

THE CHANGING STATE OF THE LANGUAGE LAB: Results of 1988 IALL Member Survey

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LAB SURVEYS: 1976 versus 1988

Many of us as directors of language learning labs wonder where our labs stand in relation to serving the technology needs of our faculty and student clients. Technology has changed radically in the last decade, as have teaching and learning strategies. The language lab appears to have been eclipsed by other new technologies such as video and computers. Has our institution been able to adjust to these changes and incorporate these changes into the services we provide? Also, how does our service and status within the academic community compare with other labs at other institutions?

Last year, IALL, the International Association for Learning Laboratories, commissioned a survey to get a better look at where language labs in the USA stand, both in service facilities and professional status. IALL President-Elect Ruth Trometer at MIT generated the survey, with input from the Executive Board and other lab directors. The raw data of the IALL Survey was published in the January 1989 edition of *IALL News Review*.

A similar language lab survey was conducted in 1976 by Rhoda Stern of Baruch College. Her results were reported in the two editions of *NALLD Journal* of that year. The two studies yield some interesting glimpses into the changing role and status of the language lab over the last decade.

In reviewing these two studies, several trends emerge. First, today's learning center,

while primarily entrenched in serving foreign and second language programs, is moving towards service to a wider group of academic departments. In addition, all labs are using a greater variety of technology in serving their clients.

A third trend is the improvement of the professional status of the lab director. Not only have salaries risen, but now more directors have advanced degrees, and are in administrative positions rather than academic ones. This evidence would seem to show the growing professional level of the position. At the same time, discrimination against women in lab management positions seems to have abated with a dramatic rise in the proportion of women directors.

The 1976 Stern survey was sent to 150 selected institutions where known labs existed. The 1988 Trometer survey was not only mailed to all American IALL members, but also blindly addressed to "language labs" at 1500 colleges and universities in the country. A total of 376 language labs responded with information about their services. An additional 125 were returned indicating that the institution did not have lab facilities; this data, however, was not used in the survey results.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

While our professional organization changed its name from the National Association for Language Laboratory Directors to the International Association for Learning Laboratories over the last decade, the majority of the institutions responding still call their facility "the language lab." As seen in Figure 1, in 1988, 59.3% still use that term compared to 79.8% in 1976. Another 16% in 1988, have merely changed the term "lab" to "center"; language is still clearly in the title. Those "labs" using the terms "media" or "resource center" have doubled over the last 12 years from 7.9% to 16.5%. Another 6.7% have other names altogether. The growing variety in unit names indicates that many labs now offer both a wider range of technologies available, and serve a wider client base beyond languages.

Figure 1. Facility Title

| Lab Name Used: | 1976 | 1988 |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| Language Lab | 79.8% | 59.3% |
| Language Center | 4.5% | 16.0% |
| Learning Lab/Center | 5.6% | 0.0% |
| Media Resource/Center | 7.9% | 16.5% |
| Other | 3.3% | 6.7% |

LAB TECHNOLOGIES AVAILABLE

Today, as indicated in Figure 2, fewer labs now seem to limit their learning technology to audio. In 1976, 53.9% were audio-only labs. Although this question was not asked in 1988, we can see by the increased use of non-audio technologies that perhaps only about 17.8% of

the labs surveyed are restricted to audio alone. The heaviest use of another medium was videotape. Since only 17.8% reported no video per se, one might deduce that this group has audio-only labs. The actual audio-only percentage might even be lower since some labs may have projection media or computers, but no video.

Considering new hardware technologies available in labs today, video and computers are clearly the most widely used. In 1976 only 32.6% had video machines in the lab. Today this has more than doubled with 68% reporting video equipment. In addition, 17.6% have satellite receivers available, and 11.8% are incorporating interactive videodiscs. No one reported computer equipment in the labs in '76, today 57.2% of the labs have computers.

Other traditional non-audio media technologies are also more widely available at the labs in 1988. In the Stern study, only 13.5% reported use of slides, filmstrips and films collectively. In the IALL study, 55.6% now have projection equipment available for slides, 44.9% for filmstrips, 38.6% for film, and 39.6% for overheads.

These statistics indicate only lab equipment. In another section of the 1988 survey, respondents were asked to tally the amount of media materials used by their faculty. These figures seen in Figure 3 show even higher use of these new technologies. Here 73.6% reported some use of video materials. Apparently some labs, while not having equipment, do provide access to materials or programs, possibly served by other campus services. Also, 24.3% reported interactive audio use, 11.7% interactive video, and 20.4% satellite program use.

The more recent interactive technologies and satellite reception are increasingly used in labs, and others noted plans for purchasing such equipment.

Figure 2. Lab Equipment and Services

| Lab Technology Available | 1976 | 1988 |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| Audio only | 53.9% | 17.8% |
| Audio cassette players | NA | 96.0% |
| Lab console | NA | 71.0% |
| Slides/filmstrip/film | 13.5% | NA |
| Slides | NA | 55.6% |
| Filmstrip | NA | 44.9% |
| Film | NA | 38.6% |
| Overheads | NA | 39.6% |
| Videotape | 32.6% | 68.0% |
| Videodisc | NA | 13.4% |
| Computers | NA | 57.2% |
| Interactive video | NA | 11.8% |
| Interactive audio | NA | 13.6% |
| Satellite receiver | NA | 17.6% |

Computers are also being used to organize the centers. The computer is also being used to catalog resources by 34% of the 1988 respondents.

Figure 3. Media Materials Used in 1988 only:

| | Videotape | Computers | Interactive Audio | Interactive Video | Satellite |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| None | 17.8% | 33.3% | 59.8% | 72.3% | 65.7% |
| Light | 17.8% | 26.6% | 10.4% | 7.4% | 10.6% |
| Moderate | 34.3% | 18.9% | 8.0% | 2.7% | 6.6% |
| Heavy | 21.5% | 10.9% | 5.9% | 1.6% | 3.2% |

DISCIPLINES SERVED BY THE LAB

The language lab has opened up to other departments, yet most language labs continue to serve largely foreign languages and English as Second Language. There are fewer exclusively foreign language labs (61.7% in '76 and only 45% in '88). While use by others has grown from 12.4% to 38.3%, only 13.8% reported equal use by others with the foreign languages. Thus, 83.3% of the labs have language faculty as their most frequent clients.

Figure 4. Departments Using Facility

| Disciplines Served | 1976 | 1988 |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Foreign Languages/ESL only | 61.7% | 45.0% |
| Foreign Languages/ESL/others | 12.4% | 38.3% |
| Others equally as language | 24.7% | 13.8% |
| Other groups | 2.2% | 1.1% |

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Cataloging of materials:

The 1988 survey yielded some interesting information on how labs are handling questions of cataloging their materials and dealing with the complexities of copyright. In Figure 5, of those using computers 26% of

IALL Survey

labs report use of data base programs and another 8% indicate use of a mainframe computer system to automate their listing and cataloging of materials. Typed lists (40%) still seem the main source of information, with 35% using card catalogs.

Figure 5. *Methods of Cataloguing*

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| None | 27% |
| Typed lists | 40% |
| Card files | 35% |
| Database | 26% |
| Mainframe | 8% |

Copyright policies:

Lab directors report a wide latitude in terms of copyright policies and practices as seen in Figure 6. While 42% indicate that their institution has approved a copyright policy, another 31% report that guidelines are used in place of a firm policy. Another 19% state that no policy is in place at their institution. The disparity of responses here again underscores the difficulties educators are experiencing in dealing with the complex problem of interpreting and following copyright policies within educational settings.

Figure 6. *Institutional Copyright Policy*

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| Policy in place | 42% |
| Guidelines only | 31% |
| No policy | 19% |
| Unsure | 7% |
| No response | 1% |

The more specific question about obtaining permissions for "backup" copies of materials again shows the lack of consistency among language labs. That a large number did not

respond to these three questions also indicates a lack of clarity on the issue of copyright. For permissions for audio, video and computer back up copies, Figure 7 indicates that almost as many labs do not request permissions as labs that do. Only with audio are there significantly more who obtain permissions (49%), than those who do not (34%). It is not clear whether those who made no response to the question of backups for video and computer materials do not use these materials or are simply reluctant to admit illegal practices.

Figure 7. *Permissions for Backup Copies*

| | Audiotape | Videotape | Computer Disk |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| Yes | 49% | 23% | 19% |
| No | 34% | 21% | 15% |
| Not apply | 6% | 29% | 34% |
| No response | 11% | 27% | 42% |

GENDER, ROLE, STATUS AND SALARY FOR DIRECTORS

In the last 12 years, the balance between men and women serving as lab directors has improved considerably. As seen in Figure 8, women now make up 43.4% of the total number of lab directors as compared to only 27.2% in 1976. While not yet equal in numbers, this ratio surpasses the male/female ratio of faculty and administrators on most college campuses. Interestingly, along with this sexually liberating phenomenon, the number of directors of undeclared sexual gender has decreased over the same period, down from 2.2% to just 1.3%.

The greying of the profession seems as evident in this field as in other academic fields. In 1976, the average length of service in the position was just 5.3 years. Today 37% of the

directors report they have served over 10 years, and another 20.5% over 5 years.

Besides growing older, the professional status of lab director seems to be increasing as well. One sign is that more directors are now appointed to positions in the institutional administrative hierarchy rather than fulfilling oversight or caretaker roles as an adjunct to faculty appointments. Today, 62.7% of the lab directors have administrative appointments in contrast to just 34.5% in 1976. Only 42.6% have academic appointments compared to 50% in 1976.

A second related indication of the growing professional status in the director's position is a shift towards reporting to higher level administrators. While few directors report to Vice Presidents (2.1% in both studies), today many more report to College Deans rather than to department chairs. In 1976, the majority of directors (62.8%) reported to chairs, while today only 37.5% do. Instead 28.9% report to a Dean, and 18.8% report to the Director of Libraries, AV or some other service unit. This movement to higher reporting authority reflects increased independence of the labs. They are now moving out of the domain of language departments towards a separate identity as an independent unit, one that makes its own decisions on budget, staff and other administrative matters.

Also indicative of the increased professionalism of today's lab directors is the doubling of the number of PhD's among them. In 1976 just 22.8% held the PhD degree while now 43.95% have the doctorate. Those with Master's degrees has also grown from 22.8% to 33.5%.

In spite of the increased professional status of most lab directors, it appears that many still wear many different "official" hats. Of those responding to the recent survey, only 13.3% reported full time lab work; 50.3% teach foreign language as well; 8% teach educational technology courses; 27.2% manage other AV/TV services on campus; and 8.5% are attending graduate school.

Figure 8. Profile of the Lab Director

| Lab Director Status | 1976 | 1988 |
|--|----------|-------|
| Male | 70.6% | 55.3% |
| Female | 27.2% | 43.4% |
| Undeclared | 2.2% | 1.3% |
| Years on the Job* (median = 5.3yrs.) | | |
| <1 year | | 8.2% |
| 1 - 5 years | | 31.9% |
| 6 - 10 years | | 20.5% |
| >10 years | | 37.0% |
| Salary (1976)* | | |
| Male median = | \$14,888 | |
| Female median = | \$13,325 | |
| Salary (1988) | | |
| <\$5,000 | | 3.5% |
| \$5,000-10,000 | | 3.7% |
| \$10,000-20,000 | | 16.0% |
| \$20,000-30,000 | | 34.0% |
| \$30,000-40,000 | | 29.0% |
| \$40,000-50,000 | | 8.5% |
| >\$50,000 | | 1.6% |
| Education | | |
| Ph. D. degree | 22.8% | 43.9% |
| In doctoral studies | 15.2% | 3.5% |
| M.A. or M.S. degree | 22.8% | 33.5% |
| B.A. or B.S. degree | 10.9% | 10.9% |
| Less than B.A./B.S. | 7.6% | 6.6% |
| Appointment Type | | |
| Academic | 50.0% | 42.6% |
| Administrative | 34.5% | 62.7% |
| Reporting Line | | |
| VP/Provost | 2.1% | 2.1% |
| Dean | 11.7% | 23.9% |
| Assoc./Asst. Dean | 1.1% | 5.0% |
| Language Dept. Chair | 62.8% | 37.5% |
| Other (AV, Library, etc.) | 5.3% | 18.8% |

* Data for years of service and salary ranges were not gathered in the 1976 survey. Only the median length of service and male and female salaries are available.

IALL Survey

Yet another sign of growth in status is increased salaries for directors. While a comparison with salaries in other academic fields is needed, the wages reported in 1988 certainly represent an improvement in status and reward for many lab directors. The median salary for male directors in 1976 was \$14,888, and \$13,325 for women. Today, 34% earn between \$20-30,000; 29% earn between \$30-40,000; and 10.1% earn more than \$40,000. The number receiving over \$40,000, however, may be more an indication of the years spent on the job, or the fact that the scope of lab director duties has also increased, such as also directing media services or serving as a language department chair.

Almost 20%, unfortunately, take home less than \$10,000 for their work as lab directors. I would expect that, these salaries are for part time non-professional staff in small labs, or are partial payments to faculty who also teach. Overall, there appear to be substantial gains in salary for many lab directors, gains that would appear to reflect growing salaries in many other academic fields as well.

CONCLUSION

While many have predicted the demise of the old language lab, data from this survey shows continuing support for the lab, not only for traditional audio facilities, but also

for a growing variety of new technologies. The Language Resource Center of today seems to be moving towards becoming a more flexible service center, one for a wider variety of users as well. They serve both independent study use in the lab, and classroom media needs as well.

Most significantly, lab directors are rising above the level of being mere custodians of equipment and tape services. Most remain strongly involved in language programs, yet they are also achieving increased professional roles. They are becoming middle level managers and instructional consultants to the faculty, whom they now can serve with a wider variety of technological choices.

REFERENCES

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NOTE: The raw data from the IALL Survey is available on data disk for any IALL member who wishes to search for additional information and correlations. To obtain a copy of this information [in Mac Filemaker format], please send a blank disk to IALL Publications Chair, Frank Ryan, Language Lab, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912. Your professional obligation, however, will be to share the information you obtain. Write up a short paragraph indicating the questions you asked along with what you found and mail to Read Gilgen, editor of The IALL Journal.