Lab Management

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Hi! I'm Matt Wyszynski . I'm new to the staff of *The IALL Journal*, and I'll be writing this column on Lab Management. After finishing my graduate work at the University of Michigan, I spent two years at The University of Texas—Arlington teaching courses in Spanish literature and Spanish for business. With the help of the staff in U.T.A.'s Language Acquisition Center, I had the opportunity to apply new technologies to classroom and distance instruction. In 1998, I accepted a position at The University of Akron as director of the Language Resource Center and assistant professor of Spanish. We've just finished installing a Sony 8000 audiolab with 25 Dell OptiPlex GX1's integrated with the audio system, and I'll begin workshops next semester so that the faculty here can begin to take full advantage of this new technology.

Please feel free to contact me with any problems or issues that you feel need to be addressed in this column. I look forward to hearing from you!

The SUNY, Stony Brook Language Learning and Research Center Background

By 1994 when Professor and new Director of the Language Learning and Research Center (LLRC), Dr. Mikle Ledgerwood, arrived at Stony Brook (part of the State University of New York System), the University had not had a functioning language center for several years, and all that remained of technological assistance for language learning were two rooms: a broken-down audiocassette laboratory and a lab of original IBM XT computers used primarily by German classes one hour a week. But since second language acquisition has always been an important part of the Stony Brook curriculum and faculty felt that technology was needed to fulfill their instructional aims, the new, state-of-the-art Language Learning and Research Center (LLRC) was born.

Keeping the Old While Building the New

After determining the budget for the LLRC, the next item of business was repairing and upgrading the existing facilities while preparing the new area. The old audiocas-

sette laboratory with its twenty-eight positions and console was repaired over a period of a year and a half (the delay being due to limited resources and conflicting opinions on how it might be most effectively used). The desire to support audio testing and curricular decisions by the English as a Second Language faculty gave the impetus to repair it fully. It remains operational today and is scheduled on a classroom basis. In addition to its audio facilities, it also has a television monitor, a laserdisc player and VCR for using video materials with classes.

The older Computer Assisted Instructional (CAI) facility was also upgraded. The director installed hard drives into fifteen of the twenty-two machines, opened up the laboratory extra hours for German students and made some older German software accessible for use on a library basis. In addition to this German software, materials for Spanish, French, Italian, Russian and Latin were also made available for students to use to practice their written composition on the IBM XTs. An added advantage of maintaining these machines is that with proper software, they can be used to run laser disc players.

While work was proceeding on the new facility over a two-year period, three demonstration computers and a variety of software were purchased for the CAI lab to allow faculty and students to see what was now possible in computer-assisted learning. Not only was this investment necessary in order to keep interest in the LLRC high, but it was also essential for the curriculum of the Doctor of Arts Program in Foreign Languages.

The New LLRC

On March 2, 1996, President Shirley Kenny inaugurated the new LLRC, truly a state-of-the-art facility. The Center consists of two laboratories, two classrooms and the Director's office and its development machines.

The first room one enters is the Audiovisual Laboratory. Like all of the rooms, this lab has soundproofing carpet and sound deadening and follows a color scheme of red, white, and black (the school's colors) in muted shades. The AV lab contains thirty-four audio and VCR carrels, two of which are larger than the others for disabled access, as well as a checkout desk and storage room. The AV carrels are in rows of varying size, allowing traffic to pass through the middle of the room towards the back. Each carrel contains a VCR and television as well as a portable audiocassette recorder with the same features of the built-in audiocassette recorders used in the old Audio Lab. One of the recycled

computers bought in the original stage of the project now occupies one of the larger carrels and has special non-Western fonts.

The checkout desk contains chairs for two assistants and has a checkout computer with barcode wand attached. Behind the desk is a long narrow storage room which contains the high-speed audiotape duplicator, a film projector, camcorders (VHS and 8mm), two portable computers (a Power Macintosh PowerBook and a Windows laptop), two video projection units and an LCD panel, as well as all of the materials available to be used in the LLRC. The materials are heavily concentrated on computer items since video and audio materials are available elsewhere in the library. The shelving in this room is variable to allow for maximum storage flexibility as the quantities of media to be stored changes. The storage area also holds the network hubs for the computer lab. This room has its own door and separate lock, an added measure of security.

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The second lab one enters is the computer laboratory. It has thirty carrels with twenty Power Macintosh 7100s and ten Pentium 75s as well as a workgroup laser printer. All of the Pentiums and five of the Macs have laserdisc players and televisions attached. The computers are networked together using Novell NetWare 4.1 in a local area network and connected to a server housed on the first floor of the library in the Division of Instructional Computing. Thus the computers can be used for local projects by whole classes (using such things as Dedalus Interchange and other conferencing tools) as well as on a library basis for running applications housed locally. These computers can also access the server for Internet and e-mail use, as well as the materials housed there. The Macs have all the security features contained in the system software as well as *At Ease for Workgroups*. The DOS machines are tightly tied into the server and all files loaded on them are erased when the computers are rebooted. Changes to DOS or Windows setup or to the hard drive can only be made by a Novell system administrator. As in the previous lab, the carrels are set up in rows. Other arrangements of furniture were not possible in these two laboratories due to space, facilities, power, and budget constraints. Without dividers separating them and good sight lines, it is still easy to teach an entire class while in the laboratories.

On either side of the laboratories are two classrooms. Each classroom has fifty seats for students and a multimedia cart for instructor presentations. The seats are movable so that instructors can use any type of seating arrangement

needed for classroom activities. In the front of each room is a faculty desk with lectern and chair, and on one side of the room is a small repository for storage of the video projection units. On the other side are the multimedia cart and a 52-inch stereo monitor raised on a specially built unit. A laserdisc player, a Panasonic AG-W1 multi-standard VCR and a Mac 8100 with speakers and a DOS 486/100 card are on a movable cart. The instructor can choose any Mac, DOS, or Windows application as well as the Internet for their teaching materials in these classrooms. Normally the instructor chooses from one of the three image sources available (VCR, laserdisc player, or computer) to display on the large monitor. However, with video projection devices and a built-in screen, two images can be displayed when necessary.

Outside of the Center proper is the office of the Director that also serves as the materials development site. A Mac 8500, scanner and camcorder are available for image and motion video digitizing. A color inkjet printer is attached to an older 840 AV Mac which also has a digitizing card. A Pentium 75 (soon to be upgraded) with its own color inkjet exists for DOS/Windows materials playback and development. The Center contains a wide variety of software for materials creation ranging from the difficult to the more formulaic (mainly in Macintosh format), including Digital Chisel, PhotoShop, Director, and Authorware. Desktop publishing, videocapture and editing, and CD-ROM creation are all part of the work of this area. As is the case with all of the computers in the Center, these are connected to the LLRC's network allowing for printing on the workgroup laser printer.

Conclusion

Several important lessons learned from many different IALL members and IALL publications were incorporated into the design of this LLRC. As Victor Aulestia (Director of the Language Media Center, Univ. of Maryland Baltimore County) said in Boston in 1989, the most important aspect of lab design is allowing for flexibility. Nothing is more important than being ready for change, even in a brand-new facility. Technology does not stand still. Tomorrow's labs will be much different than today's state-of-the-art LLRC at Stony Brook, but this Center has the built-in flexibility necessary to meet the changing needs and resources available in the future. Any carrel in the LLRC can be re-dedicated from one machine to another with very few difficulties. There are no built-in machines in any of the carrels, and the power supplies for the carrels are easily upgradable. Even the furniture is easily removable if carrels, themselves, become out

moded. As new useful technology becomes available, it can be easily incorporated into the facility's labs and the classrooms. The LLRC's design flexibility ensures it can be used in many different ways by faculty and students of today and tomorrow.◆

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