Comm Lab in Spacious New Digs

By Beth Von Till

After almost 19 years in room 231 in Hugh Gillis Hall, the Comm Lab opened its doors to its new home in Clark Hall this fall. It is located in room 240 Clark Hall on the second floor, right above the state-of-the-art Academic Success Center. The new space has 2400 square feet, two video recording conference rooms, two faculty offices and a large multipurpose space. A large reception area welcomes student clients. Twenty-eight tutors help to staff the Lab, which is open Monday through Thursday from nine to six. In a classic response to the adage "build it and they will come" the Lab served 978 students during the first three weeks and 173 students in a single day. The tutors were heroic in their efforts to assist students and maintain and calm and helpful atmosphere.

(Cont. page 2)

Deis writes from Afghanistan - Next Page

Deis and Haji Mohammed, a local tribal chieftain - see page 2 for more
Comm Lab

(Continued from p. 1)

All of the spaces are meant to be flexible and meet a wide variety of needs. The main area houses the department library, areas for students to work one-on-one or in groups with the tutors, or plug in their laptops for power while they access the internet through the campus wireless system. The largest open area is used several times a week for workshops presented by faculty, alumni, and graduate students. A schedule of upcoming workshops is updated frequently on the Communication Studies department web site. We are enjoying adapting to our spacious new environment.

The lab is gorgeous with new and nearly new furnishings and equipment. A large fishbowl window allows passersby to be intrigued by our many workshops and other offerings. The smaller areas are more private and provide perfect opportunities for coaching and special projects. We have plasma screens and cameras in our conference rooms and two computers in the main area for student use. Two "vintage" playback units and one VHS camera are on carts for use in the Lab.

New bookshelves have just arrived and we are busy sorting through our extensive journal and text collection. By the end of the semester, we should have learned a lot and found homes for almost everything.

Our wish list includes TV monitors, DVD players, computers, and an LCD projector. If you or your organization would be interested in donations or potential joint projects, we are interested. Contact department chair Dennis Jaehne or Lab director Beth Von Till. Next time you are on campus, come by for a tour.

Report from the frontline: Deis writes from Afghanistan

Paul Deis, recently a coach with our forensics team, continues to serve in the U.S. Army reserves as a Civil Affairs officer in Afghanistan. He recently wrote Genelle Austin-Lett that he's worked with coalition forces to improve the lives of the Afghani people who are still reeling from Taliban rule and the war that followed.

Among his other duties, Deis has been working hard to help open girls’ schools that had been closed by the previous regime. "As I'm sure you know the Taliban closed all the girls schools and was notorious for throwing acid in the face of the women who weren't fully covered so anytime we engage a girls school I really feel the polarity our approach vice the Taliban."

For his efforts, Deis and a few of his colleagues were presented ceremonial turbans by tribal leaders. "This is a big deal in Pahtun culture and I'm confident that we've really won their trust after 9 months working together."

Deis writes that the approach of winter means a slowing of operations for both coalition forces and insurgents who continue to mount attacks throughout the country. He anticipates some humanitarian aid drops, but he notes that the bad weather will hamper efforts on all sides of the conflict. Even so, he reports that insurgents launched two suicide attacks in the past few weeks.

Deis plans to return from Afghanistan in March of next year.

Faculty News

Jay Baglia received the Outstanding Book Award by the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender. The award recognized his recently published book, The Viagra Ad Venture: Masculinity, Media, and the Performance of Sexual Health.

His award letter celebrated the book's synthesis of feminist and performance theory: "The reviewers found your analysis original, complex in conceptualization, and persuasive in its effort to encourage scholars to more deeply interrogate everyday practices of gender and sexuality."

(Cont. page 3)
Facility News Continued

Baglia received his award at the 29th annual OSCLG conference in October.

No doubt, Dr. Baglia's future and related research will continue this already well-received research agenda. He explains: "I am now analyzing the performativity of fertility as evidenced by the news stories and marketing of the reproductive technology industry. Like sexual dysfunction rhetoric, the rhetoric of the fertility industry produces as an "effect" that which it has the discursive office to define. What is more, the fertility industry is now "in bed with" the medical journals that publish "results" of clinical trials."

Matthew Spangler directed his original play "Mozart!" at the Avignon Theatre Festival from July 20 to 28, 2006. "Mozart!" is a musical theatre production based on letters between Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his father Leopold. It featured five instrumentalists, two singers, and four actors, who play Mozart, his father, Anton Mesmer and Marie Antoinette. "Mozart!" was produced at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland in 2005 where it received positive reviews in the local press, including the London Times. This summer's production in Avignon coincided with the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth in 1756. The Edinburgh Fringe Festival and the Avignon Theatre Festival are the largest and second largest theatre festivals in the world.

Dr. Spangler has also published "Haunted to the Edge of Trance: Performance and Orality in the Early Poetry of W. B. Yeats" in New Hibernia Review (Summer 2006). He also has published essays Alfred Uhry, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Lizette Reese, and James Duff in The Biographical Dictionary of Southern Writers (Louisiana State University Press). That book won the Jules and Francis Landry Award.

Stephen Eckstone has been invited to present a paper at the American Marketing Association's annual conference this November. His paper is entitled, "A Longitudinal Study of Media Usage Among College Students: Or, If You Want Your Messages to Reach and Influence College-Aged People, Why Not Ask Them How to Do It." Among the questions that he addresses: How would students reach themselves to influence a buying decision? Are advertisers making mistakes in their media decisions? If so, what should be changed? Describe the creative approach of an effective electronic or Web-based media campaign.

Federico Varona contributed to the Sixth Congress of Communication and Marketing: Innovation and Position at the Tecnológico de Monterrey, Monterrey, México. This Congress was held in September. Dr. Varona presented a lecture entitled, "Appreciative Inquiry: A New Way of Discovering, Creating, Sharing, and Implementing Knowledge to Improve Communication in a University context." He also offered a workshop: "Applying the Appreciative Inquiry Process to Improve Employee-Superior Communication in a University context."

Forensics Update

The SJSU forensics team competed at the Cal-Biola Swing at UC Berkeley. Two new first year students, Nick Bhardwaj and Hann-wei Chang, took second place (on a split decision) in Novice Parliamentary debate. Mr. Bhardwaj also took honors as second best speaker and earned first place in open division extemporaneous speaking.

The forensics team is also planning to attend an international competition in Argentina in March.

Got News? We Want to Hear it?

Are you publishing any articles? Presenting any papers? Winning any awards? Innovating any teaching techniques? Having any adventures? Email the editor: wooda@email.sjsu.edu
Chair Report - Dennis Jaehne

Seasons change slowly around us -- autumn leaves are swirling along the sidewalks now -- and as you drive along San Fernando the campus seems calm and slow to change, looking just like it did when you went to school here. But when you look more closely, you'll find that we are in the midst of many changes in what we do and how we do it.

For one thing, our department has developed a much more international focus. This August, we successfully completed the tenth year of our exchange program with Chiba University in Japan, with thirteen students joining us from three different universities. The recruiting trip we made to Japan in April increased the visibility of the program there and gained us two new participating universities. We expect they will continue to send their students. When here, the students live in the dorms and attend COMM classes to improve their conversational English. They are mostly freshmen and somewhat awed when they first arrive; but they leave with great sadness, having made many new friends and discovered a wider world.

Our faculty engage in other international activities as well. Dr. Federico Varona recently made a successful visit to Instituto Tecnologico de Monterrey, Mexico where he lectured to 500 people on Appreciative Inquiry. He followed up his lecture with a four hour workshop on that topic. Next month, he will presenting his work at the Communication Conference of the Americas, running in parallel with our National Communication Association meetings in San Antonio. This conference brings together scholars from throughout Latin America. Dr. Varona was the lead organizer. I was fortunate to be selected as a Salzburg Fellow this summer, representing the university for a week long seminar on Improving Global Education in Salzburg, Austria. And I'll be leading a group of 30 students next Spring for our Semester Abroad program in Bath, England. Over the summer, Dr. Andrew Wood completed some field research on the quality of public spaces by visiting several airports in Asia. Other faculty are involved in other international projects, which you will read about in upcoming newsletters. So, driving by along San Fernando, it might seem as though the department is just about the classrooms and offices in Hugh Gillis Hall. But we are branching out.

There are changes at home as well. Our new COMM Lab in the renovated Clark Hall is open and serving students. We're still receiving equipment and furnishings and not everything is in place yet, but the Lab staff and the student tutors have been patient and adaptable in keeping the Lab open "during construction" to serve the many students seeking help in developing their oral presentations. And though it's too early for final numbers, the preliminary indication is that we are serving many more students in the new Lab than formerly. Watch the upcoming newsletter for notice of our grand opening celebration.

Less visible to outsiders, but no less significant, is the new assessment work that faculty are engaging as we work to demonstrate that our students are meeting their learning outcomes. The results are leading us to make changes in our courses. At our most recent faculty meeting we grappled with the challenges of teaching information literacy. We share a concern with other faculty nationally that students who lack the competence to seek out and evaluate high quality, reliable, accurate information -- and make critical decisions based on it -- will be severely disadvantaged in facing the problems of our globalizing world. During the coming year, the department will engage in a rigorous self-study, part of the program planning process we are mandated to conduct every five years. We’ll take a careful look at how we’re doing, where we need to improve, and how we should develop in the coming decade. We’ll be contacting alumni to participate in surveys that reflect on their experience as COMM majors. We’ll look forward to hearing from you.

The department continues to experiment with new efficiency and cost-saving solutions. We were going to replace our copier with a networked machine, but at the last moment we had an opportunity to participate in a campus study of how academic units might use high-end color laser printers. Dr. Malu Roldan, from Management Information Systems, received a grant from Hewlett-Packard to fund the study. Just yesterday we installed the new networked printer in our mailroom -- it’s as big as a small fridge! Faculty will be able to order up print jobs from anywhere via the web and pick them up when they come down to the mailroom. This is probably everyday reality for high tech companies, but it represents significant progress toward a new frontier for the department. Of course, we’ll probably fall in love with the machine and want to keep it after the one year grant is over!

There are many more things to talk about, to complain about, and to brag about. Some of those stories are elsewhere in the newsletter; and we’ll continue the adventure in many more newsletters to come. In the meantime, we’d love to hear from you alumni about your activities and careers. Please send us items we can use in future newsletters.