

At the UCLA Extension American Language Center, becoming fluent in English is more than "California Dreamin'."

California's not just for dreamin' anymore, unless you want to dream in English.



Judy Tanka,
ESL Instructor and Lab Coordinator

The UCLA Extension American Language Center (ALC) located in Los Angeles' Westwood Village is one of the most popular and successful intensive English language programs in the world. It's a magnet for people from every country on the globe who share one goal: becoming fluent in the English language. Established in the mid-1970's, ALC offers two full-time programs: an Intensive English Communication Program (IECP) that helps students improve their English communication skills for personal and professional endeavors, using a practical approach to listening and speaking with conversational grammar

and some writing; and an Academic Intensive English Program (AIEP) & University Preparation Track (UPT) that uses an academic approach that equally emphasizes reading, writing, listening and speaking to prepare students for study in an American college or university.

ESL Instructor and Language Lab Coordinator Judy Tanka describes the program as "a very well articulated, well coordinated, rigorous academic preparation program that equips students or professionals with the communication skills they need." More than half of their students are preparing for entrance into an American college or university. And since ALC serves multiple populations, they regularly adjust the curriculum to serve the changing needs of their clients as reflected by the global economy and political climate. "We adjust (our programs) continually, and we think that's part of the reason for our success," said Tanka.

Approximately 25 to 50 ESL instructors teach about 2,600 students each year, who are encouraged to live on or near campus and become immersed in American culture, of which L.A. has plenty. English courses range from 4 to 12 weeks in length and are taught

at seven levels of proficiency. Before starting a program, students take proficiency exams to determine their course level. And most courses are offered continually throughout the year. But what makes the ALC program unique is the "intensive" aspect.

The intensive way to language fluency.

The program is intensive because students are in class five hours a day plus have hours of homework each night, whether they're taking academic or professional courses. "That's very different than going to night or adult school, which is a couple of hours a week," said Tanka. "It's much more effective and so rigorous that our students are often surprised at how intensive it is," she explained.

According to Tanka, all students are expected to learn a combination of basic skills: reading, writing, spoken skills, note-taking, and listening. While the communications courses focus on speaking and listening skills, idioms, and slang, the academic courses focus on critical thinking and study skills as well.

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"Students at a lower level need more practice in listening and speaking. The lab allows that, and the teacher can give individual feedback the way she/he can't in a regular classroom." — Judy Tanka, ESL Instructor and Lab Coordinator

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An ALC instructor communicates with all students simultaneously in the lab.

How a digital language lab rounded up the learning curve.

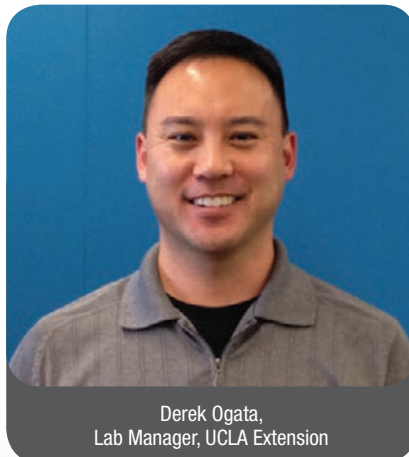
To help intensify the students' learning beyond the traditional classroom, ALC incorporated two digital language learning labs with a total of 54 student stations. For the instructional technology to run it, they chose the Sony Virtuoso™ and Soloist® digital language lab software suite acquired through their local SANS authorized reseller, International Teaching Systems (ITS), Inc.

According to Derek Ogata, Lab Manager at UCLA Extension, who was involved in the software selection, the language center had made the decision to move from hardware-based to IP-based technology for more flexibility. "The Sony Virtuoso language lab software works very well," said Ogata. "The Sony IP-based technology has reduced maintenance and improved reliability. It is an excellent implementation of VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)," he added.

Tanka reports that teachers most commonly use the recording features, which give them the ability to instantly collect student recordings, evaluate

them, and give feedback. "Monitoring is a very important feature as well," said Tanka. For example, Tanka gives her students an exercise where they listen to a recording that has pauses built in for them to repeat or respond. "I definitely monitor students and use the intercom feature to speak to them individually," she added.

"A feature we've learned about recently and are eager to use is the ability to insert verbal comments into a student's recording right where it's needed. We think that's a really terrific feature," said Tanka. "Students expect a lot of feedback," she added. "It needs to be relevant. If a



Derek Ogata,
Lab Manager, UCLA Extension

student makes a pronunciation mistake, it's most beneficial if the teacher can insert comments right where the error happened."

Besides the recording and the collection capability, Tanka said that the instructors like the ability to pair students randomly in twos or threes for conversation practice and to give students individual feedback while in the lab.

Every student spends quality time in the lab, but interestingly, the students with lower levels of proficiency spend the most time in the lab. "We feel that the lab allows students to work at an individual pace and get instant feedback from the teacher—those are the kinds of things that the lower levels need more of," explained Tanka.

They also keep the lab open after school like a library system, where students can spend time working individually.

Teachers love the monitoring features; students love the feedback.

"Students love the lab and often ask for more lab hours," said Tanka. "They love the autonomy of the lab, they want to control their own learning, and they want the feedback from the teacher that he/she is not able to give in a class with 20 or 30 students. So the students do see the benefit.

"And so do teachers, because it's really rewarding," she continued. "You're able to individualize instruction and assign communicative activities that you couldn't do in class. We do oral assessments of grammar, for example. When you have 15-20 students in class, and you ask them to talk about a picture and use a certain grammatical structure, how can you monitor the accuracy of their performance? You can do it beautifully in the lab," she explained.

"The Sony IP-based technology has reduced maintenance and improved reliability. It is an excellent implementation of VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)."

— Derek Ogata, Lab Manager, UCLA Extension



Students also work independently in the ALC language lab.

SANS and ITS conduct periodic on-site training sessions for the ALC faculty and IT staff, and Ogata reports that the IT staff has been very happy with the level of training and support from both SANS and ITS. "The technical help is really good," said Ogata. "The software interface is intuitively laid out, which makes the functionality of the lab simple to learn," he added.

As language lab coordinator, Tanka takes that training one step further by getting the teachers excited about the technology. She feels the key to achieving that is through continued, incremental training and periodic reminders of the features and how to use them. She advises the

teachers to always think of activities to do in the lab that they couldn't do in a regular classroom, such as conversation pairing, voice recording or incorporating multimedia or the internet.

An interesting way in which ALC uses the lab is to conduct pilot tests for the TOEFL® exam, a unique program in which their students can participate. The TOEFL exam tests English language proficiency, and more than 8,000 colleges, universities and agencies in more than 130 countries rely on TOEFL scores to help make admission decisions. UCLA Extension also uses the lab for interpretation/translation courses.

Preparing students for personal, professional and academic communication – now and in the future...

What are future plans for ALC? "It would be great to have another lab, said Tanka. "I would also like to see more video content added onto our server, so

teachers could do more video-based lessons," she added.

ALC also will be looking at a new SANS technology, SANSSpace™ Virtual Language Learning Environment, to extend the students' learning to anywhere/anytime. SANSSpace software provides both students and teachers with web-based content management, a digital comparative recorder for listening and speaking practice, and both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration tools. "I think with the advanced capabilities of smart phones, that's where technology is going," said Tanka. "There is great potential for remote testing – testing students before they get here, for their level of placement. That's something we would love to do," she added.

And based on the success of ALC for the past 35-plus years, this is a language center that is sure to make those dreams a reality.

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Virtuoso™ technology enables student-to-student projects at Glastonbury schools.

Sony Virtuoso™ digital language labs are an integral part of the Foreign Languages Program at the Glastonbury School District in Connecticut. Teachers at Gideon Welles School, Smith Middle School, and Glastonbury High School use the lab technology extensively.

As part of the Glastonbury Spanish 6 curricular unit on the childhood perspective at the high school, students customarily wrote, illustrated, and assembled storybooks, which they then shared with younger students by visiting the elementary schools. Logistically, this was sometimes difficult to arrange, and Spanish teachers Marcia Guedes and Mario Ramos were looking for an easier way. Then they remembered the Multi-Teacher capability of Sony Virtuoso technology. This digital language lab



software enables students at different schools to meet via the lab technology without leaving their respective schools, since they are all connected on the same network. The teachers made arrangements for the high schoolers to work with middle school kids via the language lab.

The older, high school Spanish students had no trouble targeting their projects for the middle school age group since they were familiar with the issues that are often on the minds of middle schoolers. These teens created digital stories, using Prezi™ presentation software (www.prezi.com), on such subjects as friendship, family difficulties, the prom, appropriate social media use, etc. Each story had to have a moral, and interesting characters, as well as teaching new vocabulary. Some students even incorporated elements of magical realism, in the style of *Como Agua Para Chocolate*, by Laura Esquivel, which they had recently read.

"The Sony language lab allowed us to match up each high school student with one or two middle school students, so they could show the stories made with Prezi and read the stories live," said Marcia Guedes. As they read, the younger students could ask questions for clarification. After hearing and seeing the digital stories, the middle school students answered general questions about them,



with help in keeping their responses in the target language from the high schoolers. After the experience, the older teens said they enjoyed sharing their stories and wisdom with their younger peers, because normally their only audience was their teachers.

Middle School Spanish teacher Augusta Gonzalez recounted, "I loved the comment by one of the students, after hearing the story read in Spanish: 'Do these students speak Spanish just like the Spaniards? They sound just like Spanish speakers.' It was very inspiring and gratifying for them to see and hear the Spanish used to entertain them and that they understood the stories."