

# Lab Management

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## A Technological Excavation...

Sometimes being a lab director reminds me of being an archeologist. Take this morning, for example. I was looking through articles I've saved over the years that deal with technology in foreign language learning and was struck by the age of some of the "artifacts" I discovered. Many of the topics (the "artifacts") have survived over the last two to three decades without deteriorating into the soils of "file 13"! Even in today's multimedia age topics from the past are still alive and kicking; in particular, the "Neanderthal" audio cassette is the most enduring of all—so enduring, in fact, that its distribution to students was a common topic of discussion over coffee at the '93 IALL conference in Lawrence. Though many directors had different ideas about ways to distribute tapes to students, the consensus was that a good distribution system is still a basic necessity in any language media center. Some directors are desperately searching for efficient ways to distribute tapes to students; others have found a comfortable solution for their own setting; and still others believe in constant flexibility and adjustment. The bottom line: a distribution system is relative to each university's capabilities, and the best system is whatever works for you.

As you decide how to distribute tapes to students or to revise a tape distribution system, consider the following questions when selecting the appropriate system:

- **How is your lab funded?**

You need to consider your budget or resource for funds and determine whether or not it can permit the purchase of cassettes in bulk and the purchase of equipment necessary for tape duplication.

- **What type of equipment do you have?**

A high-speed duplicator capable of producing multiple copies is necessary for coping with time constraints and with the volume of copies needed for a successful cassette exchange program. Equally important is whether or not

you have equipment that permits students to listen to tapes in the lab setting.

- **How many students do you serve?**

Of course, the number of students you serve will determine the number of tapes you need to make available. If you have a large number of students and a small lab, you may not be able to handle a large influx of students who wish to complete assignments in the lab setting. And, too, recording tapes for exchange systems will require either keeping a large number of pre-recorded cassettes on hand or duplicating a large number of cassettes on demand.

- **What are your faculty's preferences?**

For example, does your faculty wish to have students focus their attention on listening comprehension in the lab, or are they comfortable with students listening to tapes in other environments?

- **Do you have student workers?**

Student workers can assist in the duplication and exchange process. If you have only a few student workers, you must consider other strategies, such as having students record their own tapes.

- **Do you have adequate space to store excess blank or duplicated cassettes?**

Sometimes an exchange program may create a large surplus of cassettes in the lab. In such instances, you must be prepared to store these tapes in a safe and organized manner.

- **For what tapes do you have duplication permission?**

To distribute tapes to students, you must have permission from the publishing company, no matter which system you choose to follow.

I recently asked LLTI list members to describe how they distribute audiotapes to students. Institutions large and small responded, providing me with some very helpful and interesting information concerning their labs and their tape distribution systems. Perhaps you will recognize your own system or one that is of interest to you.

## Smaller Schools

Approximately 1,400 students attend Rhodes College in Memphis with 450 – 500 students enrolled in language courses. No lab fee is required, since the lab is funded by a departmental budget. The lab has only four audio carrels available, making in-lab assignments difficult; therefore, tape duplication is crucial. Students may bring in 90-minute cassettes and have lessons duplicated by staff using a SONY CCP 110/

112 duplicator equipped with one master and three copy positions. (Marjorie Stoner, *stoner@vax.rhodes.edu*)

**Colorado College** in Colorado Springs has 1,900 students. As with Rhodes, there is little audio lab equipment available for students, and no lab fee is charged. Fortunately, each language class has a limit of 25 students. This limit on enrollment is a big help for the media center, allowing them to prepare a maximum of 30 student tape sets for each course. Most sets are placed in vinyl albums; smaller sets of two to three tapes are put in individual cases that are rubber-banded together. Students sign out one set for the duration of their course and return it before taking the final exam. Personal copies for students are made if they bring in blank tapes. (Marni Armstrong, *marmstrong@cc.colorado.edu*)

Though a larger institution, the **University of California at Irvine** has a system similar to that of Colorado College. Tapes are checked out by sets for the entire quarter. A drawback is that checking out the entire set means that students are more likely to lose some of the tapes and have to pay for replacements. The upside is that they have to come in only twice—once to check out the tapes and once to return them! (LeeAnn Stone, *lstone@benfranklin.hnet.uci.edu*)

**Luther College** in Decorah, Iowa, has a total enrollment of 2,400 students with 700 enrolled in language courses. In their Language Learning Center, students are charged an annual \$2.00 fee the first time they come in for a tape. Throughout the semester they swap tapes as needed, and at year's end the tape is theirs to keep. Fees collected pay for the tapes and the maintenance/replacement of duplication equipment. (Dennis Magnuson and Marcia McKelvey, *magnusde@luther.edu*)

## Larger Schools

**Temple University** in Philadelphia has had the same "recycle" system for 20 years! To cover tape and staff costs for some 2,500 students, the lab sells \$5.00 coupons redeemable for tapes. The lab receives permission from publishers to make two tapes at a time for each student enrolled in a course. Students check out their tapes, then return them to the lab to be recycled. Tapes are erased and redubbed using two SONY CCP-13 duplicators with three copy positions each; since the lesson numbers on the tape labels are penciled in, they can be erased easily and changed as needed. (Robin Lawrason, *Lawrason@vm.temple.edu*)

The **University of Arkansas** in Fayetteville has approximately 2,300 students enrolled in language courses. In the

College of Arts and Sciences, each student is charged an \$11.25 lab fee per language course. A portion of the lab fees supports three distribution systems. Students may listen to the tapes in the lab, or bring in a new cassette and exchange it for a take-home copy (the tape is theirs to keep), or bring in a cassette and have a particular chapter recorded. For duplicating purposes, a Sony CCP 1300/1400 duplicator with 7 copy positions is used. (Linda Jones, [lj27524@uafsysb.uark.edu](mailto:lj27524@uafsysb.uark.edu))

Bruce Parkhurst reports a slightly different twist at **Boston University**. Here, there is neither a fee system nor a tape exchange program; students can listen to tapes in the lab or duplicate tapes themselves on cassettes they provide. The lab prepares a "fast copy master" for students, who may make a 20-minute appointment or take their chances on a walk-in basis to make take-home copies. Two SONY CCP-200 duplicators with one copy position each are available for students to use. Even with 3,700 language students per semester, their system is very successful! (Bruce Parkhurst, [brucep@acs.bu.edu](mailto:brucep@acs.bu.edu))

The **University of Florida** in Gainesville has a huge elementary language program with 1,500 students alone in first-year Spanish courses! As with the schools mentioned above, students may listen to tapes in the lab, exchange tapes or have tapes duplicated, depending on the language they are studying. However, a couple of procedures make these activities a bit easier. Student workers prepare sets of copies to use as masters and in-center tapes. If the original is an odd length, for example 23:42 on side A and 33:15 on side B, a master copy is made on a 90-minute cassette so that Side A begins at the beginning of Side A and Side B begins at the beginning of Side B. This copy allows you to record both sides of the student copies at the same time. Also, tapes are given color-coded labels based on language and level, and are placed in color-coded bins to make their retrieval easier. (Judy Shoaf uses LabelMaker Pro for DOS to make labels.) Exchange tapes are also recycled; the tapes are erased and are sorted by language, course, and tape length. Since the labels list all the lessons in the course, the number of the old lesson is crossed out, and the newly recorded lesson is easily circled when the tape is recorded or redubbed. (Judy Shoaf, [jshoaf@clas.ufl.edu](mailto:jshoaf@clas.ufl.edu))

The **University of Wisconsin—Madison**, with 29,000 undergrads, also has a large language program. No lab fee is charged; all costs are borne by the college in its base budget. Read Gilgen describes their methods of tape distribution. Some tapes in the lab are in "lock down" booths: a tape is placed in a deck and locked in so it cannot be removed. A student may come to the lab and use that tape, with or with-

out a university ID. Students may also check out tapes with their IDs in order to listen to them in the lab or at home. A computerized circulation system using bar code scanners keeps track of the tapes that circulate in and out of the lab. All recycled tapes are distributed from marked tray bins (e.g., Spanish 101, Lesson 3) and are labeled with bar code numbers. Three times a semester overdue notices are sent. Most students return their tapes; but for those who do not, their ID numbers are sent to the registrar's office, where a hold is placed on their records. The lab itself has three sets of duplicators, each one with 19 copy positions. (Lessons are recorded on Scotch AVX tapes for the sake of maintaining a quality standard.) Two student workers make the tapes and use only two sets of duplicators at a time, rotating the third in and out to balance the wear and tear. Even at that, the workers record 38 tapes every two minutes, sometimes 2,500 – 3,000 tapes a week at peak times of the year! Students may also use the self-service Pentagon duplicator to make their own copies. (Read Gilgen, *read@lss.wisc.edu*)

In addition, each person reported that before tapes were duplicated permission to copy was received from the publishing companies. In instances where students were charged a lab fee, fees were and are used to cover costs for blank cassettes, purchase and maintenance of equipment, and student workers.

Each of the systems I have described is firmly established at its institution; each was implemented relative to what was and is available. An archeologist? Yes, I feel like one, but as with archeology, everything you survey, "dig up" and hold on to is valuable both past and present. Our "artifacts," no matter their age, are crucial for learning. ■

*Editor's Note: See also LLTI Highlights Column for discussion of 60- and 90-minute tapes (pp. 89-93).*

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