

**If You Build It Will They Come?: Designing and Implementing a Digital Media  
Lab**

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## Abstract

Digital media including video and graphic design is becoming an increasing part of higher education curricula. In order to support this growing trend, the Loyola/Notre Dame Library designed a digital media lab in conjunction with their recent renovation and expansion. Presented is information about the design and implementation of the Digital Lab including services, equipment, and software provided by the lab as well as staffing and implementation issues. The library's efforts at promoting the Digital Lab are also discussed.

Over the past several years audio, video, and graphic design software has become more accessible for use by non-professionals. The 2008 Horizon Report indicated that grassroots video is an emerging technology likely to have an impact on teaching and learning within a one year timeframe. The rapid increase in video technology has provided faculty with a number of methods to incorporate video into their curricula (The New Media Consortium and Educause Learning Initiative 2008). The growing ease of use of graphic design and video and audio editing software has allowed for an expanding roll of video, audio, and graphic design projects and presentations in the classroom (Kim 2009). Despite the rising usability of this software, many students are often reluctant to work with the unfamiliar technology (Austin et al.). Having a dedicated space and staff in the library to assist students with the growing number of video and graphically based projects and assignments will become increasingly important as digital media becomes a greater focus of higher education curricula.

The Loyola/Notre Dame Library (LNDL) is located in Baltimore, Maryland and serves both the College of Notre Dame of Maryland and Loyola University Maryland with an FTE of approximately 6,500 students. The library holds an extensive media collection. Faculty members often request that the library provide services to allow students to utilize this collection in class projects. These requests combined with the growing ubiquity of digital media caused LNDL to

begin investigating services it could provide to allow students to take advantage of our extensive media collections and resources and to provide support for student projects that incorporate media.

LNDL began a renovation and expansion project in August 2006. As part of the increased commitment to supporting digital media, the completed renovation and expansion project included a new digital media lab, named the Digital Lab, for graphic design and audio and video editing projects. The lab had a soft opening in the spring semester of 2008 with by-appointment access to the lab. The soft opening allowed for the Digital Services staff to work out staffing issues, implement all the software and hardware needed in the lab, and learn much of the software themselves while still allowing access to the lab in the meantime. The official opening of the lab occurred in conjunction with the completion of the renovation and expansion project in the summer of 2008.

Much research went into planning the components available in the Digital Lab. When planning a digital media lab it is important to provide the core graphic design and video editing software. LNDL researched the best software available on both Macs and PCs and made the decision to provide software on both platforms. Although Macs are generally known for their superiority for graphic design and video editing, many LNDL patrons are more comfortable using PCs. Therefore, Digital Services staff decided that the Digital Lab needed to provide access to software on both Macs and PCs. In addition to purchasing choices based on LNDL staff research, many of the items purchased were recommended by the Communication Arts department at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, as they were planning a new Digital Media Arts major and wished to have the library support their new curriculum.

In an effort to provide as much state of the art equipment as possible, LNDL applied for and received a \$100,000 grant from the Knapp Foundation. The grant money funded two media servers, ten Dell PC media workstations, five Apple Mac Pro workstations, 15 WACOM intuos<sup>3</sup> 4x6 drawing tablets, an Epson Stylus Pro 4800 color printer, a Nikon SuperCool Scan 5000 slide scanner, an Epson Perfection V750Pro scanner, and a Microtek Scanmaker 9800XL large scale scanner. Software included with the purchased computers included iMovie for Macs and Windows Movie Makers for PCs. Additional software funded by the grant included Adobe Create Suite CS2 for both PCs and Macs, Quark Xpress 7 for PCs, and Final Cut Express HD for Macs. LNDL has also purchased additional software and equipment for the lab including three digital cameras (Nikon CoolPix 5400, Nikon D80, and Nikon D40x), two camcorders (Panasonic PV-DV202D and Sony Handycam HDR-UX1), a Flip video camera, Adobe Premiere Elements for PC, and AVS Video converter. Open source software has also been downloaded to the computers to supplement proprietary software, including Audacity for audio editing and podcasting and Blender for creating 3D content.

As well as providing access to software the Digital Lab also lends out equipment. Digital cameras and camcorders may be checked out from the lab for a period of 24 hours. Patrons may also purchase media for use in the lab including CD-Rs, DVD-Rs, mini-DVDs and DV-tapes for use in the camcorders, and photo paper for use in the large scale color printer.

In addition to setting up hardware and software for the Digital Lab, designing the lab also involved setting policies such as hours, costs for printing, and computer use policies. The Digital Services staff decided that the lab was strictly for the use of lab software and equipment. Patrons using lab computers for software found on other public machines would be asked to relocate. Patrons are asked to sign in upon entering the lab in order to both track use of the lab software

and equipment as well as determine that the patrons' use is appropriate to the Digital Lab. Unlike other public computers in the library, Digital Services staff decided to leave the computers in the Digital Lab free from any drive protection software. Currently all public computers outside the Digital Lab are installed with drive protection software that will erase any changes made on the computer, including any documents saved, when the computer is restarted. Based on the ongoing nature of many of the projects created in the Digital Lab, Digital Services staff decided that drive protection software would not be appropriate. Computers are cleared at the end of each semester. Patrons are warned prior to the end of the semester to save any work they wish to keep for the future.

The Digital Lab is staffed 61 hours per week with full-time library staff from the Digital Services department present during weekdays and work study students staffing the lab during nights and weekends. Patrons may also ask at the circulation desk to receive access to the lab during times the library is open but the lab is not staffed. The lab is purely self-serve during these periods.

Lab staff are expected to be familiar with what software and equipment is available for use in the lab. However, staff are not fully proficient with all available software. Assistance is provided for all equipment and audio and video editing software. For the most part the graphic design software is for use on a self-serve basis, with help guides and tutorials available for reference. Ideally the staff would be fully trained on all available software and equipment, but due to the high end nature of the graphic design software and budgetary constraints for training, it is not currently possible.

Additional staff training issues occur due to staffing the lab with work study students. Due to the nature of student employment there is a high turnover rate from year to year and sometimes even semester to semester. Additionally, although Digital Services staff have created training materials to train student workers on the software and equipment, based on the number of hours they work per week, it is often well into the semester before students are fully trained. Thus it is difficult to make sure highly trained employees are staffing the lab at all times. So student workers are told to do the best they can and then to refer patrons to full-time staff for more advanced questions.

Thus far this staffing model has worked. The majority of questions staff receive are for assistance using scanners, camcorders, and video editing software all of which lab staff are trained to answer. Patrons have asked a limited number of questions regarding the graphic design software, which is the area where lab staff are limited in their knowledge.

Use of the Digital Lab is steadily increasing, but is still not at originally hoped for levels of use. Part of the problem is making faculty, staff, and students at both colleges aware of the lab's existence. The Digital Lab is located on the lower level of the library off to the side where no one who is not purposefully coming to the lab is likely to pass by it. Thus it is out of sight, and patrons are not likely to just stumble across it and inquire about the services provided there.

The library has undertaken a number of methods to promote the Digital Lab. Traditional promotional materials such as fliers and brochures have been distributed at both campuses. The LNDL homepage prominently features information about the Digital Lab. Key people at both colleges have also been made aware of the lab services. Both colleges have similar equipment available for students in their Communications departments. However, these facilities are not

available to other students, who are increasingly requesting access to graphic design and video editing software. Thus the library has heavily promoted the Digital Lab to faculty and staff in the Communications and IT departments at both colleges so that they may refer students to the library's Digital Lab when appropriate.

LNDL also ran a contest during the Fall 2009 semester in order to promote use of the lab. Submissions were requested in the form of either a 3-5 minute video or a poster promoting the Digital Lab. Contestants were required to work on their submission for a minimum of 2 hours using the equipment in the lab. This requirement ensured additional use of the Digital Lab, while the final submissions provided the library with student made promotional materials for future use in promoting the Digital Lab.

As is often the case in academic libraries, the most effective method for increasing use of the Digital Lab has come with partnering with specific courses and professors. Due to a space crunch in regular academic buildings, Loyola University Maryland approached the library about using the Digital Lab to teach their Writing for the Web course. This course has now been taught in the lab for two semesters and is scheduled for a third. Although LNDL would not want to dedicate the Digital Lab as a classroom space, having one course that heavily uses the software available in the lab has been a great way to get students using it. Not only are they using the lab resources during class time, but they also come to the Digital Lab to work on their assignments for the course. The Digital Lab has also partnered with other courses who do not meet in the Digital Lab including an Education course at Loyola University Maryland where students were required to make either audio or video podcasts and with all the pharmacy majors at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, who video recorded interviews with pharmacists already working in the field and then edited them using software in the lab.

In the future the library hopes to promote the Digital Lab by holding informal training sessions. Sessions would be open to faculty, staff, and students. They would include training on the video editing software available in the lab. A session specifically for faculty focused on incorporating digital media into the curriculum is also possible.

As with all services in academic libraries, the Digital Lab needs to continuously promote its services through the methods previously mentioned and future methods not yet tried. The colleges that LNDL serves have a new population of students and faculty every year, so the library needs to make sure that they are made aware of the services the Digital Lab provides.

In addition to promoting the Digital Lab one of the biggest challenges is keeping the software and hardware in the lab up-to-date. In order to remain a state of the art facility that students and faculty will want to use, the Digital Lab needs to provide updated software and hardware, which is increasingly hard to do during these days of reduced budgets. It is also difficult because new versions of the software are being released all the time. The Digital Lab faced this problem from the beginning. Due to time restrictions on spending the grant money, the initial lab equipment and software was purchased almost a year prior to completion of the space for the lab. By the time the lab opened Adobe had released Creative Suite 3 already making our purchased version of Creative Suite 2 out-of-date. Luckily in agreement for holding the Writing for the Web class in the Digital Lab, Loyola provided an upgrade to the Creative Suite 3 platform. At this point though Adobe has already released Creative Suite 4, and there is no budget to upgrade to this software at any point in the near future. Other notable software upgrades include moving from the Leopard operating system to the Tiger operating system on the Macs. This upgrade included a new version of the iLife software which contains iMovie and Garageband, two popular pieces of software in the lab. Again due to budgetary constraints only



2 of the 5 Macs in the lab were upgraded at this point. These issues will persistently be a problem for the Digital Lab. Thus the library needs to continue to investigate ways to overcome budgetary constraints in order to keep the equipment and software updated including applying for additional grant money and lobbying for upgrades that can be supplied by either of the colleges' IT departments.

Implementing and running the Digital Lab has been a time-consuming process for LNDL's Digital Services staff. However, the services the Digital Lab provides are becoming more and more important as digital media becomes a larger part of the curricula at the colleges it serves. The library is definitely filling a need not fully met by any other department, and Digital Services staff will continue to grow the services they currently provide in the Digital Lab as they become more in demand.

## References

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