

MITE AVISTA opens the doors to the magic of media technology

BY SUSAN SCHUTTA

Tucked away on the third floor of the Henry F. Hall Building, accessible only by the Mackay St. entrance, is one of Concordia University's best kept secrets, the MITE AVISTA Computer Lab. Home to state-of-the-art computers, including 3D animation equipment, virtual reality technology and audio-visual digital software, MITE AVISTA seems more like a Hollywood Disney studio than an academic teaching unit.

In order to raise the lab's profile and showcase students' work, MITE AVISTA staff held an open house November 22 and 23. Most of those who visited the lab left in awe of both the potential and accessibility of its technology.

One of the MITE AVISTA's biggest fans, Vice-Rector Academic Rose Sheinin opened the event by announcing that if she can learn to use this high-tech equipment, anyone can.

"I'm here to push this teaching lab," said Sheinin. "I urge you to play with the equipment, have fun, create something. I never considered myself a creative person, but even I can use this technology." Sheinin admitted that although she was a late convert to the charms of MITE AVISTA, "I'm happy to say that it has high priority in the next Capital Campaign."

Edit videos

Both Sheinin and Helen Bambic-Workman, the head of the lab, point out that labs like MITE AVISTA are democratizing media technology. "Before, when you wanted to edit videos you needed \$150-200,000 switchers," said Bambic-Workman. "Now you can use a toaster, which costs a fraction of the price."

A toaster?

"It's a video production studio on a [computer] board," explained Bambic-Workman. "When you are editing two videos together

and you don't want to have a jump-cut, you used to have to use a switcher. Now you can use a toaster to generate a graphic image to make the cut smoother."

MITE AVISTA got off the ground with the help of Commodore, the computer company behind Amiga computer line and its renowned animation programmes. According to Raymond Prachun, Amiga Marketing Manager for Canada, there are several reasons why his company provided 10 computers and 19 monitors to Bambic-Workman's pilot lab in 1989.

"My background is in teaching, so I know that educational institutions are always broke," said Prachun. "I also think it's important for students to become familiar with up-to-date technology. If kids today aren't up on the latest technology, we're in trouble."

But the real reason Concordia now has a cutting-edge computer lab, joked Prachun, "is that Helen wouldn't let us rest until we gave her the computers. She said that if we helped her at the beginning she would gradually pay for the equipment, so we made a deal."

While MITE AVISTA may have a limited number of computers, they aren't at a user-saturation point yet. "This lab is pan-university. We're open to all students from all disciplines, from Psychology to Fine Arts and Communication Studies, to Anthropology and Biology," said Bambic-Workman. "We aren't for the faint of heart. You have to be ready to put in a serious effort and be ready to learn."

Some of the projects the lab has been involved in include an interactive computer education package on HIV and AIDS, developed by Communication Studies graduate student Danielle Comeau.

Students and staff who missed the open house can visit the MITE AVISTA computer lab during regular office hours.



Vice-Rector Academic Rose Sheinin, left, who describes herself as a late but enthusiastic convert to the technology, gets a refresher from Helen Bambic-Workman, head of the MITE AVISTA computer lab, during an open house last week.

ELSEWHERE...

COMPILED BY MICHAEL ORSINI

This is the first in an occasional series of columns highlighting newsworthy events at universities across Canada. If you have any interesting bits of information to pass on, please send them to Concordia's Thursday Report, BC-117.

The ink has dried on the **University of Ottawa's** Writer-in-Residence programme. The 20-year-old programme, like similar ones across the country, fell victim to budget cuts at the Canada Council, its main benefactor. Some of Ottawa's writers-in-residence have included Audrey Thomas, Joy Kogawa, Guy Vanderhaeghe and Janet Lunn.

The **University of Western Ontario's** Journalism school got some good news recently. The university's Board of Governors defeated the administration's attempts to close the 47-year-old graduate school by a vote of 13-12.

The recession has hit **Dalhousie University** hard. In an effort to cut costs, President Howard Clark has recommended that several departments be abolished. On his hit list are the Theatre Department (including Costume Studies), the Music Department, and the School of Public Administration. Other possible victims include the School of Library and Information Studies in the Faculty of Management, the Dalhousie Art Gallery and *The Dalhousie Review*, the academic journal. The move has been condemned by the Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Dalhousie Faculty Association, which argues that "there is no academic basis on which these programmes can be cut."

A former graduate student and a faculty member in the **University of British Columbia's** Psychology Department have been the targets of hate mail. Over the past eight months, they have received five anonymous letters attacking the "radical feminist viewpoint" in some of the department's classes. An assessment of the letters by two forensic psychiatrists hired by UBC found no basis to conclude that the letters were written by a person or persons suffering from a psychotic disorder. The University has also launched an internal investigation into the matter, and the RCMP is conducting an investigation of its own.

University of New Brunswick Professor Martin Yaqzan, whose incendiary views on date rape earned him national attention, has been reinstated following his suspension with pay. The controversy erupted over an article the mathematics professor wrote for the University's student newspaper, in which he claimed that date rape is a natural outlet for the sexual needs of young men. He also suggested that a woman who is invited to a man's bedroom should expect sex. The decision to reinstate Yaqzan has been criticized by student groups at the university.

A group of angry protesters forced the cancellation of a discussion last month at **McGill University** on a controversial theory which suggests that some memories of child abuse are imagined. The guest lecturer was University of Pennsylvania Professor Emeritus Dr. Harold Lief, an advisor to the U.S.-based False Memory Syndrome Foundation, which represents people who believe they have been wrongly accused of abuse. Its critics have dubbed the foundation "the incest lobby."

McGill University has chosen one of its own to its top administrative post. Bernard Shapiro, a graduate in 1956, becomes McGill's new principal on September 1, succeeding David Johnston. There may be something in the genes; his twin brother, Harold, an economist, is president of Princeton University.

Canada has the second-highest number of university-educated adults of all 24 countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), according to a report prepared by Statistics Canada. Fifteen per cent of adults aged 25 to 64 had a university degree; the U.S. had the highest rate, with 23 per cent. However, Canada did lag behind in the number of graduates with science and engineering degrees. Only 17.6 per cent of students graduated from these programmes, fewer than half of the graduates in France (39.6 per cent).

Sources: *The Gazette*, *Dalhousie News*, *University of Ottawa Gazette*, *UBC Reports*, *The McGill Reporter*, and *CAUT Bulletin*.