
Keeping the Language Lab Relevant: Lessons Learned

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Résumé

Currently, language centers are facing serious challenges to their existence as technology becomes ubiquitous, mobile and web-based. Additionally, as language pedagogy has made the shift from listening exercises and learning through repetition to collaborative learning models, many campus language labs have found themselves having to rethink their service models. How do we face the challenges of being more than "just a space"? What services, programs, and other approaches do we offer to support language acquisition?

The University of New Mexico Language Learning Center has been in existence since 1974 serving both instructors and language learners through a variety of technological and pedagogical transitions. In 2012, the LLC decided to change the emphasis of its language center to lessen the emphasis on technology and to increase its efforts to help instructors implement collaborative and other effective learning strategies. Central to this was a redesign of the physical space to allow for a flexible learning environment.

Five years ago the LLC was on the brink of extinction, but this dramatic redesign reinvigorated the life of the center and created new opportunities for students, instructors and staff. During this time, usage doubled even though enrollment went down.

This presentation will look at: how changes in pedagogy affect lab design, how technology interacts with the physical space, the changing role of technology in the LLC, collaborating with other university departments, training and management of student employees, knowledge management, and strategies for faculty engagement. The discussion will encompass both center design and the changing role of the center and its staff. We will look at why we still need the physical space and simultaneously, and perhaps ironically, how to apply our expertise to the inevitable growth in virtual space.

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