

Regional Reports

Editor's note: the reports in this column were adapted by Journal staff from the regional group newsletters and Web sites.

MWALLT

MWALLT's Fall 2001 conference was held October 19-20 on the campus of Luther College in Iowa. Hosted with great success by Dennis Magnuson and his Language Learning Center staff, the event featured two days of presentations, panels, and extracurricular activities. Our sessions covered a wide range of topics, including DVD applications, course management systems, language center management, wireless technologies, authoring tools, computerized testing, and Web-based multimedia use.

On the second day of the conference, our business meeting was held in conjunction with lunch in a lovely room high on a bluff with enormous glass windows that overlooked the Luther football field. Future MWALL conferences were announced with much applause and anticipation. The Fall 2002 Conference will be hosted by Ron Balko at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. The Fall 2003 Conference will be hosted by Grant Olsen at Northern Illinois University in Dekalb, Illinois. After some discussion, we approved motions to change our organization's acronym to MWALLT and the name to Midwest Association for Language Learning Technology. These changes will both acknowledge our affiliation with IALLT (International Association for Language Learning Technology) and more accurately reflect our mission.

After the meeting, we all returned to the beautiful day and great sessions with some lingering to catch the score of the football game.

For more information about this and other past MWALLT conferences, please consult the MWALLT history Web page

at <http://LanguageCenter.cla.umn.edu/MWALLT/history.html>.

NERALLD

NERALLD held its Fall 2001 meeting at the College of the Holy Cross on November 1st and 2nd. We got off to a great start with the November 1st pre-meeting workshop on "Non-Western Fonts and Unicode". Led by Emmanuel Paris-Bouvret, Manager of Language Instruction Technology at Trinity College, this three hour event gave us an overview of the issues related to multilingual computing and hands-on practice in generating Web pages encoded in non-Western characters.

The meeting itself, focused on "Distance learning and On-line Course Management Tools", was held on November 2nd and featured the following sessions;

The On-Line Module Project: Self-Paced Instruction and Technology
Sarah Lohnes, Center for Education Technology, Middlebury College

A Comparison of Blackboard and Other Online Tools
Cheryl Turner Elwell, Clark University

Comparison of Course Management Tools on the Web
Kara Schwartz, Amherst College

Does it Really Work? Using Software for Lab Management"
Mary Fetherston, University of Rhode Island

The Use of Blackboard for Spanish Composition
Dr. Dorothy Escribano, Worcester State College

Independent Learning via the World Wide Web
Dr. Elizabeth O'Connell-Inman, College of the Holy Cross

WebCT as a Communication Tool in Elementary German
Dan Soneson, Southern CT State University

The Use of FrontPage for Course Web sites
Dr. María Acosta-Cruz, Clark University

The K-12 Perspective
Steven Smolnik, Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium
with Barbara Sawhill, Oberlin College (in absentia)

Many thanks to Mary Morissard-Larkin and her staff for a wonderful meeting.

For information on this and other NERALLD meetings and events, please visit the NERALLD Web site at <http://www.marlboro.edu/~neralld/>. ♦

Conference Reports

ACTFL Report

Mary Morrisard-Larkin, College of the Holy Cross
Iris Myers, Roanoke College
ACTFL affiliate representatives

The annual conference of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages was held November 15-18, 2001 in Washington, DC. In addition to hosting an information booth in the exhibit area, IALLT sponsored three presentations and one interest meeting. Many conference attendees stopped at the booth to learn about our organization and to find out about hardware and software for their language labs. Consequently, a great deal of interest was generated in our publications.

We would like to express our gratitude to Harold Hendricks and Jacqueline Kaminski (outgoing ACTFL representative) for coordinating the information booth, and for helping us become more familiar with our role as the new ACTFL affiliate representatives. We would also like to thank all of our presenters, whose sessions are described below, booth volunteers and most especially all of the IALLT members who stopped by to lend their moral support. We hope to see you at ACTFL 2002 in Salt Lake City!

Computerized Testing: Do the Benefits Outweigh the Costs?

Mary Morrisard-Larkin, College of the Holy Cross

Mary Morrisard-Larkin's session focused on the use of the Web for administering language tests. During the presentation, she explored the benefits and advantages of Web-based testing as well as some of the drawbacks and limitations associated with it. Mary described some of the tests being used at the College of the Holy Cross, pointing out their use of "Quiz Builder," a program that facilitated the creation of multiple-choice, true-false, and one-word fill-in-the-blank type items. She also discussed their use of the University of Wisconsin placement tests. At the conclusion of the session, time was allowed for questions and discussion by session participants.

*The role of
technology in L2
learning in the
L2 classroom*

Reported by Jerry W Larson, Brigham Young University

Yoshiko Mori, Ronald Leow, Georgetown University, Jörg Waltje, Ohio University

Dr. Yoshiko Mori gave a brief overview of the academic technology support structure at Georgetown University and presented a sequence of multimedia Japanese lessons that she recently developed at GU. The product, designed in Libra, integrates video, sound, and various types of text-based interactivity. The different modules were transparent and varied. Dr. Mori explained how the product was developed and how it is used in Japanese courses. Next, Dr. Ron Leow took a different approach. His is a theoretically informed, critical look at how technologically enhanced learning materials affect the learning experience. After examining a number of empirical studies as well as theoretical hypotheses, Dr. Leow emphasized what his own research has underscored: the importance of attention in the learning process. Finally, Dr. Jörg Waltje discussed the pitfalls and breakthroughs he encountered in introducing a QuickTime digital video server at his institution, offering specific solutions for a successful implementation. He went on to show how the audio and video materials are presented to learners and demonstrated how OU's LRC integrates some of the streaming materials with interactive exercises to make the learning experience more effective and enjoyable.

The session offered a welcome variety of approaches to and questions about integrating multimedia and other technologies in the language learning process. The confrontation of practical implementations with theoretical questions and empirical findings provided ample food for thought and discussion, and, naturally, no easy resolution. The confrontation of practical implementations with theoretical questions and empirical findings provided ample food for thought and discussion, and, naturally, no easy resolution.

Reported by Peter Janssens, Georgetown University

*Certifying
Competency in
CALL*

Claire Bradin Siskin & Gisela Hoecherl-Alden

In this session, Claire Bradin Siskin and Gisela Hoecherl-Alden described their efforts to secure funding for and development of a Technology Certificate program for language teachers at the

University of Pittsburgh. The need for such a certificate was born out of the fact that more than 50% of teachers (Goldfield 2001) and that graduate students, too, have poor technical skills. In addition, the presenters suggested that self-evaluation of technical abilities is often overestimated.

Siskin and Hoecherl-Alden detailed the Technology Certificate grant proposal they submitted to a reviewing committee at the University of Pittsburgh. Certification was based not only on the actual completion of the program, but also on a battery of tested competencies. Three skill levels were to be assessed. Level 1: managing computer files; Level 2: creating a simple web page; and Level 3: creating a digital video file. Participants (mainly graduate students) would submit an electronic dossier that would become part of their teaching portfolio. The anticipated benefits of such a certificate include a greater understanding of the capabilities of technologies available, a greater use of authentic materials, enhanced language learning and teaching, and a greater motivation of students to learn a foreign language.

The proposal for developing the certificate was rejected. The reviewers, most of them from the "hard" sciences, felt that such a certificate would only help those who have no technical skills, that only students of a foreign language would benefit from the Technology Certificate program, and that the program would duplicate of other efforts at the University. Siskin intends to resubmit the proposal with some modifications. Hoecherl-Alden is now at the University of Maine and intends to incorporate the program's aims in foreign language teaching methods courses, at the K-12 level in a PMLA co-sponsored program, and as a 4-day, 20 hour intensive workshop for instructors, teaching assistants and professors. Both presenters hinted that further compartmentalization of the skills and competencies as discreet areas could lead to departmental and institutional support for a Technology Certificate program.

Web page for this session: <http://edvista.com/claire/certify.html>

Reported by Michael Heller & Jutta Schmiers-Heller, Montclair State University

IALLT Interest Sessions

The IALLT section was conducted by Jacqueline Kaminski to more than 40 ACTFL participants. After showing attendees the IALLT Web site, the session was opened up to allow everyone to introduce themselves, share experiences using technology and ask questions. Some participants were looking for

information about hardware while others were interested in learning how other schools administered their language labs. Many attendees were also looking for information about activities that they could do with students in the lab, including how they might begin digitizing materials. ♦