

# LAB MANAGEMENT

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## When A Little Help Would Help: Management Resources For Lab Directors

Since the previous issue of the lab management column in the *IALL Journal* was also the inauguration of this feature, it is fitting that it began at the beginning with an article entitled "Job Descriptions: What Is It That We Do?"<sup>1</sup> In that article, Marie Sheppard presented three diverse examples: a generic list compiled by IALL's Mid-Atlantic regional group, Toni Larson de Aguilar's LLTI posting of her duties at a small, private liberal arts college, and Sheppard's description of her own position at a large, public university.<sup>2</sup>

The breadth of skills, knowledge, and abilities required of a lab director was eloquently summarized by David Pankratz in his reply to Aguilar's LLTI posting: "It's overwhelming when you actually see [the job description] on paper. A lab director must be a manager, supervisor, public relations expert, professional trainer, language teaching expert, technician, and visionary."<sup>3</sup> If even that summary threatens to overwhelm you, take heart, because you are not alone and there is no need for you to blaze any trails or reinvent any wheels. In this issue, I provide snapshots from my key-

board of a variety of resources that await the inquiring minds of novice and experienced lab directors alike. Please take notes as you read; if I have inadvertently omitted one of your favorite sources of information, let me know and I will include it in a future column.

### Professional Associations

(varying costs involved, but indispensable for getting to know, work with and learn from the "major players")

In case you just happened to pick up this journal in a library or in a colleague's office, welcome to the lab manager's home base, IALL. If you will take a moment to unravel the acronym, you might reason, correctly, that the International Association for Learning Laboratories represents people like yourself, around the world, who support and promote effective uses of every sort of technology for language teaching, language learning, and related research. IALL membership benefits include this journal, a newsletter, and reduced fees to attend its biennial meeting and to purchase its publications.<sup>4</sup>

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IALL membership also comes with an invitation to participate in a regional group. Are you aware of, and actively participating in, the one nearest you? Without a doubt, these groups provide the best professional opportunity for learning lab managers to make new contacts and friends on a regular basis without taking part in the following conversation:

Other Person: "Hi, what do you do?  
You: "I'm a language lab director."  
Other Person: "Oh... (long pause)  
What exactly is that?"

(Try to memorize David Pankratz' summary for a snappy reply when you *are* in that situation!)

IALL and its affiliates welcome participants at all levels of education and at any level of expertise. If you are new to this field, you will find that the regional groups offer a unique opportunity to develop your leadership and presentation skills. If you are a long-time dues-paying member who has been lurking on the sidelines, you can safely gauge the currency of your knowledge and test the accuracy of your self-confidence. In a manageable circle of colleagues and a fairly close-to-home venue, either of you can feel comfortable discussing issues of common interest, collaborating on common problems, and sharing solutions. As is true with any small organization, the regional groups are only as valuable as the sum of the contributions of *each* member. Take part! and I guarantee that your reward will be many more times your investment.

For more and different sources of fellowship and information related to our profession, there are several organizations with which IALL maintains official ties. These include:

- ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages),

- AECT (Association for Educational Communications & Technology),
- CALICO (Computer Assisted Learning and Instruction Consortium), and
- TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages).

At varying rates, each of these associations offers basic membership benefits comparable to those of IALL. Certain groups also have state and/or regional sub-groups. And some of the groups support management-related special interest groups, such as AECT's Division of Educational Media Management (DEMM). For more information on these affiliated organizations, contact IALL's Programs Director, Dick Kuettner, at (703) 463-8995, or [kuettner.p.r@p9955.wlu.edu](mailto:kuettner.p.r@p9955.wlu.edu).

### Electronic Lists and Newsgroups (fully-subsidized or inexpensive; speedy!)

First, the good news: if you have ready access to a computer, and a backbone connection or a modem and phone line to the INTERNET network, and a little training, then you have a veritable wealth of information at your fingertips.<sup>5</sup> The bad news is that if you had 25 hours per day and 8 days per week to devote to this single activity, you could almost begin to hope to keep up with a small share of the resources that are available electronically. And bear in mind that I am only referring to the language-and/or technology-related resources that are clearly applicable to our field!

The most pertinent all-around newsgroup I know is LLTI, Language Learning and Technology International Information Forum ([llti@dartcms1.bitnet](mailto:llti@dartcms1.bitnet)). The participants are primarily lab directors at American colleges and universities who are making announcements or seeking answers to pedagogical and technical questions related to language teaching and language learn-

ing. Another general group that might be of interest to lab managers is "Media in Education" (media-l@bingvmb.bitnet). During the months that I was a subscriber to this list, the subjects included designing AV systems for auditoriums, film title searches, planning for new media classrooms, a discussion of the pros and cons of media centers that are subsidiaries of libraries, employment opportunities, copyright questions and opinions, and much more. Be forewarned that Media-L is a very active group. If you are not in the habit of weeding out your e-mail in-box on a daily basis, you may find the volume of this list a bit intimidating.

For more specific information, the Institute for Academic Technology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill manages a list that disseminates information on IBM-sponsored research projects. There you can also find a valuable collection of articles and bibliographies related to multimedia in education. To get on their mailing list, send your request to pubs.iat@mhs.unc.edu. For the Macintosh platform, the SUMEX archive site at Stanford University is a treasure trove of material; write to info.mac@sumex-aim.stanford.edu to explore the riches. If it is a particular language or culture or geographical location that interests you, *The Modern Language Journal* recently published a "List of Lists."<sup>6</sup> Also, Nancy Shires' article on "Computer-Mediated Lists for Foreign Languages," which appears on page 29 of this issue, provides an extensive list of electronic discussions.

### Reference Books

(often initially expensive, but worthwhile investments)

In the realm of technology, it may be true that a conventionally published book is out of date by the time it is printed. But this is not always the case with reference books on

the management of media resources. As an example, I offer William T. Schmid's *Media Center Management: A Practical Guide*.

Thirteen years ago, Schmid set forth the following objectives for his text: "(1) to provide techniques that have practical application for the management of media center programs; (2) to present management concepts that have broad relevance for people working in a wide variety of media support services; and (3) to serve as a practical supplemental text for students taking courses in the management of media center programs (p. ix)." In a concise and orderly fashion, Schmid covers organizational approaches, management of personnel and budgets, selection and purchasing of materials and equipment, and public relations. The emphasis on practicality is most evident in the chapter devoted to "Obtaining Useful Utilization Data" and the corresponding resource section that provides examples of a variety of service forms. The selected bibliography is rather dated, but the annotations make very interesting reading.

For a more recent general reference, I highly recommend Charles W. Vlcek and Raymond V. Wiman's *Managing Media Services: Theory and Practice*. With fifty years of combined experience in media management, the authors provide a comprehensive treatment of both the technical and human aspects of management. Their purpose is to "present factual, philosophical, and thought-provoking content" and to "provide the reader with a background of information, ideas, concepts, and practices that can be reworked, adapted, and applied successfully to situations and problems that may arise (p. xxii)." The book is clearly written and structured in a way that promotes easy access to any given point of reference. Each chapter begins with objectives and ends with a summary and a selected bibliography. In addition, more than half of the eighteen chapters include media resources re-

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lated to the various topics. This volume is perfectly suited to serve as a textbook, but it also merits a prominent position on the bookshelf of practitioners in the field of lab management.

### Management Humor (classic, essential)

If you consider the phrase “management humor” to be an oxymoron, let me assure you that the classification does in fact exist as a subject heading in the electronic card catalog at my local public library. No matter how high or low your current position is on the management totem pole, it is books like these that enable you to keep your perspective as well as your sanity. Two of my favorites in this category are Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull’s *The Peter Principle* and C. Northcote Parkinson’s *Parkinson: The Law*. Do these maxims sound familiar?

- In time, every post tends to be occupied by an employee who is incompetent to carry out its duties (Peter & Hull, p. 27).
- Spend sufficient time in confirming the need, and the need will disappear (Peter & Hull, p. 130).
- An ounce of image is worth a pound of performance (Peter & Hull, p. 165).
- The time spent on any item of the agenda will be in inverse proportion to the sum involved (Parkinson, p. 53).
- Delays are thus deliberately designed as a form of denial and are extended to cover the life expectancy of the person whose proposal is being pigeon-holed (Parkinson, p. 150).
- Five members are easy to collect and, when collected, can act with competence, secrecy, and speed. Of these original members four may well be versed,

respectively, in finance, foreign policy, defence [sic], and law. The fifth, who has failed to master any of these subjects, usually becomes the chairman or prime minister (Parkinson, p. 166).

If these sayings do not remind you of anyone you know or if, heaven forbid, any of them strike you as the least bit offensive, or less than humorous, perhaps you just need to see gems like these in context. Look for management humor books at any library or bookstore, and try to enjoy a few pages each day. With time and repeated exposure, you will hopefully regain and maintain a sense of humor about this part of life called “work.” In my experience, a sense of humor is an attribute of managers that is all too often lacking.

### In Conclusion

This small selection of resources available to managers of learning centers is limited not only by space and time restrictions; it also reflects my limited knowledge. Can you add to this list by naming other professional associations, newsgroups, book titles (including humor!), journal articles, or services that have consistently or significantly aided you in your work? If you will send that information to me at the address below, I would be pleased to credit you and include an update in my next column.

### Resources

- Parkinson, C. N. (1980). *Parkinson: The law*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Peter, L. J. & Hull, R. (1969). *The Peter Principle*. New York: W. Morrow.
- Schmid, W. T. (1980). *Media center management: A practical guide*. New York: Hastings House, Publishers.

Vlcek, C. W. & Wiman, R. V. (1989). *Managing media services: Theory and practice*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

Notes

1. Sheppard, M. (1993). Lab management. *The IALL Journal*, 26(1), 39-42.
2. The Winter 1989-90 issue of *The IALL Journal* (JETT v22n4, pp 44-51) published the results of a comprehensive reader survey on employment characteristics covering such questions as educational background, salary, title, responsibilities, linguistic abilities, and work-related philosophies.
3. Pankratz, D. (1992, November 20). Re: #207 job classification. In Otmar K.E. Foelsche (Listowner), LLTI (LLTI@dartcms).

4. See the IALL Membership and Publications Order Form on page 91 of this issue of the Journal.
5. For a helpful and pertinent introduction to this subject, see Wyman, W. J. (1993). "Internet and foreign-language instruction: A report from behind the front lines." *The IALL Journal*, v26 (1), pp 26 - 33.
6. Ervin, G. L. (1992). "MLJ News and Notes of the Profession." *The Modern Language Journal*, v 76 (4), pp 552 - 530.

Contributions/suggestions for the "Lab Management" column may be sent directly to Kathleen Ford. Mailing address: UCLA Language Lab, 190 Powell Library, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1517; phone: (310) 206-8955; fax: (310) 206-1455; e-mail: eil8kef@mvs.ucla.edu, or EIL8KEF@UCLAMVS.

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