

# THE LANGUAGE LAB AS LIBRARY: THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON EXPERIENCE

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The Language Lab. Whether those words conjure an image of a sleek modern facility, replete with satellite dish, or a musty room crammed with graffiti-covered carrels, language labs have been a part of the educational scene for more than two generations. Using technology to teach languages received a boost during World War II when machines were used to speed training in language skills necessary for the war effort. The late 1950s and most of the 1960s brought an emphasis on space, science and catching up to Russians which, aided by liberal NDEA funding, saw language labs proliferate on college campuses. Labs were perceived as instruments to apply scientific knowledge to language instruction and give students, no matter how geographically isolated, exposure to native speakers. They "symbolize a new era in which technology came riding to the rescue of the teaching profession." (Harding and Rodgers 1985)

Educational literature at this time reflected a flurry of study and activity in this area. Article after article was published on which technologies could best be used in language instruction. Greater numbers of articles appeared as directors shared strategies to encourage, coax, and assist instructors to use the technology.

However by the late 1970s, articles virtually disappeared from the literature, just as language labs themselves languished, often

dying slow deaths due to under-funding. After the initial excitement, instructors discovered that dull programs did no more to entice students to study than dull lectures. Some sided with Capretz who felt learning in labs wasn't improved because students didn't hear their mispronunciations and, instead, kept reinforcing errors. Others, such as Harding, noted that equipment problems and the amount of work (by instructors) kept labs from being used as fully and completely as possible. Too often lack of funding, particularly in an era of staffing cuts, led to the lab's demise. Decreased funding also meant labs couldn't keep up with technological changes.

Indeed, in 1969, Capretz saw these changes in technology as aiding the death of language labs. For example, he predicted that cassettes would cause the downfall of labs because sound quality wouldn't be as good and foresaw labs checking out portable audio equipment that students would use for other purposes. In the same

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way, he felt video's sound was too poor and educational television would only promote production of poor quality materials. (Capretz 1969)

In reality, the opposite occurred. In a 1976 survey of 40 college and university language labs, Edward Stack discovered that rather than hastening its demise, new technologies were revitalizing language labs. "... technical progress in the field of electronics presented teachers with new and nearly irresistible opportunities for audio-visual reinforcement of instruction." (Stack 1977)

These "new and irresistible opportunities" drew the attention of other departments, encouraging growth and sending language labs in new directions. Rather than signaling the end of language labs, new technologies gave language labs life and visibility. "Other departments have discovered the efficacy of the laboratory concept, and are using it on a regular basis." (Stack 1977) He further found that this broadened use resulted in the language lab becoming an independent university-wide facility, accompanied by a name change to herald this new focus. Yet, Stern's study of the same time found that 53.9 percent of language labs were still audio only and only 42.7 percent did, indeed, serve more than foreign language, English as a Second Language, and a few select departments. (Stern 1976)

Learning Support Services at the University of Wisconsin - Madison mirrors this pattern. Begun as a branch of the Spanish Department, the Language Labs soon became an independent department serving all foreign languages. Increasing audio production and a fledgling interest by non-language departments in the College of Letters and Science fostered a name change to Labs for Recorded Instruction. As use broadened and new technologies were added, the name was changed to Learning Support

Services (LSS) in 1986.

The evolution of the UW's LSS also illustrates a less documented aspect of language lab history. In providing technology for instruction, Learning Support Services also developed an extensive library. Production of original materials and purchase of tapes to accompany texts resulted in a growing audio collection. The LSS was not alone in this; "large laboratories tend to have extensive libraries of materials on many topics and in many languages." (Stack 1977)

The UW's LSS also had an audio studio, not only for producing original materials but also for preparing or adapting commercial tapes for use on a dial access system. Thomas R. Goldsworthy, director from 1957-1978, remembers "I realized that unless there was some easy and positive way for both the teacher and the students to correlate the exercises on the tapes with the specific pages in their textbooks, they could not and would not use the tapes efficiently and effectively."

Goldsworthy was not alone in seeking ways to provide access to his growing collection. The Association for Educational Communications and Technology, in 1971, published "Standards for Cataloging Non-print Materials," a revision of an earlier Division of Audio Visual Instruction document. Many language labs, though, found traditional cataloging systems too restricting. "Limited subject matter, however, made impractical the use of Dewey or LC numbers." (Rodriguez-Nieto 1985)

Instead, Goldsworthy devised an original cataloging system, the "Tape Index Correlation Code" (TICC). Such a cataloging system, according to Mildred Lyle, acquisitions librarian from 1967-1984, supported the department goal "to produce detailed written information about the contents of the recording to facilitate the use of the materials, not only by teachers who ordered or recorded the tapes, but also by teachers

using textbooks other than one from which they were recorded."

Goldsworthy created a cataloging system consisting of a two letter code for the language, i.e. GR for German or FR for French. This is immediately followed by a 1, 2 or 3 to designate the material's difficulty and then an accession number within that category. Following that came the reel number within the set, then a band number for the spot on the reel. Thus, SP1.007.12, band 3 means that the material with this number is a beginning Spanish tape, the seventh series purchased for beginning Spanish. The recording is the twelfth reel and the third selection on that reel.

All open reel audio tapes were customized to have white leader between each selection. Instructors could then easily fast forward by counting the white bands to the part of the reel containing the needed dialogue or exercise. In addition, the reels were split into smaller segments for mounting on the dial access system students used for listening and recording.

Detailed contents guides, called "TICC Guides," were prepared for each set of tapes. Karen Tusack, former student employee and now LSS Micro Training Coordinator, recalled that producing guides was a time consuming process. Exact times and descriptions of each portion of every reel were collected, guides for the entire set were typed and then distributed to binders in all language departments. Each week, the appropriate information for assigned tapes was put into a study guide, distributed to instructors and placed in all dial access carrels.

The TICC System was recognized and studied at other universities because Goldsworthy envisioned that wider adoption of this system would "... enable exchange of tape information between schools." (Lyle letter). For example, Boston University developed their cataloging system as "... a modification of the University

of Wisconsin Tape Index Correlation Code." (King 1978).

Early on some departments had discovered that Learning Support Services provided technologies and services they could use. The Music Department used the listening labs for students taking an Introduction to Music course. The ability to break musical works into segments made it easier for students to study specific movements over and over. On occasion, they used the classroom concept to administer exams. For several years, the dial access segments could even be accessed via telephone from home or dorm.

By the 1980s, however, the UW's language labs fit Stack's description of a complacent lab. Its obsolete equipment was well-maintained, thanks to full time technicians, with new pieces being added as budgets permitted. (Stack 1977)

In the mid-1980s, the Wisconsin Legislature tried to remedy years of under-funding with special allocations for lab modernization. Although the legislature probably had chemistry labs in mind, LSS Director Read Gilgen succeeded in gaining a share of that funding and in 1986 the first of several remodeling stages was completed. That fall, a "grand opening" highlighted the SONY LLC5510 cassette-based lab system in spacious labs, complete with carpeting, new carrels and comfortable seating.

While the lab modernization provided visible new equipment and updated facilities, less obvious changes had prepared the way for Learning Support Services to take its place among the UW's "real" libraries.

Before the 1986 switch to a completely cassette-based system, cassettes had begun to be integrated in the collection. High speed duplicators made it possible to have large quantities of cassettes available for checkout. Students had stereos with tape players, portable cassette players, and

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boomboxes. All were more convenient than the outdated open reel dial access system being used in the labs.

However, before a completely cassette-based lab system could be used, LSS needed an online circulation system to handle the volume. Since the TICC catalog system couldn't use the turnkey system many libraries favored, LSS librarian Carol Block developed a PC-based circulation system using KnowledgeMan, a commercial database program. Barcodes gave each individual cassette a unique identity. This customized approach meant the system could recognize and handle multiple copies with the same call number. Also, a vast part of the collection was uncataloged, having only a barcode number. Thus rather than having huge amounts of language- and lesson-specific tapes on hand, these cassettes were recorded for whichever lesson was in demand and then when returned were recycled for some other lesson.

LSS staff began testing the circulation system in January of 1985 when only about 1,700 cassettes were circulated. In a concentrated effort over semester break, student employees barcoded all cassettes and created a database. The online system was run both with card check out and computer check out until fall of 1985 when the card system was completely overwhelmed by the volume of cassette circulation. At that time, students were working until midnight at times in a futile attempt to keep up with the manual system. Finally, around midterm, the card system was abandoned, and 11,000 cassettes were circulated that semester. Thus, by the fall of 1986 when the new labs opened with just cassettes, LSS had a circulation system which could handle the volume. In the years since, Karen Tusack has networked the system to improve efficiency. Currently, some 26,000 cassettes are circulated during the fall semester.

Despite these innovations, the LSS might

have remained an isolated part of the university, serving primarily language departments. However, another growing technology, video, propelled it into the main stream of library service. Even in 1976, Stack noted that "videotape material is rapidly gaining favor." (Stack 1977)

Gilgen had been searching for a way to expand video services. In 1983 a grant-funded studio owned by the School of Social Work lost its funding and the dean was persuaded to allow LSS to assume its operations. The Video Resource Center added studio production facilities, editing and onsite taping to its list of services. As a result, many more classes began to use video. Indeed, LSS reflected Lawrason's 1986 survey of International Association of Language Labs members that found that 68 percent used videos.

Consolidated purchase and handling of non-print materials had the firm support of the College of Letters and Science administration. They saw a value in centralized media service and encouraged departments to use LSS for acquisition, processing and storage of materials. LSS staff also protected the copyright of materials and generated public relations to increase video use. Its audio-visual equipment pool, plus the easy access to materials, made it a source of "one stop shopping" for instructors.

Since LSS is housed in the same building as the language departments, these were the first instructors to request video materials for the LSS collection. In 1985, LSS had a mere 16 video titles in its collection. The new lab facilities, however, encouraged individual viewing with 20 carrels for that purpose. Videos could be assigned for individual research or professors could videotape lectures in advance and place them on reserve.

The "explosion" of the collection, if it can be called that, began when professors successfully wrote grants, increasing the

collections by hundreds of videos at a time. Professors needing films for research and teaching found that renting foreign films in 16mm format was expensive, whereas they could instead purchase them in video format for much less. A systematic and sometimes overwhelming movement continued until, currently, the collection has 2,682 video titles.

At the same time, the new physical facilities of the labs enabled LSS staff to mount an energetic outreach program, working with professors to encourage use of video in large enrollment classes. Since the one copy of a video couldn't be taken to all sections of an introductory course with several hundred students, the console system of the SONY lab was used to continuously broadcast an assigned video. Students came to the same lab as for audio materials, but, instead, sat down to watch a video and listen through headphones. By 1991, French, German and Italian instructors were showing videos to large enrollment classes every moment the labs were open. Indeed, this had become so popular that time slots had to be "rationed" to languages based on enrollment.

Currently LSS is installing a mini-cable system which can route up to nine sources to over 30 individual video carrels. Much like the old dial access system for audio tapes, students can sit at a booth and "tune in" to any of the available programs at their convenience. In addition, each carrel contains its own VCR for viewing of individual tapes. This offers greater flexibility for students and instructors in scheduling and viewing videos for course assignments.

Videos and other materials were now being purchased year round, making the paper catalog instantly obsolete. Many of the foreign films had a wide interest beyond the language departments because they were in English, were by famous directors or were classical films studied by the Theatre and other departments. Some non-language

departments, such as Folklore and History, also added to the collection; several PBS videos were also purchased.

Thus, owning such a vast collection was one thing; making certain it was used well was quite another. At a university the size of UW-Madison, it was impossible to know which professors would be interested in new video acquisitions, and getting the word out using the paper-based TICC system was simply unfeasible. The TICC system, too, didn't denote formats, although this was indicated in a paper catalog listing that was published each year. In short, the collection was growing far more rapidly than its use.

LSS staff decided to add the collection to the Networked Library System (NLS), the university-wide online library catalog. Since LSS's TICC system is incompatible with Library of Congress cataloging, the acquisitions librarian determined that initial access would be by subject. Other cataloging information would enable a person using NLS to search for titles, directors, language, etc. The project, begun in late 1989, continues, with all but 10 percent of the LSS video collection currently in the system.

Having the LSS video collection on NLS means greater use by non-language faculty and students since anyone with access to the university library's database can discover its holdings. However, since these holdings are also on OCLC, but not circulated off campus, frustrations do occur with potential interlibrary loan borrowers.

LSS, as a department, gains greater exposure as people see the department listed as a source of non-print materials. Eventually all the collection will appear on NLS and it can then be used as the basis for an online catalog. Currently, an NLS terminal in the lab housing the videos is slowly "weaning" users from the paper copy of the catalog. Instructors can also access the NLS via modem from their offices. Future plans call for an online reservation system to be

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added to the circulation system so instructors can schedule use of video for a class and not be surprised by the video being checked out to someone else.

LSS continues to maintain a separate identity as the non-print media center for the College of Letters and Science. However, the growing size of the collection and its growing use by all segments of university place it squarely in the library community. From a "room full of machines," Learning Support Services has come to be an important source for unique non-print materials on the University of Wisconsin campus.

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