The audio-visual experience

AVISTA is leading Concordia University into 21st century

SECOND IN A FIVE-PART SERIES

by André Fauteux

"It's here! Users come and be creative," says

Helen Bambic Workman, Co-ordinator of the Audio-Visual In-Service Technical Area (AVISTA). Workman says she's proud of the new multi-media laboratory.

Last November, the facility became MITE AVISTA (pronounced mighty) when it installed a state-of-the-art Multi-media Interactive Technology Environment. It's a do-it-yourself interdisciplinary computer production and presentation facility which will launch Concordia into the 21st Century. Best of all, it's available to all Concordia students, faculty and staff free of charge.

The lab consists of nine Amiga 2000 computers which output to a nine-screen monitor wall, an Amiga 2500 system controller that outputs to a large screen, plus a variety of peripherals and software packages including a Paint Program, Desktop Publishing, Sound and Image Digitizing among others.

Amiga computers, manufactured by Commodore Business Machines, is a versatile machine known for its exceptional graphics and sound-processing capabilities. Workman says the Paint Program particularly "blew her away" the first time she used it. Mark Schofield, Director of the Audio-Visual (AV) Department, says MITE AVISTA will "break down the barriers between the two campuses" by complementing the

thriving facilities at Loyola, where AVISTA began in 1975.

People may be intimidated by new technologies that Workman admits are even "boggling the minds of engineers who are designing them." Her answer: **DON'T PANIC.** Signs saying just that are posted all over the lab, telling people that demystifying hi-tech is what MITE AVISTA is all about. She says anyone can learn new multi-media skills after taking the time to learn simple commands.

"Give creative students a tool to express their creativity and some will not only achieve its potential but also go beyond it," says Workman.

This is especially true of the part-time, student staff at AVISTA. The students come from a variety of academic disciplines to help users with the equipment.

AVISTA users can put their faith in a little more than their own abilities. Each machine, with its dedication to specific capabilities, is named after a mythical goddess — there's Amaterasu, Shakti, Isis, and Gaia, among others.

As computers are the heart of media technology, it is Computer Science student Stefan Buchholz who has been appointed systems administrator for MITE AVISTA. He has designed and implemented a custom graphic user interface for the computer work stations using powerful new system authoring software for Amiga.

Services offered by the AV Department are now more centralized than ever since AVISTA joined the Graphics and Photography Units, Visual Media Resources and the administrative unit. Various facilities are available, including a powerful stat camera, a separate copy stand, an audio room, a video editing area and a presentation room that can seat 25 to 30 people and also doubles as the computer lab.

Most important, Workman says, it is best to come to AVISTA with ideas. "People tend to learn better if they come in with a definite concept of what they want. We nurture creativity around here."

AVISTA is a learning centre

MITE AVISTA is not only one of the most advanced multi-media centres in Québec, it is also the home of several hi-tech Concordia courses. Computer Animation, taught by Cinema Professor Stephen Menzies and Formative Evaluations, taught by Education Professor Jon Baggaley are both held here. Both these professors are on the cutting edge of their fields, which are in explosive phases of development.

AVISTA Co-ordinator Helen Workman says, "this is very new and the people we have teaching here are excellent. Jon Baggaley receives calls from all over the world from people seeking his expertise in analyzing and evaluating the effectiveness of technological images. Stephen Menzies is quite simply a wizard."

The Computer Animation course provides a unique visually interactive teaching-learning environment. Under their teacher's guidance, each of the nine students in the class sits at a terminal and applies the computer software. A bank of colour monitors shows student works in progress; the professor's monitor is a video projector and a screen.

In time, a next step will allow the projector to be hooked up to each terminal so that any one of the animation projects can be flashed up on the big screen from the central control panel.

"Eventually, we want to be able to take any kind of AV output (video-disc, video-cassette, slides, even 16mm film) and control it from the console," says Workman.

The Formative Evaluations course is offered as part of the graduate programme in Education Technology. Ed-tech, as it is affectionately known, is the largest graduate programme in the Faculty of Arts and Science with more than 150 students in the Master of Arts programme alone.

According to Workman, MITE's applications can go beyond these first offerings. She sees the potential for Cinema, Ecotoxicology and Business Administration courses to be conducted under AVISTA's roof; Music and Engineering can easily make use of the multi-media lab.

"We are an interdisciplinary centre. That's our strength," says Workman. "Our doors are open to all faculties. We'd like to develop a course to incorporate these multi-media tools to develop curriculum.—**John Sobol**
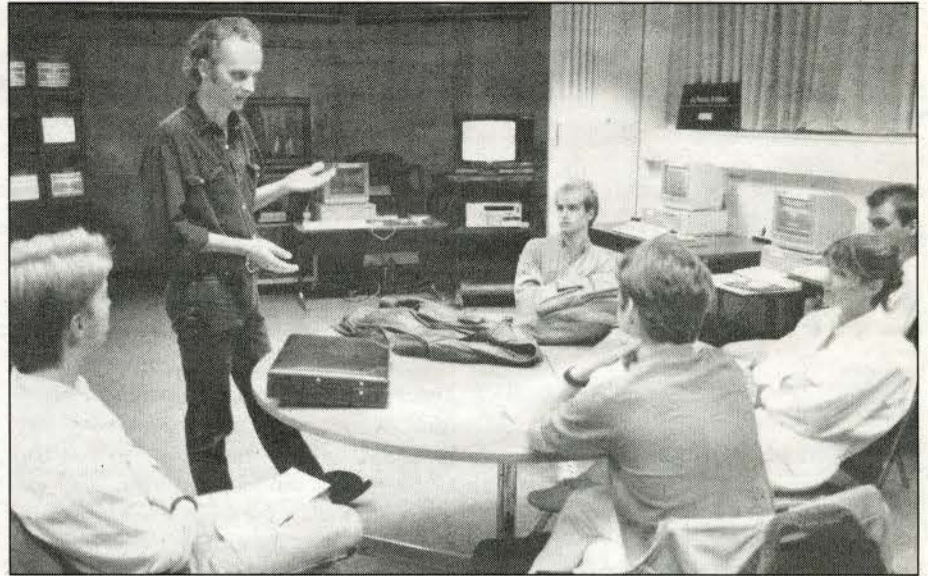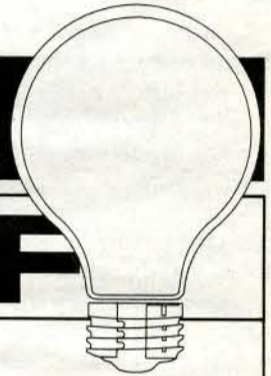

PHOTO: Owen Egan

Cinema Professor Stephen Menzies conducts his Computer Animation course at MITE AVISTA.

OFF THE CUFF

Surprise NDP Ontario victory may mark beginning of new politics in Canada, says Williams

edited by Bronwyn Chester

***Off the Cuff* is a weekly column of opinion and insight into major stories in the news. Our guest commentator this week is Concordia Political Science Professor Blair Williams, who shares his views on the surprise NDP victory in Ontario. If you are a Concordia faculty member and have something to say "off the cuff", call *CTR* at 848-4882.**

Canadian political history was made last Thursday when, for the first time ever, the New Democratic Party was elected to govern Ontario. To Blair Williams, who was director of the national Liberal Party in the early 1970s, the election results signify the anger of the Ontario electorate at former premier David Peterson's "cynical" campaign — "trying to sneak one through" while a summertime electorate slept — and a general post-Meech reaction against old-style politics.

"The election result reflects the terrific volatility of the electorate. People don't vote by tradition any more but by rationality. I believe that this is for the better. We won't have any more of these long dynasties and more people will want to get involved."

"Political parties are going to have to ask themselves not only: is it good strategy (to hold an election at a particular moment), but is it right? In Ontario, people reacted against Peterson's calling an election at taxpayers' expense (in what he thought was his own interest), two years before his mandate was up. Then when he began hopping from picnic to picnic, giving out grants here and there and, finally, promising to reduce the provincial sales tax, people asked themselves: 'why are we putting up with this? We're headed for a recession and Ontario has a deficit.' That old-fashioned pork barrelling just doesn't wash anymore."

"Also, people are more embittered by the whole Meech Lake process than politicians understand. The secrecy, the elitism, some of that smoldering resentment came down on Peterson."

"But the animosity shown to David Peterson is similar to the animosity we see toward Mulroney and Chrétien. For the next federal election, there'll be lots of loose fish out there. The smaller parties could do well because they hold a specific promise for change and don't seem as discredited as the old line parties. It's good news for the Reform Party, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois. We are certainly entering into a very interesting period federally."