Multimedia Language Centre Opens

by Sheila Embleton, Associate Dean

The official opening of the new Multimedia Language Centre (MLC) took place on Friday, September 20, 1996. The MLC is located in South 117 Ross Building. It was formerly known as the Language Laboratory, but a new name was necessary to reflect the significant improvements and changes which have taken place.

A joint proposal from the Department of Languages, Literatures & Linguistics and the Department of French Studies received $200,000 funding from the Strategic Academic Initiatives Fund in the Spring of 1995. SAIF was the idea of Vice-President (Academic Affairs) Michael Stevenson, and has been responsible for funding a number of innovative projects around the University, including the Faculty of Arts.

During the past academic year, a Steering Committee consisting of faculty members from each department, members of the MLC staff, and representatives from the Dean's Office, met frequently to discuss, and ultimately decide upon, a myriad of issues associated with implementation of the new facility - all while adhering strictly to timelines, so that the MLC would be ready to open its doors to students at the beginning of classes on September 9.

The result is a 37-seat facility, with a DEC Pentium and head-set microphone at each workstation, supported by a LAN server and a printer. Software is available for most levels of language study, including for reading knowledge, for most languages taught in the two departments – Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Many aspects of language can be practised in the computerized facility, particularly pronunciation, vocabulary-building, and grammar drill, but perhaps the most exciting aspect is the visual and cultural enhancement that goes well beyond what is possible with traditional textbooks or audio-lab facilities. Many students seem delighted with the computerized aspect, and are reluctant to leave for their next class or in order to relinquish their seat to another student. The MLC can accommodate a full scheduled class as a group, but most of the use is on a flexible drop-in basis.

In order to help smooth the transition from the Language Laboratory to the MLC and help instructors become more familiar with some of the new technology and teaching techniques, Dr. Diane Beelen Woody of the Department of French Studies has been named Implementation Coordinator of the MLC for the FW96 academic year. One of Dr. Woody's activities for this year is running a Brown Bag Lunch Series, where instructors can learn about various technologies and techniques, but also engage each other and Dr. Woody in extensive discussion. The first such Lunch was held Thursday, October 17, with the topic "Pedagogy and Technology in L2 Courses".

This Faculty of Arts facility is truly state-of-the-art and superior to those that we either visited or got specifications on from other universities. Not only is it of course completely up-to-date, but our software is far more extensive (in terms of numbers of languages covered and levels and types of language study available), the seating capacity is larger, and the hardware is more flexible (and hence will be easier to upgrade and adapt as new software becomes available).

For those who would like to know more about the MLC, please contact Dr. Woody (dwoody@yorku.ca) or myself (embleton@yorku.ca).