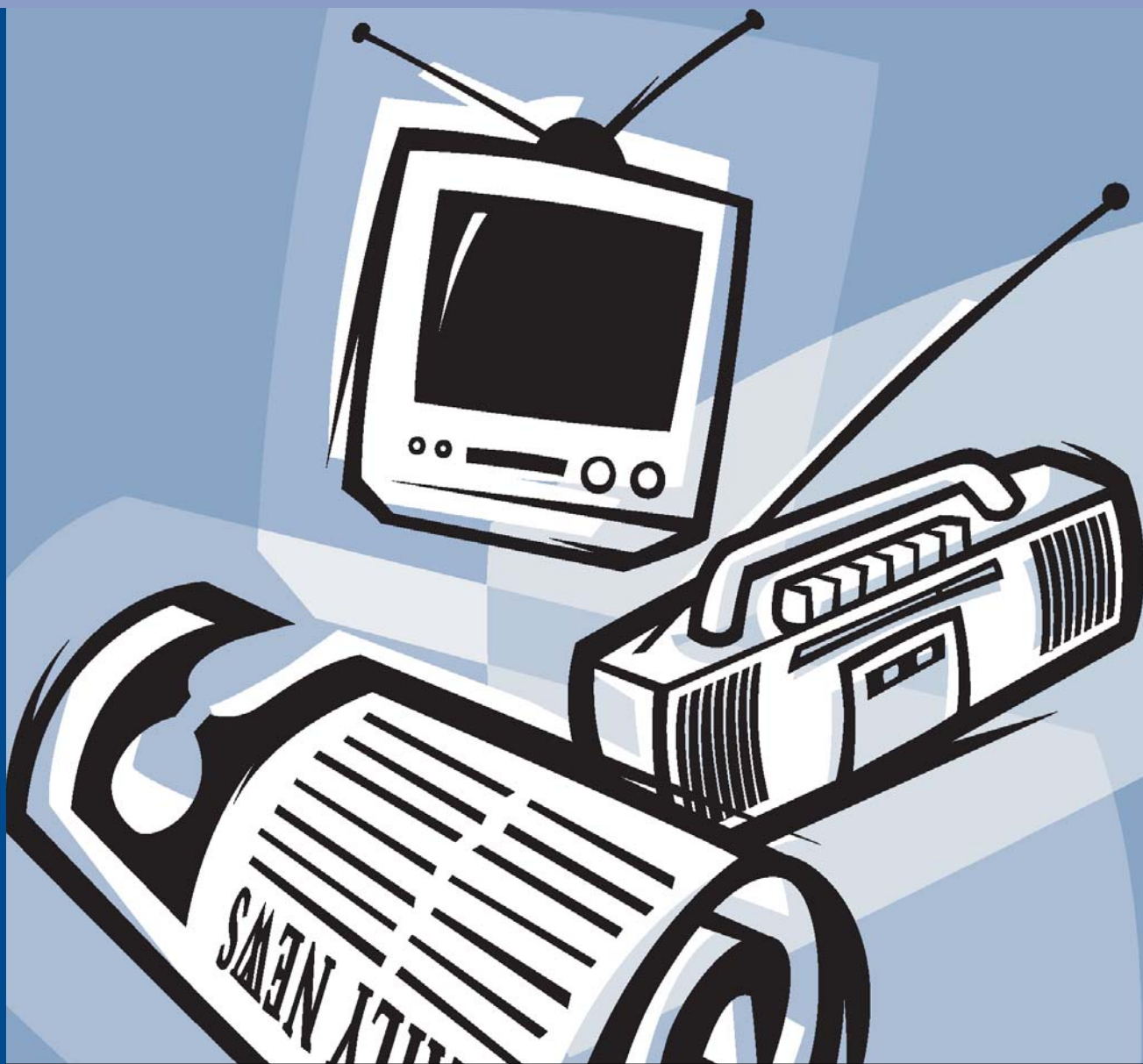


Journalism Training and Institution Building in Central American Countries

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Journalism Training and Institution Building in Central American Countries

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Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination

June 2003

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|----------|--|
| CAJP | Central American Journalism Project |
| CELAP | Centro Latinoamericano de Periodismo (Center for Latin American Journalism) |
| CIESPAL | International Center for Advanced Studies in Journalism for Latin America |
| FIU | Florida International University |
| IAPA | Inter-American Press Association |
| ICFJ | International Center for Journalists |
| LAMP | Latin American Journalism Project |
| NAHJ | National Association of Hispanic Journalists |
| PROCEPER | Proyecto Centroamericano de Periodismo (Central American Journalism Project) |

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Krishna Kumar
Senior Social Scientist

Executive Summary

Background

Avibrant, diverse, and independent media—print, television, radio—is crucial to successful democratization and economic development. USAID’s Latin American Journalism Project (LAJP), which focused on journalistic standards and practices in Central America from 1988 to 1997, was the Agency’s first major media initiative. The project stemmed from an assessment and conference, and a proposal by Florida International University (FIU), that concluded that educational and training programs carried out over the long term would have a positive impact on journalism throughout the region. As designed and implemented by FIU, the project provided training to nearly 7,000 participants on different aspects of journalism. When funding lapsed in 1997, the Agency passed the torch to the Center for Latin American Journalism (CELAP), a private, self-supporting institution that continues to provide journalism training in Latin America.

As a part of its global assessment of media assistance, USAID’s Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE)¹ evaluated the achievements, impacts, and limitations of the LAJP and CELAP programs in October 2002. Based on a systematic review of the project documents and a series of interviews conducted in Washington, Miami, and Panama, the evaluation focused on the media scene in Central America prior to launching the media initiatives, the initiatives themselves, and the contribution that LAJP and CELAP made to the growth of independent media in Central

America and to the democratization process. The study also sought to draw policy and programmatic lessons important to designing media interventions in developing and transition societies.

Latin American Journalism Project (LAJP)

Based on the workshop recommendations, FIU submitted a proposal for a seven-year, multicountry training program. USAID funded the program for five years with a budget of \$9.3 million and extended it for another five years with an additional \$4.5 million. Initially, the program was called the Central American Journalism Project, but the name was changed to the Latin American Journalism Project (LAJP) when Andean countries were added. To allay concern about the project’s integrity and independence from the U.S. Government, FIU constituted an advisory board of journalists and educators to shape the program’s policies and activities and obtained waivers from USAID concerning approval of participants and pre-publication review.

To support the emergence of independent media in Central America, LAJP undertook many training, publication, and networking activities and projects:

- *Short- and long-term training.* As the main objective of LAJP was to improve the professional skills of journalists, it largely focused on short- and long-term training that was practical and relevant to Central American conditions. Short-term training included intensive courses on writing skills, news reporting and coverage, television news production, use of cameras and editing, investigative journalism, election coverage and reporting, and professional ethics.

¹ CDIE is now the Office of Development Evaluation and Information (PPC/DEI).

LAMP held more than 6,800 training sessions, and, at the height of the program, offered as many as 65 different courses in a year.

- *Publications.* LAMP initiated a number of publishing projects to assist training initiatives and help other educational institutions. The publications also helped develop and strengthen networks of journalists and media institutions. They included *Pulso*, a journalism review for the region that covered critical issues in journalism training and education; *The Latin American Media Directory*; and Spanish-language textbooks for journalism education.
- *Annual awards program.* One of LAMP's most innovative initiatives was the Premios de PROCEPER annual awards program, established in 1992 to honor outstanding journalists taking on controversial and often dangerous investigative projects. Often, the award ceremonies were broadcast regionally and featured prominent speakers, including presidents of Central American countries.
- *Conferences.* LAMP also organized conferences covering such topics as employer and employee relations, raising the stature of the profession, and corruption and conflict of interest. Such conferences helped build a regional network; enabled journalists, media owners, and educators to exchange information and ideas; and promoted a regional dialogue on common problems.
- *Code of conduct for journalists.* LAMP succeeded in establishing and disseminating a code of conduct for journalists. Anecdotal evidence from journalists suggests that this code has helped reduce corruption in the media in Honduras and Panama.

Despite the achievements of LAMP, the USAID assessment highlighted a few limitations.

- Some journalists felt the selection process—although removed from the politicized process

of review by the U.S. embassy or USAID—could have been more transparent and open.

- LAMP focused most of its efforts on newspaper journalism. USAID suggested the program refocus energies on initiatives to train rural radio journalists.
- LAMP worked mainly with mainstream urban media outlets. Considering the rural nature of much of Central America, more focus on rural outreach might have yielded good results.
- The project did not build a strong network of alumni trainees.

The Center for Latin American Journalism (CELAP)

A primary goal of LAMP was to transfer responsibility for training and other activities to an independent center directed by journalists and media owners from Central America. In 1996, with pledges for about \$700,000, LAMP leaders established CELAP in Panama City. The center emerged as an independent entity, with a board of directors mostly from Central America. It has held three biannual meetings that provided journalists with important networking opportunities, made CELAP quite well known, and generated more than \$77,000.

CELAP's greatest achievement is its continuation of LAMP's training mission. Unlike LAMP, CELAP targeted its activities to all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although its educational and training programs were pitched throughout Latin America, their appeal was thinly spread. Participation figures for 2001 reveal that the center's real success has been with Panamanian journalists. Its training programs tend to be of shorter duration than those offered by LAMP, though some topic areas offered have been more specialized. One seemingly unavoidable problem is that CELAP expects most participants to pay for their training. A typical weekend seminar costs about \$600, equal

to about two month's salary for journalists in many Central American countries. Media owners have been unwilling to pick up these costs.

One factor that adversely affected CELAP's growth is that it tried to establish its identity as a Latin American institution without any connection with LAJP or FIU. An unfortunate consequence was that CELAP could not reap all the benefits of its rich ancestry. In its effort to become a Latin American institution, the center lost much of its Central American flavor and thus its political support in Central American countries.

Potentially, CELAP could become a sustainable organization that contributes to the growth of free press in a volatile region, but it barely survives. Its revenues come from fees for training seminars and workshops and registrations for its biennial congress. It also raises funds from media owners and other donors and receives interest from its permanent endowment. Some board members are circulating a plan to raise the center's endowment by more than \$1.5 million, more than twice the level envisioned by LAJP for sustainability.

Contributions of LAJP and CELAP

LAJP, and subsequently CELAP, contributed to upgrading journalists' professional skills and competence, strengthening ethical standards, and contributing to the democratic process.

- *Upgrading professional competence and skills.* LAJP made a major contribution toward improving the skills of journalists and the design, layout, and coverage of many prominent newspapers in the region. Radio reporters and producers in Guatemala and Panama credit LAJP for some of the content improvement of their news programs. LAJP and CELAP directly and indirectly contributed to upgrading skills: thousands of journalists benefited from training in editing, reporting, investigative journalism, news management, and camera operation.

Journalists and media owners were made aware of the need for training and its benefits. This awareness created a second wave of training programs in some areas. The positive results of LAJP and CELAP programs also led other institutions to initiate or expand other training programs in Central America, or to support programs in other countries aimed at Central American journalists.

- *Improving professional ethics.* A major focus of LAJP's activities was improving the lax ethical standards of the profession in the region. In 1993, LAJP brought media owners and journalists together to produce the first regional ethics code for Central America. LAJP highlighted the problem of corruption, made journalists discuss it, and encouraged them to rise to higher standards. During the mid-1990s, the new code was an inspiration to journalists fighting to clean up the profession. The project's leaders offered training sessions on this sensitive topic and raised the issue during meetings with journalists, media educators, and media owners. CELAP continues to organize training activities on corruption and professional standards.

Notwithstanding, when corruption is deeply embedded in economic and political institutions, it is difficult to avoid in the profession of journalism. Because salaries are low, many working journalists succumb to the temptation to accept monetary rewards in exchange for favorable reporting. To raise ethical standards, living and working conditions have to be improved. Media owners and managers seem indifferent to the problem, and are often tied to special economic and political interests themselves.

- *Contributions to democratization.* LAJP contributed to the democratization process. By helping journalists and media outlets improve their technical and professional standards, the program prepared them for their role in democratic polities. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama, LAJP

provided intensive training for journalists covering postconflict elections that were to pave the way for peace and democracy. It ran country-specific courses, teaching journalists the norms of free and fair elections, and explaining their monitoring role and the need for balanced coverage. Media training helped improve the conduct of the elections and the political debate. In addition, the ethics code and LAJP training spawned investigative reporting that brought to light covert activities of previous governments. Although LAJP and CELAP made significant contributions to the region's march toward democracy, training programs alone will not transform the media into an instrument of democratic transition and consolidation. In Central America—as in many other parts of the world—media face many barriers and problems that limit their role in promoting democracy and individual freedom.

Why LAJP Succeeded

Leadership was the most important factor contributing to the success of LAJP—and, to a limited extent, that of its successor, CELAP. The programs' leaders were excellent managers: visionary, innovative, and deeply committed. They were well informed about the conditions in the region and established good rapport with journalists, media owners, and educators. LAJP's attempt to involve Central American stakeholders also contributed to its success. By reaching out to the leaders of the Central American media community, LAJP established credibility in the region and guaranteed the participation of journalists in training programs on elementary skills as well as advanced topics such as investigative journalism and electoral coverage. Because of its large and assured funding, the center was able to organize a range of courses and fund the attendance of a relatively large number of journalists.

LAJP's professional integrity and independence was another factor. The openness and transparency

of LAJP and the waivers obtained from USAID convinced journalists that the program was a genuine effort to improve journalistic standards. In addition, the stability of the project contributed to its success. Because LAJP functioned as a stable organization for a decade, it could afford a long-term view of its activities. Timing was also important. The project began in the late 1980s, when the democratization process was creating unprecedented opportunities for the growth of independent media, and it contributed to and benefited from the march of democracy.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

1. USAID-funded training and outreach programs can help raise the technical and professional standards of journalism and contribute to the growth of independent media in developing countries.
2. Well-designed media support projects can promote the democratization process by exposing the misdeeds of government and increasing public awareness about openness, transparency, democracy, and human rights.
3. Journalism projects should have built-in safeguards to ensure their transparency and allay doubts about USAID's intentions. Such safeguards could include independent advisory boards or allowing partners management autonomy, control over selection of participants, and responsibility for the contents of training courses and publications.
4. Strong university journalism departments can impart practical skills and expose students to standards of a free media system. They can be valuable partners for USAID-supported training programs.
5. When journalism textbooks are not available in local languages, the commissioning of new textbooks can support and amplify training sessions

and journalism education. Their sale can also raise revenue for the program.

6. To establish a self-sustaining media training organization, USAID should establish an independent center from the beginning and should aim toward self-sufficiency at the end of a project.
7. To establish a sustainable training center, USAID and its partner institutions should consider raising sufficient funds for an endowment that will subsidize training costs when USAID support is not available.
8. The recruitment process for journalism training should be transparent and ensure the participation of different ethnic groups and minorities.
9. Regional media training programs facilitate interaction among journalists from different countries and contribute to the institutionalization of standards, skills, and codes of conduct for free media. An effective alumni network helps this cause.
10. Involvement of media owners in journalism training exposes them to the standards of the profession and facilitates the application of skills and expertise gained by journalists during training. Involvement of owners also promotes more understanding between owners and journalists.
11. Low-paid journalists have opportunities and incentives to accept bribes. Without attendant legal reforms and structural changes in the political system, journalism programs and training in journalistic ethics will have a limited impact on corruption.

Journalism Training and Institution Building in Central American Countries

Introduction

USAID supported a major journalism training program in Central America during the late 1980s and 1990s. Planned and implemented by Florida International University (FIU), the Latin American Journalism Project (LAJP) was one of the first major media programs the Agency undertook. LAJP has been instrumental in providing training to thousands of journalists and upgrading professional skills and expertise throughout Central America. Ultimately the project established the Center for Latin American Journalism (CELAP), a self-sustaining journalism institute that no longer has direct programmatic ties to either USAID or FIU.

Few countries in Central America had much experience with a democratic system before the wave of democracy spread across Latin America in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

This innovative media initiative marked the beginning of USAID programming in the media sector. This discussion of LAJP is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the media scene in Central America as it existed prior to the launch of LAJP. Chapter 2 explains the origin, organization, and activities of LAJP. Chapter 3 discusses the establishment and programs of CELAP and describes the challenges facing this new organization. Chapter 4 assesses the overall contribution that LAJP and CELAP have made to the growth of independent media in Central America and in democratization processes. Finally,

Chapter 5 highlights the policy and programmatic lessons that can be considered in designing media interventions in developing and transition societies.

Sources for this report included in-depth interviews with journalists and program participants and a wide variety of secondary sources, including a major assessment of the program conducted by USAID (Janus and Rockwell 1998). Based on five country case studies, this assessment provides rich empirical data and analysis about LAJP and its contribution. A case study of CELAP prepared by Green (2002) provides a candid analysis by one of the program's founders. A wide range of documents and records in USAID's archive were also consulted.

1. The Regional Media Scene

Few countries in Central America had much experience with a democratic system before the wave of democracy spread across Latin America in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Military dictators, juntas, or generals who wielded power from behind the facade of presidents and popularly elected representatives ruled Honduras for most of the last century. When Violeta Chamorro turned over power to her successor in 1996, it was the first peaceful transfer of power in Nicaragua's recent history. In El Salvador, through most of the past century, power alternated between presidents who were members of the country's agricultural elite or leaders of the military who ruled in their stead. Although progressive elements of the country's business elite ascended into power in Panama, the country's short history is filled with military coups and dictators. Guatemala had its share of dictators

or generals who seized power, punctuated by periods marked by attempts at democratic rule (Skidmore and Smith 2001). The only exception has been Costa Rica, which enjoys a long history of democratic government.

Although the media in these countries at times attempted to balance or confront authoritarian power, often they were established to amplify the voice of powerful authoritarian states. Usually, government coercion or subsidies persuaded most media owners to follow the government's lead. Unlike the western democracies, most of these countries did not develop a tradition of independent advertising for mass appeal. Instead, commercial advertisers sought cues from the government on whether to support specific media outlets. Cancellations by private commercial advertisers followed withdrawal of state support (Waisbord 2000b). Thus, subservience to the regime was essential for the economic survival of media outlets. Moreover, the media outlets perceived as hostile to the regime were often the targets of repression, if not outright closure. In El Salvador and Panama, governments often employed violent tactics to smother opposition media voices.

Such a system produced polarized media structures in a few countries. If the media could not find government funding, opposition political parties provided the only other regular means of support. In Nicaragua, for example, every major media outlet evolved as the voice of one or another of the country's political parties. Each party presented its own brand of media: the Liberal Party with *La Noticia*, Canal 2 (on television), and Radio Corporación; the Conservatives with *La Prensa*; and the Sandinistas with *El Nuevo Diario*, Radio Ya, and Canal 4 (also television). During the 1980s, the Sandinistas either appropriated or closed all the Liberal Party media outlets. In Honduras, although newspapers might have supported the various parties (Liberal or National), during the 1980s all major media outlets gave tacit support to the military, which was unchecked by presidential power until 2000. In Panama, media outlets were either identified as supporting the dictators or as opposition outlets.

Opposition media were often censored or closed by the authoritarian government in Panama.

If the media could not find government funding, opposition political parties provided the only other regular means of support.

All over Central America, the standards of journalism were extremely poor. Many journalists were not qualified to cover economic and political issues. Poorly paid, they had little incentive to go after interesting stories. They were also concerned for their personal safety from the state security forces, guerrillas, and drug traffickers. The owners and publishers, often representing powerful economic and political interests, did not hesitate to interfere in news operations. Most had either superficial commitment to the notion of editorial freedom or thought such freedom was a luxury they could not afford while supporting authoritarian political systems.

Central American journalists had a limited view of the world, with few looking beyond their national borders for stories or regional trends. Investigative reporting was practiced at very few outlets, partially due to the dependency established between the state and media owners (Waisbord 2000b). Many leaders in journalism circles outside the region felt that Central American journalists were unprepared to deal with the enormous challenges confronting their region.

Often, Central American journalists were not only deficient in their craft but also did not subscribe to professional ethics. Corruption was not uncommon both in print and broadcast media. Although there were honest, committed journalists, many, if not most, were not averse to accepting bribes from the government, military, or political parties in return for favorable coverage. Poor salaries, pervasive corruption in economic and political life, the system of political patronage, and, above all, the poor institutionalization of the norms of journalism con-

tributed to this atmosphere where low standards were accepted. This further undermined the credibility of the press.

Most Central American countries did not have vibrant civil society organizations that supported independent media. Journalism associations were often weak and usually divided. It was not uncommon to have more than one association in a country. The owners and publishers often distrusted such associations. As a result there was no common ground between them. Because authoritarian governments, for the most part, controlled the region, the rule of law was weak or nonexistent in many of these countries. In Panama, democratic structures such as the National Assembly were used as puppets by the dictators to push through laws that gave the state more power to control media content, journalism licensing, and even hiring practices.

In short, the media landscape in Central American countries in the early 1980s was hardly encouraging. Most countries lacked the democratic institutions that are essential for the growth and survival of the free press. The standards of journalism were generally poor, and the quality of their output left much to be desired. It was at this stage that FIU proposed the Latin American Journalism Project to USAID.

2. The Latin American Journalism Project

USAID gave FIU a grant of \$475,000 to conduct an in-depth assessment of the state of journalism in Central America.

The purpose was to come up with a comprehensive plan for improving the standards and practices for journalism (Heise and Green 1996). The funding also supported one experimental seminar conducted by FIU with journalists from the region. A three-person FIU research team took six months to travel throughout the region, conducting in-depth interviews with 150 journalists, journalism educators, and media owners.

The assessment found that Central American countries lacked educational institutions capable of

imparting sound journalism training. Most universities taught social communication and communication theory, but not modern journalism. The few journalism departments that existed were often highly politicized, with curricula that emphasized theory and did not provide practical instruction. No regional training center for journalism existed in the early 1980s. Only a few journalism textbooks in Spanish were available that used relevant, practical examples. The assessment noted “that most journalists were poorly paid and badly educated, making them easy targets for corruption, especially in the absence of an accepted code of conduct” (Heise and Green 1996).

The assessment found that Central American countries lacked educational institutions capable of imparting sound journalism training.

It indicated that that the press, except in Costa Rica, was unprepared to promote democratization processes.

The experts at the workshop shared the view that only a long-term educational and training program would have any impact on the region. Such a program, they agreed, should have a professional and practical focus. It should use instructors from Latin America to conduct many of the training sessions; and it should also take into consideration existing Latin American realities and not blindly impose the journalism practices of the United States. The workshop recommended that efforts focus on journalism training, professional ethics, news organization administration, and business management. It also recommended that an independent center, functioning on a decentralized basis throughout the region, be established to be the focal point for these activities (Green 2002).

Project Funding and Scope

Based on the recommendations of the workshop, FIU submitted plans for a seven-year, \$12 million multicountry training program to USAID. USAID funded the program for five years with a budget of

\$9.3 million, but later extended it for three years with an additional \$4.5 million. Initially, the program was called the Central American Journalism Project (CAJP, or PROCEPER by its Spanish acronym). The name was changed to the Latin American Journalism Project (LAJP) when Andean countries were added.

From the beginning, one of the central goals of LAJP was to create a legacy of self-sustaining and self-directed training in the region. The leaders of the FIU program expected that once journalists in the region raised their own standards, it would be important for them to take over the lead of the training enterprise. As part of this goal, the program needed to encourage the formation of a code of journalism conduct for the region. According to Green (2002), “FIU’s training program would serve not just as a catalyst in this pursuit, but also as a supportive foundation once journalists started using the code to weed out corruption.” In addition, the program needed to focus on training journalists in practical skills such as investigative techniques, research methods, and writing, as well as improving newsroom organization and administration.

The original plans envisaged focusing on the six Spanish-speaking countries of Central America. However, when the program was started in the late 1980s, the Sandinistas were in power in Nicaragua, and the political climate did not allow participation of Nicaraguan journalists. Panama was also excluded because of a deterioration in relations between that country and the United States. As a result, the group of countries that made up the core of training in the first few years of the program was smaller than originally planned. Most of the original focus was on Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The program expanded to Panama and Nicaragua after the fall of the regimes in those countries. With additional funding from USAID, the last three years of the program included the Andean Pact nations of Colombia, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

Integrity and Independence of the Project

From the beginning, FIU was concerned about the integrity and independence of the project. During the pilot-training session of journalists, FIU officials realized that the program could be controversial because of its ties to the U.S. Government. Some journalists questioned the motives behind the project. They expressed concern that the U.S. Government was funding the project to counter journalism programs being directed by Cuba and the Soviet Union, disseminate anticommunist news stories to newspapers, or channel funds for propaganda purposes. Some even suspected that the U.S. Government was using FIU to achieve its political objectives.¹

Such criticisms were credible because the U.S. Government had funded journalism training projects to fight communism. For example, the CIA supported a program through the U.S. Information Agency to train Afghan guerrillas as journalists at Boston University.² Journalism training projects and funding for pro-U.S. publications to counter Soviet propaganda were suggested by the Kissinger Commission’s report to the Reagan Administration. Following these recommendations, the CIA, with USAID support, funded the supplement *Nicaragua Hoy*, which regularly appeared in the Costa Rican newspaper *La Nación* (Shallat 1989). *Nicaragua Hoy* was a voice for the Nicaraguan Contras and the Nicaraguan exile community in Costa Rica during the Contra War.

FIU took several steps to allay these apprehensions and ensure the integrity of the project. First, it proposed and constituted an advisory board composed of journalists and journalism educators from within and outside the region. The board shaped the poli-

¹ Guillermo Martinez of the *Miami Herald* removed himself from the informal advisory panel of the FIU project because he feared the program might have ties to the CIA. An article in the now defunct *Miami News* also quoted USAID sources as saying the program was meant as a direct counter to Soviet propaganda and policies in Central America.

² Bernard Redmont, Dean of the communication faculty at Boston University, resigned in the flap over control of the Afghan training program. Redmont eventually became a member of the advisory board for CAJP.

cies and activities of the program. Second, FIU insisted that the project operate in accordance with the professional principles of the free press in western democracies. The project proposal stated “it is imperative that the project be operated independently by Florida International University, free from political ideology and fully committed to professional principles of a free press” (Heise and Green 1996). To assure the integrity of the project, the university insisted that it have sole authority to close down the project if it was used “by anyone for purposes other than strengthening the professional news media in Central America” (Heise and Green 1996).

Third, FIU sought and gained two important waivers from USAID. The first concerned selection of participants. Normally, the final approval of participants in USAID-funded projects rests with the U.S. embassy where the participant lives. USAID and the journalist association in the trainees’ home country must also approve. This could have created a problem. Patterning its selection criteria after the Nieman Fellows Program at Harvard University, FIU insisted that it should be the final arbiter. USAID accepted the request. The leaders of FIU’s program felt this was an important waiver, because it removed politics from the selection process and the *perception* that politics were involved. There was a directive from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget that all publications prepared with federal resources were subject to “pre-publication review.” Such review was unacceptable to FIU, as it violated the norms of press freedom. To journalists, prepublication review was a form of censorship that would taint the program (Heise and Green 1996). Again, USAID obliged. In hindsight, efforts by FIU to ensure independence of LAJP from political influence and USAID’s full concurrence to the principle were critical factors in the success of the project.

LAJP’s Activities

LAJP undertook a wide variety of activities and projects to support the emergence of independent media in Central America. These can be grouped under the categories of training, publications, and networking.

Short- and Long-Term Training

As the main objective of LAJP was to improve the professional skills of journalists, it largely focused on training for the short and long terms, which was practical and relevant to Central American conditions. Its emphasis was not on theoretical discourse but on making journalists more professional and productive in their craft. Therefore, LAJP offered intensive courses on writing skills for print and broadcast journalists, news reporting, the production of television news, and the use of cameras and editing. It also supported courses on investigative journalism. In addition, it developed courses on election coverage and reporting so that journalists could cover elections with objectivity and balance. Finally, LAJP organized intensive training seminars on professional ethics. By all accounts, the project was the first organization to propose solutions to the climate of corruption in the journalism profession in Central America.

In hindsight, efforts by FIU to ensure independence of LAJP from political influence and USAID’s full concurrence to the principle were critical factors in the success of the project.

For two reasons, an overwhelming proportion of the training was short term. First, it enabled LAJP to maximize the number of the trainees and thus program outreach. Long-term training programs would have been expensive and reached fewer journalists. Second, media owners were not willing to send their employees for long-term training. Early in the program, some journalists who attended longer training sessions returned to their home countries to discover their jobs had been given to others. Short training sessions allowed journalists a break from their routines, but not enough time for reluctant owners to have second thoughts about their absence. Given the deadline nature of journalism and the constant need to produce new journalistic products, shorter sessions allowed journalists a more flexible schedule of training opportunities.

Training sessions were held both at FIU in Miami and at the LAJP regional training center in San Jose, Costa Rica. In the latter years of the program, some of the sessions were held at CELAP's new independent training facility in Panama. The training sessions ranged from two to five days. At the height of the program, LAJP offered as many as 65 different training courses in a single year. None of the training courses had more than 18 journalists at a time. Instructors for the training program were selected from among FIU faculty and journalists from Latin America and the United States.

To reduce the cost, LAJP also undertook short-term training in different countries. Under this arrangement, faculty would relocate to a central location in one of the countries of the region, and trainees would come to their location. Usually, these training courses attracted most of their participants from the host country, although sometimes journalists from neighboring countries would attend. Those attending the first round of courses were often chosen as trainers for future courses in their own countries. LAJP trainers also worked inside newsrooms to give intensive training. Sometimes, owners asked LAJP to provide trainers to act as editorial consultants and editors for extended periods. In that way, the news operation became a daily workshop as journalists performed their regular tasks under the tutelage of LAJP advisers.

Finally, under arrangements with LAJP, FIU offered a special degree program (in Spanish) for Central American journalists. The objective was to prepare highly skilled journalists to serve as the leaders and teachers of journalism, an expectation that proved to be realistic. A few trainees taught courses in journalism in their countries after completion of their studies. Some of these FIU alumni were also instrumental in steering other journalists to the LAJP training program. The project funded 126 trainees for the FIU degree program.

Trainees were screened by representatives of the program in each country and by a committee of faculty members at FIU. Only full-time journalists who had the consent of their employers could apply for the training.

Altogether, LAJP provided training to more than 6,800 participants. The figures are slightly misleading, as the project counted the number of trainees in each training course irrespective of whether participants had attended earlier courses. (Journalists generally took multiple courses.)

In 1990, LAJP created Pulso, a journalism review for the region, to cover critical issues concerning journalism training and education.

Publications

LAJP initiated a number of publishing projects to support the training initiatives and help other educational institutions. These publications also helped develop and strengthen networks among journalists and interested media institutions.

In 1990, LAJP created *Pulso*, a journalism review for the region, to cover critical issues concerning journalism training and education. The magazine became a forum for discussions and elaborations of journalistic techniques and standards. It generated advertising revenue that was used to finance CELAP, the training institute that followed LAJP. Although the magazine stopped publishing hard copy when USAID support ended, FIU keeps an electronic version of *Pulso* alive at www.pulso.org. This version of *Pulso* is financed with support from the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation.

Another popular venture of LAJP was the *Latin American Media Directory*, first published in 1993. The purpose of this directory is to provide necessary information about media institutions and journalists and to promote interactions among them. This publication was supported with advertising from publishers throughout the hemisphere. Like *Pulso*, the directory is now issued electronically and is available at www.mediagua.com. Some of the proceeds from directory sales were earmarked to finance CELAP.

Finally, LAJP was instrumental in creating Spanish-

language textbooks for journalism education. Portions of the proceeds from the sale of textbooks were set aside to support CELAP. Altogether, the program published 10 texts under the series title *Journalism in Latin America*. They covered a variety of topics, including ethics, writing, investigative reporting, television and radio production, interviewing, and business reporting.

Annual Awards Program

One of LAJP's most innovative initiatives was the establishment of the Premios de PROCEPER annual awards program in 1992 to honor outstanding journalists. These awards also honored journalists willing to take on controversial and important investigative projects. Many award recipients were journalists who investigated death squads and extrajudicial killings by militaries in the region. The awards ceremonies were often broadcast regionally and featured prominent speakers such as some of the presidents of Central American countries. The awards also built interest in the LAJP and FIU training programs. Journalists from every country in the region were honored during the six years the awards were presented. The awards program ended with the end of LAJP.

Conferences

The project also organized a number of conferences, covering topics such as employer/employee relations; increasing profitability of news organizations; university entrance, graduation, and media employment for journalism students; raising the stature of the profession; conflict of interest; and corruption. Such conferences helped build a regional network; enabled journalists, owners, and educators to exchange information and ideas; and promoted regional dialogue on common problems facing the media sector.

Code of Conduct for Journalists

After extensive informal discussions, LAJP ultimately succeeded in its efforts to establish a code of conduct for journalists. In 1993, a meeting of journalists and media owners in New Orleans produced the first ethics code for journalists in the region. The code was widely disseminated by

LAJP. Although no empirical evidence is available, journalists have suggested that the code helped reduce journalism corruption in Honduras (Rockwell 1998b) and Panama (Rockwell 1998c).

Limitations and Problem Areas

There is broad consensus among media observers in Central America that LAJP made a major contribution to the advancement of techniques and technical training for working journalists. It contributed to an improvement in newspaper design throughout the region. Its training was instrumental in improving editing and content in the region's newspapers, and it stimulated the growth of investigative journalism. Along with LAJP, journalism groups such as the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) and the Freedom Forum helped inspire these changes. Radio journalists in Panama and Guatemala also cited LAJP for helping create more awareness for serious public affairs journalism on the airwaves (Rockwell 1998a and 1998c).

[LAJP] contributed to an improvement in newspaper design throughout the region. Its training was instrumental in improving editing and content in the region's newspapers, and it stimulated the growth of investigative journalism.

These achievements are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. However, a few limitations of the project were highlighted by the USAID assessment (Janus and Rockwell 1998).

First, questions were raised about selection of the participants. The assessment revealed that some journalists felt the selection process—although removed from the politicized process of review by the U.S. embassy or USAID—could have been more transparent and open. It relied on a few advisors, who were not always fair. At the end of the program, FIU learned that some of their advisors extracted bribes or sexual favors from journalists in exchange for selecting them for the prestigious program.

Second, LAJP focused most of its efforts on newspaper journalism in the region. LAJP's own analysis in 1993 showed that it had trained almost twice as many newspaper journalists as broadcast journalists (Heise et al. 1993). However, in most of the countries (Guatemala, Panama, Honduras, and El Salvador), newspapers remain an elite form of media, reaching less than 10 percent of the populace on a regular basis. Thus, the major focus on print media limited the impact of LAJP on the overall media system in some countries. USAID auditors suggested the need for the program to refocus energies on its initiatives to train rural radio journalists (Lazar et al. 1991), but little progress was made, except in Costa Rica, where LAJP conducted some training programs for the radio. One possible reason for such a limited focus on broadcast media was that the supportive media owners mostly owned newspapers. Also, the project found it difficult to locate radio and television facilities where intensive classes could be conducted. One of the goals of the program had been to develop an information-sharing network among radio journalists. Some headway was made on this initiative in Nicaragua, but such networks never surfaced elsewhere.

Third, LAJP worked mainly with mainstream urban media outlets. Journalists from small community outlets or specialized outlets aimed at young or nontraditional readers often felt LAJP did not address their needs or audience (Janus and Rockwell 1998). Considering the rural nature of much of Central America, more focus on rural outreach probably would have yielded significant results.

Finally, evaluators suggested that the project did not build a strong network of alumni trainees (Lazar et al. 1991; Janus and Rockwell 1998). LAJP did not have a strong database of the alumni. A stronger organization of LAJP alumni could have helped with the transition to CELAP's management of the training initiative. Further, an alumni base could have been tapped to deal with social problems facing journalists, such as the physical dangers that still threaten journalists in Guatemala, or the oppressive criminal libel laws

in Panama that have resulted in heavy fines or the jailing of journalists.

3. The Center for Latin American Journalism (CELAP)

One of the primary goals of LAJP was to transfer responsibility for journalist training and other activities to an independent center directed by journalists and media owners from Central America. As there was no regional journalism institution in Central America, the leaders of LAJP were confident that they would be able to raise necessary funds and build widespread support for the planned center.

Establishing CELAP

The first step LAJP took toward creating CELAP was to establish a tax-exempt, not-for-profit foundation, the Press Freedom Foundation, chartered in the state of Florida. The foundation was formed to raise resources, establish CELAP, and transfer its leadership and management to a Central American board of directors. The bylaws for the foundation stated that the proposed center will

- promote a free and responsible press
- promote professional journalism in, but not limited to, the republics of Latin America and the Caribbean
- organize and conduct training, meetings, conferences, and other exchanges for journalists
- provide technical and professional assistance to journalists and other media personnel
- stimulate an open dialogue on ethics and the responsibilities of journalism
- promote dialogue among journalists, media owners, and media educators.

The bylaws stressed that the center would follow the free-press norms of western democracies, and

its activities would be conducted independently of any government. Moreover, it would focus on both the print and broadcast media. The bylaws also stipulated that the center's board of directors should include journalists, media owners, and media educators.

LAJP commissioned a study about the funding requirements for the center. The study determined that the center stood the best chance of surviving if it started with an endowment of at least \$1.5 million (Green 2002). However, the study also noted that the center could survive with lower initial endowment by generating income from training activities, grants, and contracts (Green 2002). In response to these findings, LAJP began efforts to raise the \$1.5 million.

LAJP took several steps. First, it mobilized all its earnings and marked them for the endowment. For example, it transferred all the royalties and profits from the sales of 10 books it had published as well as the advertising revenues from the journal to the endowment. It also diverted profits from the Central American media guide to the fund. Second, it contacted major foundations in the United States for assistance. Its efforts did not succeed, however. The U.S. foundations showed little interest in a regional center for journalism, much less in supporting its endowment. The only exception was the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, which provided a grant of \$150,000 for operating expenses.

Third, the leaders of LAJP personally approached every newspaper, radio station, and television station in the region to solicit funds. To alleviate concerns of potential donors about possible waste or misuse of donated funds, they crafted two provisions in the bylaws of the center: 1) the board of governors would not authorize the use of the endowment fund for operating and other expenses; 2) in case the center ceased to operate, the endowment funds would be returned, "in their entirety," to donors. These provisions helped allay the initial resistance of many media owners, who were concerned that their donations might be wasted if the center closed.

After persistent efforts, LAJP obtained written pledges of \$700,000 from media owners in the region (Green 2002). A large portion of funds was generated in Panama, where major newspapers and a major television and radio holding company contributed more than \$258,000. Unfortunately, many media owners in other countries failed to keep their promises. One reason was that some of them insisted that only media owners should serve on the board of directors, a condition that the leaders of LAJP did not find acceptable. Thus about \$180,000 of the pledged money never materialized.

In 1996, with pledges totaling more than half the necessary endowment, the leaders of LAJP decided to move forward and establish CELAP in Panama City.

In 1996, with pledges totaling more than half the necessary endowment, the leaders of LAJP decided to move forward and establish CELAP in Panama City. The center emerged as an independent entity, with its board of directors mostly from Central America, and with Roberto Eisenmann Jr. as its first president.

Organization, Area of Operation, and Budget

Unlike LAJP, which primarily operated in Central America and a few Andean Pact nations, CELAP targeted all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean for its training and educational activities. It shifted the recruitment focus southward, attempting to draw participants from South America. It held a congress of journalists in Puerto Rico in 1999. As discussed later in this document, given its limited economic and organizational resources, such a drastic expansion in its area of operation proved to be unwise.

CELAP has a permanent staff of four including the executive director, who is responsible for its operations. There is little doubt that the center is understaffed. The small staff has to coordinate the logistics of training across the hemisphere, organize the

center's biennial congresses, recruit, market, and raise funds. The leaders of CELAP recognize the staff is overworked and underpaid.

The executive director reports to CELAP's current president, Luis Alberto Ferré Rangel of Puerto Rico's *El Nuevo Día*. CELAP has an executive committee, headed by the president, which is largely responsible for its general supervision. CELAP now has 25 members on its board of directors, with representatives from at least 10 nations in the hemisphere. Many former CELAP presidents serve on the board but rarely attend meetings.

The present space is barely sufficient, and the [CELAP] center lacks necessary equipment such as computers for training. The center barely manages to survive financially.

The center had difficulty finding a suitable location and had to move three times during its short life. When it started, it occupied space in a building donated by the newspaper *La Prensa*. However, the site was temporary, and after two years the center shifted to offices vacated by the U.S. forces in the Panama Canal Zone. This move proved to be a near disaster. The staff had to commute long distances. Rent, utilities, and telephone service were more expensive in the converted territory than they had been in Panama City. The internet connection was disconnected for months. The staff felt isolated, and outsiders had a hard time locating the center. Consequently, the CELAP office was relocated to a new building in Panama City. The present space is barely sufficient, and the center lacks necessary equipment such as computers for training.

The center barely manages to survive financially. For nine months in 2001, it operated on revenues of about \$249,000. (The center changed its accounting practices in 2001, so its report only reflects the amount for the shortened fiscal year.) The operating revenues were generated by registrations for the center's biennial congress, fees for training seminars and workshops, and funds raised

from institutions and media owners. At the end of 2001, the center had a surplus of about \$21,000. The endowment contributed more than \$32,000 in interest payments that went into the center's operating budget. The permanent endowment stood at almost \$614,000 in 2001 and generally earns about 5 percent interest. Puerto Rico's *El Nuevo Día* recently added \$30,000 to the endowment, and has pledged an additional \$30,000 (in \$10,000 increments) through 2005.

CELAP has been able to attract funds from various journalism foundations. The McCormick Tribune Foundation contributed \$150,000 for its operating expenses. The Violeta Chamorro Foundation in Nicaragua donated traveling funds for lecturers. The Knight-Ridder Foundation supported instructors and lecturers through its donations. However, all these grants were made in the late 1990s, when the center was in its incubatory stage (Rockwell 1998c). In recent years, the center has received funds for special events and operating expenses from many organizations, including the Freedom Forum, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), the Violeta Chamorro Foundation, UNICEF, UNESCO, and USAID (CELAP 2001).

CELAP's Activities

The greatest achievement of CELAP is carrying on the journalism training mission started by LAJP. Since 1999, the center lists 3,340 registrants for events. The center still tracks the total number of those registered (including participants in its congress gatherings) in the way LAJP did, but it also keeps a separate tally for the number of individuals involved in those events. According to its records, CELAP has had 1,268 participants at its various events, including workshops, seminars, and the biennial congress for Latin American journalists. In 2001, the center counted 778 participants in 17 seminars conducted in seven countries and at the center's congress in Panama. This was an increase in the number of activities from 2000, when the center held 11 seminars.

Although the center attempted to publicize its training programs throughout Latin America, the appeal of the center was spread thinly around the

hemisphere. For example, the participation figures for 2001 reveal that CELAP's real success has been its appeal to Panamanian journalists. Although representatives of 17 countries and territories attended its programs, 80 percent of those attending were Panamanian. About 12 percent of participants came from Latin America and only 7 percent from Central America (excluding Panama).

CELAP's training programs tend to be shorter than those that were offered by LAJP. Many are one-day seminars or are held over a weekend or three days. Only a few have been conducted for over a week. Although CELAP has provided fewer training options, some of the topic areas have been more specialized than the menu offered by LAJP. Recent topics for training seminars have included investigating corruption, freedom of information acts, investigative reporting, medical writing, banking laws, radio news production, and environmental and economic journalism.

CELAP has the potential to become a sustainable organization that contributes to the growth of a free press in a volatile region. However, if it is unable to raise resources, it may have to close its operations.

One currently unavoidable problem is that CELAP expects most participants to pay for training. The cost of a typical weekend seminar is about \$600 (Janus and Rockwell 1998), an amount equal to two months salary for a journalist in many Central American countries. As a result, media owners are not enthusiastic about sending their journalists to the seminars. Journalists in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras complained about the high costs of the training activities (Janus and Rockwell 1998).

CELAP is increasingly using trainers from Latin America who can relate training to local realities. Although it has access to many of the former LAJP trainers on its roster, it prefers to use Latin American experts.

CELAP has held three biennial meetings of journalists from around the hemisphere. Two of the meetings were held in Panama (1997 and 2001) and one in Puerto Rico. These meetings have been important for networking among journalists and have made CELAP quite well known in many countries. The meetings also generated \$77,409 for CELAP (including a \$10,000 donation from *El Nuevo Día*).

CELAP has discontinued two major initiatives promoted by LAJP. It stopped the Central American award program, as it wanted to shift its focus away from Central America. It also discontinued publishing textbooks in Spanish. As indicated in the previous section, both these initiatives had been quite successful. Textbook sales brought additional revenues to the center.

Problems and Challenges

CELAP remains a struggling organization with an uncertain future. It has the potential to become a sustainable organization that contributes to the growth of a free press in a volatile region. However, if it is unable to raise resources, it may have to close its operations. A few factors that have adversely affected its growth are briefly mentioned here.

First, CELAP tried to establish its separate identity as a Latin American journalism institution without any connection to LAJP or FIU. It neither openly advertised its connection to LAJP nor established a long-term relationship with FIU. The LAJP coordinator who administered the program in the region refused to move from Costa Rica to Panama to take charge of the new organization. As a result, many LAJP alumni were unaware that CELAP was an offspring of the project and established to continue its activities. Similarly, organizations in the United States and Central America that had worked with LAJP in the past were also unaware of CELAP's connection with the project. One unfortunate consequence of its search for a separate identity was that CELAP did not profit from LAJP's experience and, in many cases, ended up reinventing the wheel.

Second, in its efforts to become a Latin American institution, CELAP lost much of its Central American flavor. Its effort to recruit participants from all over Latin America have not been successful. Only 12 percent of its trainees came from South America. On the other hand, many critics of the center from Central American countries contend that CELAP no longer serves their needs in a significant way. Perhaps, in its attempt to seek a larger constituency, CELAP has inadvertently lost its political support in Central American countries.

The truth is that CELAP has acquired a strong Panamanian orientation for reasons beyond its control. Panamanian media outlets contributed much of CELAP's budget and four times as much funding to the endowment than all other outlets in Central America combined. The organization is located in Panama and staffed almost entirely by local staff. Above all, Eisenmann, who contributed much to CELAP's credibility and survival and served as its first president, lives in Panama. Although identification of CELAP with Panama is natural and perhaps unavoidable, it has undermined its reputation as a regional institution.

Finally, the composition of the board of directors has also become problematic. The present board is too large, and most members not attend meetings. It has U.S. members who have little or no interest in the center and have been totally uninvolved in its operations. CELAP included three former presidents of Latin American nations on the board who had once been journalists. The presence of politicians has compromised the nonpolitical reputation of the center. Journalists and media educators have questioned the wisdom of including politicians on the board.

The major challenge before CELAP is to attain financial sustainability. Some of its board members are circulating a plan to raise an additional \$1.5 million. Half of this total would be used to bring the endowment up to the level originally set by LAJP to sustain the center. The renewed fundraising plan calls for \$100,000 to purchase

desktop computers, video editing stations, digital cameras, and other technical equipment for the center's training room. This fundraising plan also earmarks more than \$400,000 to fund the necessary cash outlays for the center's congress meetings for the next decade. The remaining funds would be used for training scholarships and to support travel for trainers.

4. Contributions to the Growth of Media and Democratization

So far this paper has explained the objectives, activities, achievements, and limitations of LAJP and CELAP. This chapter examines the overall impact of these programs on the media and the democratization process in the region. It focuses on their impact on professional competence and skills, journalistic ethics, and democratization. Finally, it identifies major factors that affected the success of LAJP and, to a lesser extent, CELAP. However, because of the lack of empirical evidence and the multiplicity of factors that continue to affect the media and democracy landscapes in the region, the discussion here is exploratory in nature and is primarily based on anecdotal evidence and interviews.

Upgrading Professional Competence and Skills

Surveys conducted by the USAID evaluation team (Janus and Rockwell 1998) and interviews with observers of the Central American media scene indicate that LAJP made a major contribution toward improving the technical and professional skills of journalists. There has been an improvement in the quality of news reporting and editing, which should at least be partly attributed to the activities of LAJP and CELAP.

LAJP contributed to improvements in the design, layout, and coverage of many prominent newspapers in the region. The influence of LAJP can be seen in the reengineering of *El Diario de Hoy* in El Salvador (Janus 1998a), and *La Prensa's* modern

design in post-Noriega Panama (Rockwell 1998c). *Siglo Veintiuno* in Guatemala credited LAJP with improving its design (Rockwell 1998a). As a result of their new layout and better news coverage, all these newspapers increased their market share (Rockwell and Janus in press). In Nicaragua, the project was responsible for improving the quality of news broadcasts by some independent radio stations. (Janus 1998b). Radio reporters and producers in both Guatemala and Panama also credit LAJP for some of the content improvements of their news programs (Rockwell 1998a and 1998c).

The work of LAJP and CELAP has helped institutionalize training within the region and created an environment where other groups will find fertile ground for training initiatives.

Both LAJP and CELAP have directly and indirectly contributed to upgrading journalists. They trained thousands of journalists in editing, reporting, investigative journalism, news management, and camera operation. LAJP alone held training sessions for 6,800 journalists. (These figures may overstate participation, as the project counted trainees in each course, and some journalists may have attended more than one course.) Since 1999, CELAP has had 1,268 participants in a variety of events (workshops, seminars, and conferences). The sheer number of participants is a reasonable indicator of the impact the two organizations have made on the media sector.

LAJP and CELAP have also made journalists and media owners aware of the need for training and its benefits. Trainers and alumni from LAJP and CELAP programs have spread their philosophies about journalistic ethics, investigative journalism, and journalistic balance throughout Central America and beyond during the past 15 years. Their personal examples are cited in many of the positive anecdotes about the programs. The LAJP awards program was often referred to as the

Central American Pulitzers, and winners of these awards were often regarded as leaders and trendsetters for journalists.

Awareness of the benefits has created a second wave of training programs in some parts of the region. In Guatemala, various alumni of LAJP created new training initiatives attached to local universities, journalism organizations, or NGOs (Rockwell 1998a). The positive results of LAJP and CELAP have encouraged other institutions to initiate or expand training programs in Central America or to support training programs in other countries aimed at Central American journalists. Some of these organizations include the Poynter Institute (based in St. Petersburg, Florida); the Freedom Forum; the Inter-American Press Association; International Center for Advanced Studies in Journalism for Latin America (CIESPAL); the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), a U.S.-based organization for Latino journalists; the International Federation of Journalists; and Northwestern University (Rockwell 1998a and 1998c). Thus the work of LAJP and CELAP has helped institutionalize training within the region and created an environment where other groups will find fertile ground for training initiatives.

Both trainees and trainers have benefited from these programs. LAJP was regarded in Central America as a prestigious training program that could make the difference in getting a job. Media outlets sought program participants for open positions. Often, listing participation in an LAJP training course on a résumé could help an alumnus land a job. Many LAJP alumni have acquired leadership positions in the region's media. Like trainees, trainers also profited from their association with LAJP. Prominent media outlets often invited them to consult. For instance, the Salvadoran newspaper, *El Diario de Hoy*, employed Lafitte Fernandez, an LAJP trainer, to revamp it. In Panama, Gustavo Gorriti, another former LAJP trainer, reinforced an already vigorous investigative reporting team at *La Prensa*. Gorriti's investigative reporting team was responsible for *La Prensa's* reputation as one of the best newspapers in Latin America (Alves 1997).

Professional Ethics

A major focus of LAJP's activities was improving the lax ethical standards of the profession in the region. The leaders of the project raised the issue of professional ethics in their formal and informal meetings with journalists, media educators, and media owners. Every year, the project conducted several training courses on this sensitive issue. One of the major contributions of LAJP was bringing media owners and journalists together in New Orleans in 1993 to produce the first regional ethics code for Central America. CELAP continues to organize training activities on corruption and professional standards for journalists.

There is little doubt that their efforts had positive effects on the problem of corruption in the journalism profession. LAJP highlighted the problem, made journalists discuss it, and encouraged them to rise to higher standards. The ethics code promoted by LAJP was instrumental in bolstering anticorruption programs to eliminate journalistic graft in Honduras in 1993 (Rockwell 1998b) and in Panama in 1995 (Rockwell 1998c). During the mid-1990s, the new code was an inspiration for the journalists fighting to clean up the profession.

LAJP had its most visible effects during the early to mid-1990s. By the late 1990s, as the program was closing, corruption was creeping back into newsrooms in various parts of the region.⁴ In interviews with the evaluation team, Honduran journalists mentioned a rise in corruption, though not to

⁴ Examples include:

- Radio journalist Sandra Maribel Sanchez noted at a Freedom Forum conference in 1999 that the president's office in Honduras had complained about the higher and higher levels of graft demanded by reporters covering the president (Fleiss 1999).
- Media organizations in Guatemala in 1998 were charging NGOs as much as \$5,000 to place articles in the newspaper or on the radio. Such coverage would be presented as news and no mention was made of the exchange of funds (Rockwell 1998a).
- In 1999, Nicaraguan television anchor Danilo Lacayo was involved in a complicated corruption scheme with Nicaraguan Comptroller General Agustin Jarquin Anaya. For political reasons, Jarquin and Lacayo wanted to expose the immense corruption of President Alemán's administration. Jarquin paid Lacayo a regular fee to feature the investigations of his department on Canal 2, Nicaragua's most popular television channel. When the deal was exposed, Lacayo lost his job and Jarquin was prosecuted (Dye, Spence, and Vickers 2000).

Fighting Corruption in Honduras

Honduran journalists were incensed by the suggestion that some of their colleagues accepted gifts and bribes. In the early 1990s, the managing editor of the newspaper *Tiempo* published a list of journalists who had accepted payoffs from the National Election Board. Her decision brought her a death threat from corrupt journalists. She said she denounced her colleagues' lack of ethics because she knew LAJP would support her. The publication of the list prompted a debate among the media and the government about payoffs. One newspaper whose reporter was on the list announced a policy of firing anyone taking bribes. (Heise and Green 1998)

pre-LAJP levels (Rockwell 1998b). Major journalism corruption scandals have been revealed in Nicaragua, and one of LAJP's advisors to the program in El Salvador has also faced criticism for colluding with the government. Corruption also seems to be creeping back into newsrooms in Panama (Rockwell and Janus in press). After the LAJP, no organization promoted the ethics code, and even the alumni of the project forgot about it. For example, when Nicaragua's *La Prensa* wrote a new ethics code for the newspaper in 2001, it used other codes to draft the new standards. However, CELAP has now taken an interest and promoted the code at its biennial congress in 2001 (CELAP 2001).

Many factors and conditions have tempered the impact of LAJP and CELAP on combating corruption in the profession. First, there is an all-pervasive culture of corruption that is deeply embedded in the economic and political institutions of Central American countries (Transparency International 2001). Unless major changes are made in the institutional environment of these countries, it is difficult to change the normative structure in the journalism profession. Second, pay scales for working journalists are relatively low. Often journalists have to struggle to earn a reasonable standard of living.

As a result, quite a few succumb to the temptation to accept monetary rewards in exchange for favorable reporting. The living and working conditions of the journalists have to be improved to raise ethical standards in the profession. Third, media owners and managers themselves are often indifferent to the problem. Often tied to special economic and political interests, they do not give the problem the priority it needs. As a keen observer of the media scene in Central America put it, “Many [media owners] are part of the problem.”

Effects on the Democratization Process

As mentioned above, LAJP was launched in Central America as a wave of democracy was sweeping the region. Many prolonged civil wars had come to a resolution. Ballots, not bullets, had become instruments for changing governments. These changes created a new era for the media. Governments were forced to abolish censorship and their control over the media. The emergence of democracy required public access to information. There was a widespread awareness of the need for free and responsible print and broadcast media. Under these conditions, the training provided by LAJP became both timely and relevant.

LAJP contributed to the democratization process directly and indirectly. By helping journalists and media outlets improve their technical and professional standards, it prepared them for their role in a democratic society. Prior to taking LAJP’s training programs, the majority of Central American journalists were poorly trained and lacked an understanding of the role of the press and the professional obligations of journalists within a free society.

In El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama, where postconflict elections were held to pave the way for peace and democracy, LAJP provided intensive training to journalists for covering elections. It ran country-specific courses, teaching journalists the norms of free and fair elections, the need for balanced coverage, and their role in monitoring electoral events. In all these countries, media training helped improve not only the conduct of the

LAJP’s Contribution to Democracy in Guatemala

In 1993, President Ramiro de León Carpio of Guatemala cited LAJP as one of the forces that inspired journalists to protest against the attempt by former President Jorge Serrano to set aside the country’s constitution and assume authoritarian powers. Journalists in Guatemala were the catalyst that moved mass protests into the streets and caused Serrano to retreat into self-imposed exile. Without media attention, Serrano might have been able to seize extra-constitutional power. President Carpio’s letter still hangs in the dean’s office at Florida International University.

elections, but also the political dialogue among competing political parties. Compared to the 1970s and 1980s, before LAJP and the wave of democratization, political discourse and elections showed marked improvements. CELAP has continued training in this area. It has encouraged in-depth coverage of one Panamanian presidential election and a national plebiscite on constitutional changes for elections.

LAJP directly and indirectly helped newspapers that had been closed down by authoritarian regimes. For example, Panama’s National Guard had closed *La Prensa* and ransacked its offices and publishing plant. After the U.S. invasion of Panama, the program helped with the recreation of *La Prensa*. The paper served as an important voice in the reconstruction of Panamanian democracy.

In addition, the investigative training and ethics codes of LAJP spawned investigative reporting teams at *La Prensa* and at other publications. LAJP was cited as a reason the teams came together. Those investigative teams exposed the connections of candidates to drug cartels, bringing greater transparency to the election process in the 1990s. In Honduras, one of the program’s alumni, a Premios de PROCEPER winner, used a series of investigative reports to expose some of the ties

between the military and the death squads that had terrorized the country in the 1980s.

Journalists trained by LAJP worked to explain the historic changes and shifts in the governments of the region in the 1980s and 1990s. Their reports were instrumental in letting people know about the covert activities of governments during the authoritarian past. In Guatemala, journalists helped galvanize a public response to oppose attempts to return to that authoritarian past.

Although LAJP and CELAP have made significant contributions to the region's march toward democracy, their limitations in shaping the democratization process should not be ignored. Training programs alone cannot transform the media into an instrument of democratic transition and consolidation. In Central America—as in many other parts of the world—the media face many structural barriers and problems that prevent them from playing a more effective role in promoting democracy and individual freedom. These include limited advertising revenues, deficient media laws and regulations, weak judiciaries, state control of the electronic media, oligarchic ownership structures, a subculture of self-censorship created by authoritarian rule, and sensationalism brought on by over-competition in small media markets. Since LAJP and CELAP are unable to remove these barriers, their impact on the growth of independent media and the democratization process is bound to remain limited.

To make the media a more effective tool for the democratization process, a more holistic approach to media assistance may be necessary. Such an approach goes beyond the training and education of journalists. It also focuses on changing laws and regulations governing the media, making media outlets more profitable by improving management and sales, and building support for civil society organizations that espouse a free press and a vibrant civil society.

Factors Affecting the Performance and Impacts of LAJP and CELAP

Several factors contributed to the remarkable success of LAJP and, to a lesser extent, of its successor, CELAP. Perhaps, the most important has been leadership. The leaders of the program were visionary, innovative, deeply committed, and, above all, outstanding managers. They were extremely well informed about the conditions in the region, and they established a remarkable rapport with the journalists, media owners, and educators. They made bold decisions and were not afraid of taking risks. They had a long-term vision of their efforts leading to the establishment of an independent journalism center. Without the leadership of Dean J. Arthur Heise and Professor Chuck Green, the project would not have succeeded.

Another factor was LAJP's attempt to involve Central American stakeholders. FIU constituted an advisory board consisting of media owners, journalists, and educators to guide the project. It selected members who were both committed to the program and willing to give their time to its activities. By reaching out to leaders of the Central American journalism and media community, LAJP established credibility in the region, guaranteed the participation of journalists in training programs, and attracted journalists to its training courses. CELAP has also succeeded in involving different stakeholders in its programs.

Still another factor is LAJP's professional integrity and independence. As mentioned earlier, many educators and journalists in the United States and Central America were concerned that the project was a subtle attempt by the U.S. Government to infiltrate the media and engage in anticommunist propaganda. By seeking written guarantees from USAID and assuring the public that FIU would close the project in case of interference by the government, LAJP established its credentials. The openness and transparency of LAJP convinced the journalists that the program was not tied to a propaganda effort, but rather represented a genuine effort to improve journalistic standards in the region. LAJP could involve the Central American

stakeholders because it did not compromise its integrity and independence.

Another important contributing factor was the relevance of LAJP training to the needs of the journalists and media owners. LAJP fashioned a training program that focused on practical skills relevant to print and broadcast media. It offered courses that taught elementary skills as well as advanced topics such as investigative journalism and electoral coverage. It offered both short- and long-term training programs to suit the needs of different journalists. To make training more accessible, it conducted programs in various countries. LAJP supported the journal *Pulso*, which became a significant journalism review for Central and Latin America. *Pulso* allowed communication with a wide journalistic community and amplified the LAJP's support of professional standards and ethics codes. *Pulso's* role as a journalism review also kept LAJP abreast of issues and needs in the journalism community. CELAP has been following the example of LAJP in developing courses that impart practical skills to journalists.

The project went into operation when the democratization process created unprecedented opportunities for the growth of independent media in Central America. The project contributed to and benefited from the march of democracy.

Because of LAJP's large and assured funding, it not only organized a range of training courses, but it also funded a relatively large number of journalists. It did not have to charge for its courses, a luxury CELAP could not afford. In retrospect, because it did not ask beneficiaries to share training costs and could cast a wide net for recruitment, it established a tradition that has been difficult to match.

The long-term stability of the project also contributed to its success. LAJP originally was planned as a seven-year training initiative, but it was first funded for five years and then extended for three

more. As a result, it functioned as a stable organization for a decade, enabling it to take a long-term view of its activities. It could recruit more qualified staff, as they were assured of long-term employment. It also enabled the project to experiment with new ideas and approaches and learn from experience. Because of its long-term stability, LAJP could develop and implement plans for the establishment of CELAP.

Above all, the timing of LAJP was critical to its success. The project went into operation when the democratization process created unprecedented opportunities for the growth of independent media in Central America. The project contributed to and benefited from the march of democracy.

5. Policy and Programmatic Lessons

This section identifies important policy and programmatic lessons from the Central American experience that can be applied in other developing and transition societies. A caveat is necessary, however. These lessons draw upon a general experience in the region without going into detail about each country. Every country in the region has a different history and culture, and different social and political institutions have affected their media sectors. While most of them experienced political upheavals and turmoil during the 1980s and 1990s, their experiences were very different.

1 **USAID-funded training and outreach programs can help raise the technical and professional standards of journalism, thereby contributing to the growth of independent media in developing countries.**

There is a consensus among the experts, supported by independent assessments, that LAJP made a significant contribution to raising the standards of journalism in Central American countries. LAJP trained thousands of journalists, and they have profited from the training. Its focus on practical skills has been a major innovation in journalism training programs in Central America, and the

approach is being increasingly adopted by journalism institutions in the region. Many of its trainees have been teaching and have even launched their own training programs. The Spanish translations of journalism textbooks that LAJP published are in wide use all over Latin America. CELAP, with its limited resources, is continuing journalism training and networking activities.

2 Well-designed media support projects can promote the democratization process by exposing the misdeeds of authoritarian rulers, increasing public awareness about openness and transparency, and highlighting democracy and human rights.

LAJP's experience indicates the contribution that journalism training programs can make to promote democracy in developing and transition societies. By emphasizing the norms of free press and professionalism, LAJP raised political consciousness among the media community in Central American countries. The alumni of the project undertook investigative journalism projects, thereby exposing the misdeeds of the region's governments and other entrenched interests. Free media in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama registered major gains during the LAJP era or immediately afterward, which can be partly attributed to LAJP. However, there have been some setbacks in press freedom during the past five years.

3 Journalism projects should have built-in safeguards to ensure their transparency and to allay doubts and apprehensions about USAID's intentions. Such safeguards may include USAID granting its partners management autonomy and control over the selection of participants, contents of training, and publications. An independent advisory board can be helpful in this endeavor.

Many journalists and educators expressed serious apprehensions about LAJP's relationship with the U.S. Government. They were concerned that the government might use the media training program

to infiltrate the media, channel funds to pro-U.S. institutions, or engage in subtle propaganda. FIU allayed these fears by

- constituting an advisory committee consisting of eminent journalists and educators to guide the project from its inception
- making a written commitment that it would terminate the project if, at any stage, the U.S. Government undermined the LAJP's political independence
- securing a USAID waiver of oversight in the selection of journalists for training
- securing a USAID waiver authorizing program managers to publish without submitting manuscripts to USAID for approval
- managing the whole program with remarkable transparency and openness

Such safeguards enabled FIU to gain the confidence of journalists and media outlets, contributing to its success. It is important that USAID ensure political integrity of media programs and build necessary safeguards to allay possible misapprehensions about its intentions.

4 Because strong journalism departments in established universities have professors, staff, and technical equipment for imparting practical skills and exposing students to standards of a free media system, they can be valuable partners for USAID in overseas training programs.

The experience of LAJP suggests that strong university journalism departments have several advantages over other NGOs or private firms in providing journalism training. FIU was able to fashion a curriculum and put it into practice quickly. Its reputation enabled it to recruit professionals and academics throughout the hemisphere. Above all, it could ensure the professional integrity of the program. By finding a strong U.S. institution as a part-

ner, USAID was able to avoid the ideological squabbling that still consumes some journalism and communication programs in Latin America and often alienates working journalists (Alves 2002). The lesson is that USAID should consider working with strong university journalism departments that can offer faculties with practical experience and facilities to impart the necessary training.

5 When journalism textbooks are not available in local languages, commissioning new textbooks is helpful in supporting and amplifying training sessions and journalism education. The sale of these newly commissioned texts may prove useful in raising revenue for the program.

An independent assessment of journalism conducted prior to the launch of LAJP cited the lack of practical textbooks for journalists as one of reasons contributing to the poor quality of journalism training and instruction in the region. Some of the textbooks used in the 1980s were simple translations of English-language texts using situations from the United States that made little sense in Central America. LAJP remedied this by publishing 10 new titles for its own and other training and educational programs. The books were in Spanish, and the authors incorporated the experiences and cultures of Latin American journalism into the texts. These books are now used throughout Latin America. The profits from the sales of these books went to the permanent endowment of CELAP.

6 If a USAID program intends to establish a self-sustaining media training organization at the end of the project, USAID should establish an independent center from the beginning and work for sufficient funding and effective functioning of that center.

Although plans for CELAP were part of the initial proposals, leaders of LAJP did not actively begin planning for the independent center until midway through the program. In hindsight, managers of LAJP now realize that a few years of preparation were not enough, and the initiative for establishing

CELAP should have begun immediately. More time would have helped them sell the concept, raise funds, find a suitable location, and build partnerships with a range of media institutions in Central America. Because of the time constraints, program managers could neither raise the resources that were needed to build the new center nor mobilize enough support for it.

7 When establishing a sustainable independent journalism training center, USAID and its partner institution must raise sufficient funds for an endowment to subsidize future training costs when USAID support will no longer be available.

One problem that CELAP has experienced is the difficulty many journalists face paying for seminars and training. Training sessions often cost as much as \$600 plus travel expenses. In many parts of the region, the \$600 registration fee is equal to two months of pay for a typical journalist. Journalists from countries with economic problems, such as Nicaragua and Guatemala, simply cannot afford them. In Central America, many media organizations are unwilling to underwrite or subsidize the cost of training for employees. CELAP has tried to offset this problem by raising funds to subsidize training costs and travel expenses for some journalists. However, its resources are limited because of its small endowment funds. The result is that it is unable to provide the training to journalists from small and relatively poor media outlets, who need its services the most.

The lesson is that in developing societies, an NGO training center cannot charge the full costs of its training provided to participants. Training has to be subsidized in one form or another to reach diverse media outlets. Such arrangements are not unusual. Even in the United States, the Poynter Institute, a highly regarded, privately funded mid-career training initiative, provides subsidized training to journalists. If USAID wants to establish a sustainable media center, it should strive to establish a sufficient endowment to underwrite training and travel costs of participants.

8

The process of recruitment for journalism training initiatives should be managed to ensure transparency and the participation of different ethnic groups and minorities.

The process of recruitment is difficult and must be managed carefully to ensure the participation of a cross section of ethnic and religious groups. Perhaps due to language limitations, the indigenous community in Guatemala was underrepresented in the LAJP training initiative (Rockwell 1998a). Although indigenous media have grown in the wake of Guatemala's peace accords in the past five years, some of this growth could have been amplified with a boost from a program like LAJP. The leaders of CELAP have just begun to see the training of indigenous groups interested in a media presence in Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and elsewhere as a new area of growth.

9

Regional media training programs facilitate interaction among journalists from different countries, thereby contributing to the further institutionalization of standards, skills, and codes of conduct for free media. An effective alumni network is helpful in this regard.

The experience of LAJP also indicates the important contribution that an alumni network can make in promoting free and independent media. LAJP tried to promote an alumni network to promote its training activities, create awareness among journalists of the need for higher standards, and enable them to help each other. Although it was successful, LAJP could have accomplished much more had it put more resources into such efforts. LAJP evaluators suggested the training initiative could have strengthened the alumni outreach and database as a way to extend the impact of the program (Lazar et al. 1991; Janus and Rockwell 1998).

10

Involvement of media owners in journalism training exposes them to the standards of the profession and facilitates the utilization of training skills and expertise gained by journalists in the training initiative.

Involvement of owners also creates understanding between owners and journalists.

Media owners often lack understanding of the norms of the free press and the role of journalists in providing accurate, balanced news and perspectives. Consequently, some owners do not appreciate the importance of sound journalistic practices, which could improve the credibility of their outlets and ultimately increase their profits. Training enterprises such as LAJP can help expose media owners to the norms of a free press. The leaders of LAJP have said for years that if they could start over again they would find ways to engage media owners more intensely and get them to support training and professionalism on a higher level.

11

Corruption in the media sector is a function of various factors, and journalism programs are likely to have a limited impact on reducing corruption. Without legal reforms and structural changes in the political system, training in journalistic ethics tends to have a limited impact because low-paid journalists have both opportunities and incentives to accept bribes.

The LAJP not only conducted seminars on journalistic ethics, it was also instrumental in creating the first regional ethics code for Central America. However, acceptance of the code has not been universal for many reasons. Drafting and promoting such a code is just part of the equation in fighting journalism corruption. Working with owners to increase pay, benefits, or other rewards is also necessary to reduce the vulnerability of journalists to the temptations of corruption in low-wage countries. Equally important are the political and economic stability of the country, prevalent attitudes toward corruption, and the commitment of the media owners to transparency. The experience of LAJP confirms the common sense view that training in ethics and the creation of a code of conduct have, at best, limited impact on corruption in the journalism profession.

Annex1. Principal Contacts

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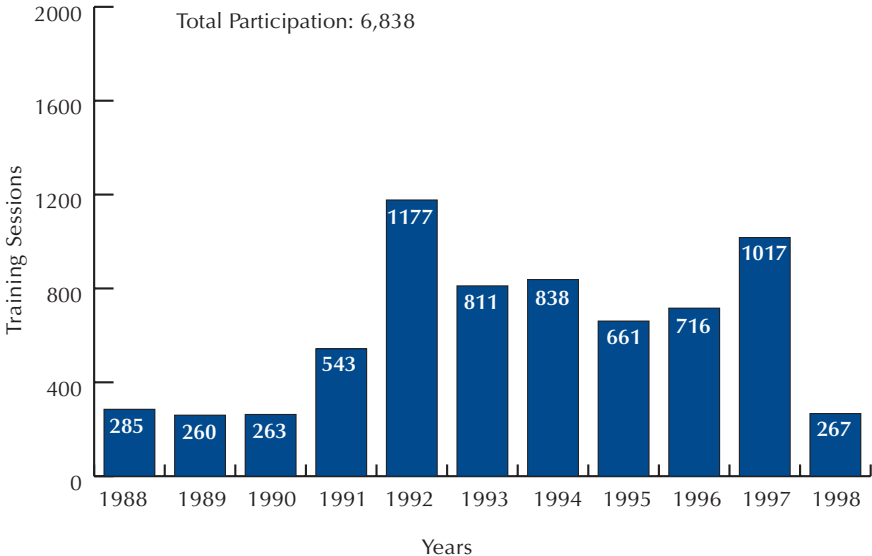
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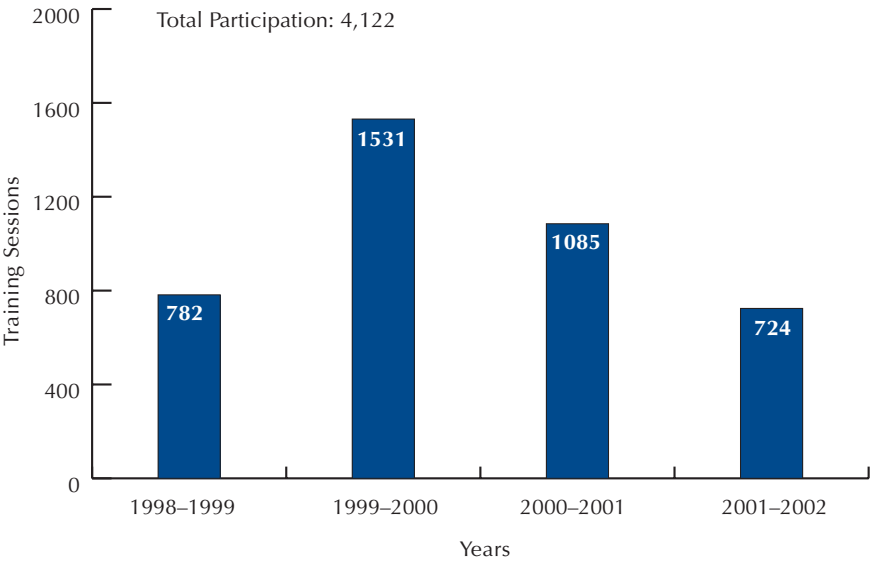
Annex 2. Training Participation

Table 1. LAJP Participation, 1988–1998*



* Totals count the number of participant sessions, not the total number of participants. Totals include CELAP activities in 1997 and 1998. Totals include registrants for CELAP's first Congress of Latin American Journalists in 1997.

Table 2. CELAP Participation, 1998–2002**



** Totals count the number of participant sessions, not the total numbers of participants. Totals include registrants for CELAP's hemispheric conferences in 1999 and 2001.

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