

LLTI Highlights

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Welcome to "LLTI-Highlights." This column features a selection of important electronic discussions from the LLTI-Language Learning and Technology International-listserv. The discussions of this column were posted during the second half of the year 2001 and have been summarized and paraphrased by me. Otnar Foelsche, the moderator of the electronic discussion list, has assigned a reference number to each topic that appeared in the discussion list. This number can be used to search the LLTI archives. Instructions on searching the archives appear at the end of this column.

Lab User Orientations

The discussions during the second half of the year started slowly, but picked back up after the summer months. A much discussed topic of the month of September was *Lab User Orientations* (#6296). Rachida Primov initiated the discussion with the following: "We currently spend the first two or three weeks of the semester conducting lab user orientations to students enrolled in foreign language classes. This practice represents a huge expenditure of staff time and decreases the availability of the lab for regular uses. We would like to prepare video or audio material, which can be accessed individually and used as a tutorial for how to use the lab services. We are considering creating a video, an MP3 or MPEG file. . . We have received a quote. . . for a Tegrity WebLearner Platform for \$24,800. This is completely beyond my budget. Can any of you suggest alternatives or sources for creating Lab User Orientation Modules?"

Several ideas for different low-cost solutions followed. Many of these suggestions focused on creating an orientation video such as the one from Jörg Waltje: "We made our own intro-tape/ MPEG -clip. The first version was rather crude, shot with a handheld cam by our lab-assistants, but it contained the essence about using the audio lab. . . I then had a student produce a nicer version using Avid Cinema, some background music, voice over... I used the QuickTime file made with Avid Cinema to convert it into an MPEG via Cleaner 5, which now sits on our video server and gives a quick intro whenever people

need it. . . It is not 'professional' but of decent quality and very functional, and it did not cost \$25,000. . . you can get editing software for cheap, use Apple's iMovie or a variety of other programs for free, and Cleaner costs \$299 in the educational version... You only have to find someone who is willing to spend a few hours on shooting and editing the clip. "

John de Szendeffy recommended a combination of orientation videos and worksheets: "We created two computer language lab orientation videos that all of our new students watch during orientation week. They are also given worksheets to complete in pairs. At the end of the session, about fifteen minutes is spent discussing the answers and demonstrating some points; otherwise, the orientation sessions run on autopilot as the students watch and control the videos individually on the computers. We can give orientations to more people, cover more topics in depth with examples, and use fewer lab staff members in the process than our old method of giving stand-up orientations with a projector... The videos consist of over 100 stills (screen shots), titles, and short video segments and are about thirteen minutes long. Apple iMovie 2 was used for editing and the final product encoded as MPEG with Roxio Toast's iMovie export plug-in. Other advantages of this approach include being able to require all students, whether their core teachers teach in the labs or not, to attend an orientation, and making the video available on every teacher's lab setup for any student to use or reuse at any time, including late placement students."

Leslie Graul went from video orientation to using PowerPoint presentations: "We used to utilize video to create orientation sessions that students could watch if they'd missed the one scheduled for their class. But whenever there was a change in equipment or materials, the video had to be edited or remade. Also, the staff had to supplement the video with a detailed explanation of how the student's assignments differed from the norm. Several years ago we replaced video technology with PowerPoint. Now we utilize PowerPoint when we give the orientation . . . We can easily change a few slides to reflect small changes in textbooks, media, equipment, and our services. We use the custom show feature to tailor the presentation for each group. The show is then ready for everyone who missed the class session to use as a tutorial. . . Using a digital camera, or inserting video clips, you can show your students anything you want them to see. You could add a narration, or do it all with text. Instead of creating one big presentation and using

custom shows for each group, you could prepare a separate presentation for each class or group. Then set each to run as a show. Your staff might enjoy helping to prepare the presentation...Best of all, it costs only your time."

Louise Stoehr described a Web-based solution for the orientation: "After several semesters of conducting individual orientation sessions, I have migrated all of the orientation materials and information to the Internet at http://leonardo.sfasu.edu/LRC_Orientation. This past fall semester we piloted the new materials and found the whole experience to be much more effective. Each student receives an instruction sheet complete with graphics, to guide them through the login and browser launching process. In the spring . . . students will be able to drop in, do the orientation and then work on language activities if they wish. We . . . required students to take a true-false quiz upon completion of the orientation session. All you need to acquire your own pics is some sort of digital camera and a basic photo editor; or else a roll of film and a scanner. Once the presentation is complete, it is easy to maintain and keep current."

The solution that Read Gilgen proposed is quite simple: "We got a new lab, which operates primarily in 'library' mode. So our training for students consists of some printed operational instructions on a bookmark which we print and distribute via the instructors to all language students." Others favored orientations with a more personal touch, such as Marty Dewindt: "Before the days of easy video and iMovie, we used an audio cassette that the users listened to their first night in the lab . . . Now the faculty bring their students in as part of a class in the first week. During that time they use the console as part of a class activity. They also are shown where materials are . . . Then we do have lab assistants on from seven until midnight . . . This combo seems to work with little negative impact on staff and students." Ed Dente's suggestion was similar: "While it certainly would not be a savings in time. . . I'd suggest holding on to the old, low-tech, inefficient way for a while longer, and, instead of staff doing it, do it yourself as director. I know it may seem like a bit of misuse of resources, but there is nothing like personalizing the center for a student. It puts a face and a name on the center for the student, it allows you as director to see each student who will use the lab and lets them see you. It makes them feel, perhaps, that they are important enough as users that the director him or herself is taking the time speak to them. Clearly, if students are coming in individually for

orientations, it is not very practical to do this, but ... you can have each class come in the last ten minutes of their first class."

Accent Marks

The October discussion on *Accent Marks* (#6346) was started by Georgia Schlau with the following inquiry: "Does anyone know how to use French and Spanish accent marks on Eudora e-mail?" Several responses with instructions followed, such as the one from Winni van Gessel: "The accent for the various foreign languages are made by hitting a certain 3-numbered combination while holding your ALT key. Although this works within any software, it is a very cumbersome method. There is no system in the order of the ALT keys and without a reference chart it is hard to master. . . Rather than referring to the characters below, I suggest you check out my Web page with . . . PDF formatted handouts as reference for the students <<http://sWeb.uky.edu/~woang00/sayre/accents.htm>>.

Mary Jane Highfield pointed out another problem when dealing with diacritic marks on a PC platform: "... If you're using WebCT on a PC, and you're typing text, any ALT + number code containing the number 4 will cause your text editor to quit, and you will lose all your work! In that case, you have to use HTML codes – see Tennessee Bob's link: <<http://fmc.utm.edu/~rpeckham/accents.html>>." Olaf Böhlke recommended the international keyboard setting: "For the Window9x platform, you may opt to choose the US101 International keyboard setting, which makes it possible to type French, Spanish, German etc. characters in any Windows program while changing the keyboard mapping only slightly. For detailed instructions with screenshots, visit <<http://www.creighton.edu/langlab/howto/accentsWin9/accentsWin9.htm>>." Marty Dewindt suggested the use of different keyboards: "We like 3-D Keyboard, though you can use the Windows international keyboards. 3-D is \$20; Windows is free. 3-D is from Fingertip Software . . . It does cyrillic as well. It can leave a keyboard layout on the screen so you can see which keys to use..." Nancy K. Jentsch had yet another free alternative: "I use SwapKeys for all my diacritical markings. They come through fine in most environments, including Eudora. A free download is available at <<http://www.swapkeys.com>>."

Spanish TV

Many of the November issues centered around the topic of *Spanish TV* (#6372). Tom Browne started the discussion with the following message: "My Spanish department has just discovered they (and Russian) are the only language that does not have its own 24 hour TV network... We are looking for a good

combination of news and information as well as entertainment programming." Daniel E. Meyers' recommendation was for Galavision/Univision. "It goes 24/7 ...I think their Web address is <<http://www.galavision.com/>>. Subscription is through a satellite dish." Carolina Giraldo had some objections towards this suggestion: "For an academic environment, I do not recommend Univision, try to find another one... SUR is a very good option." Thomas Ward recommended Direct TV: "...[it] has TVE, Tele Chile, Cine Latino, Sur, Galavision, Univision and more both in Spanish and other languages." Marie Karam: "In addition to the International Channel we purchased a LatinoDish package from Dish Network with a dozen channels from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Spain and USA as well." Marianne Crusius recommended a source for Russian programming: "we have NTVinternational for Russian: <<http://www.dishnetwork.com/content/programming/channels/index.asp?NetwID=341>>." Teri Takehiro: "...Should you prefer a focus on TV programming from Spain, TVE offers a digital package for the Americas that includes, among others, three educational channels: Hispavision (24 hour of Spanish documentaries), Nostalgia (lots of archival footage from Spanish TV), and Canal 24 horas (24 hours of news): <<http://www.rtoe.es/toe/digital/index.html>>. Subscription to TVE digital package is very inexpensive (\$100 a year)."

Course Management Technology

Another discussion that was begun in late November focused on *Course Management Technology* (#6397), a topic that was already discussed earlier this year but was addressed again due to its important nature. This renewed discussion was started by Carol Copenhagen with the following message: "Our college is planning to change its course management technology from Web Course in a Box to either WebCT, Prometheus or Blackboard. . . I'm wondering if any of these systems has particularly fine applications for language teaching?" Jeanette Clement responded with a favorable response towards Blackboard: "I have been using Blackboard for a couple of years to support my ESL writing and grammar classes. It is very user-friendly and has a multitude of functions. For the course designer, the learning curve isn't at all steep . . . It also has a great whiteboard. The e-mail system is handy as well . . . I would give Blackboard very high marks." Janis Smith expressed a much more negative viewpoint: "We have been using Blackboard this year and I am very disappointed by the fact that it does not use Unicode in its programming. This means that it does not support non-Romance languages in its functionality . . . It also means that the chat and discussion threads (a very

useful and interesting feature for language learning) are impossible with non-roman fonts." Warren B. Roby has mixed views: "... Blackboard has features I appreciate very much, such as the communication utility, which allows me to send e-mails to an entire class, groups, or individuals. I do not like the way announcements are handled: I must copy and paste the same announcement for each of my classes . . . There is no 'master' announcement feature. A big problem is that I have not figured out a way to type accents in Blackboard... My opinion is that Blackboard is a decent tool, but I am not brimming with enthusiasm for it."

Jack Burston joined in with the criticism of the foreign language support: "I've been after both the Blackboard and WebCT developers for more than two years to provide better support for foreign language fonts. While dealing with non-Western scripts is admittedly a challenging task, there really is no excuse for not providing a virtual keyboard to facilitate the typing of accented letters. WebCT has been telling me for some time that they will be adding such a facility to their program, but I have yet to see it. Blackboard appears not to take any notice of the problem." Jan Marston sent a very favorable message about her experience with WebCT: "I have been using WebCT at SMU for over two years, and have developed a variety of Web-enhancement activities for more than a dozen foreign language courses. The most extensive one is beginning French, a two-semester sequence with graded homework online five days a week. I haven't worked with Blackboard, because my institution has WebCT; but I am told that Blackboard doesn't have the quiz capabilities of WebCT. About diacriticals, we have developed a way for the user to write accents from any platform. It is a 'simple' Javascript with a keypad in a table, and it works on any Web page. . . My husband wrote the script and would be happy to share it with anyone interested, at no charge (you just have to run the credit). To get it, you can contact Thain Marston (PTMarston@cs.com) and he will e-mail it to you . . . WebCT has a powerful quiz engine . . . it does provide a way for exercises to be graded online and for the students to get immediate feedback . . . After making nearly 500 WebCT quizzes, I have made most of the mistakes one can make at least once or twice, and I have learned to make it sing. Students generally like doing their homework online because they do find out whether they are correct. If you want an overview of some of the things we have done in the beginning French course, we have a showcase on the Web at <<http://fllc.smu.edu/french/Webct/index.html>>."

Olaf Böhlke referenced several Web sites that provide comparisons of different course management systems: "I found two links comparing online CMS. The first one is a comparison of Blackboard, WebCT, and Prometheus <<http://software2.bu.edu/Webcentral/research/courseware/>>. The second link lets you compare several software packages side by side: <<http://www.c2t2.ca/landonline/sidebyside.html>>... My university, Creighton University, has fortunately subscribed to both because faculty was split on which one is 'better'. Both packages have pros and cons depending on what you want to do and how much you care for customization." Samantha Earp wrote that Volume 34.1 of the IALLT Journal will have a special section on course management systems in language teaching. Jack Burston pointed out the WebCT/Blackboard evaluation which appeared in the CALICO Journal Vol. 18:3. This evaluation is also available on-line in the CALICO Review: <<http://astro.temple.edu/~jburston/CALICO/review/Webct-bb00.htm>>. Joseph Ollie Kautz: "We have used Blackboard, Web CT, and Izio here at Stanford. We are also developing our own system called CourseWork. CourseWork is unique because of its integrated voice-recording applet. Students can record responses directly into the Web interface. Instructors can then log in to CourseWork and listen to student responses. The Language Center conducted more than 600 simulated oral proficiency interviews in CourseWork More information about CourseWork can be found at <www.stanford.edu/group/ats/coursework/>."

Sarah Lohnes added her observations concerning another course management tool: "Prometheus does support non-roman fonts in the content areas and in the threaded discussion. It does not, however, support non-roman fonts in the chat. . . . The chat also doesn't support diacritics." Kathleen March favored FirstClass: "I have just seen a demonstration of what FirstClass can do. I have used WebCT and Blackboard, and at UMaine we are about 85% users of FirstClass for e-mail. FirstClass is outstanding – the new possibilities for course management are exciting for languages. After leaving WebCT for the friendlier Blackboard, I'm definitely going to switch to FirstClass with its enhanced capabilities, including recording of voices and unified messaging system." Michael Heller: "We too are using FirstClass, but in a very limited fashion and are currently evaluating many of the course management systems on the market I agree that FC's communication system is stronger than the other players including recording audio directly in the FirstClass client, but I'm not so sure about

FirstClass' strengths in the area of course management (student grading, quiz modules, etc.). . . One advantage to FirstClass as a communications / learning management system includes its presence in the K-12 arena and the possible higher education / K-12 language articulations and exchanges that might not be possible with other systems."

Language Learning and Technology International Listserver Archives

The discussions of the Language Learning and Technology International (LLTI) listserver have been archived and posted on the Web. These LLTI archives can be accessed from the IALLT home page, which is located at <<http://iallt.org>>. A link to the LLTI Listserver appears at the top level of the IALLT Home page. The LLTI listserv page gives instructions on how to subscribe or unsubscribe to the listserver. In addition, there is a link to the LLTI archives. These archives can also be accessed at <<http://listserv.dartmouth.edu/archives/llti.html>>.

To search the archives, type the subject in the first search field. The search engine will match the subject with the subject headings of the archived messages. You may also type a key word or words in the second search field. This search will look for the key words in the body text of all messages. If the reference number that has been assigned to a discussion topic is entered in this field, the search will bring up a complete list of all discussions dealing with the topic. You may also want to restrict search by limiting it to a specific author or by entering beginning and ending dates. Such a restriction is particularly useful for searches on frequently occurring topics. Any questions or comments related to the LLTI listserver may be addressed to Otmnar Foelsche, the moderator of the LLTI discussion list. Otmnar can be contacted at <otmar.foelsche@dartmouth.edu>. ♦

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