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# Training student employees by videotape

By Gregory A. Crawford

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*Circulation staff at Moravian College are videotrained.*

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**T**oday videotapes are available for use in training for various activities from aerobics to computer technology. But is there an instructional video on how to run the circulation desk? Sound far-fetched? No, it is reality at Reeves Library of Moravian College and Theological Seminary where the reference librarians and support staff have become media personalities to a very select group of viewers—our student employees.

Moravian College and Theological Seminary is a small liberal arts college and seminary that offers the BA, BS, BMus, MDiv, MATS, MAPC, and MBA degrees. The student body includes approximately 1,200 full-time undergraduates, 550 in the Division of Continuing Studies, 160 in the MBA program, and 70 in the Seminary programs. Reeves Library houses approximately 186,000 volumes and subscribes to 1,200 periodicals. At the time that this project was undertaken, the Reference and Public Services Department consisted of two professional librarians and two support staff. Although the reorganization of the library in August 1985 resulted in a department which combines circulation, reference, reserves, and interlibrary loan, most of the training procedures were carried over from the previous Circulation Department, since most students employed by the department perform circulation functions.

Due to the extensive responsibilities of our student employees, we estimated that to fully train a new student required over four hours of one-on-one contact with a staff member. Furthermore, be-

cause of student scheduling, rarely could more than one student be trained simultaneously. Both the librarians and the support staff shared this onerous burden. Since the 1985–1986 school year witnessed a large increase in student staffing as a result of the department reorganization, the training of 25 new students required approximately 100 hours of staff time in this one task. Also during this time a greater emphasis was being placed on expanding reference services and bibliographic instruction. Thus, the two librarians were available less often to train or supervise students.

When the summer of 1986 finally came, time was available for a recapitulation and review of the year. It was evident that some changes in student training were mandated. One librarian suggested that we try to produce a training videotape. Her first task was to review some relevant literature on videotape methods which showed that the technique might be useful when adapted to our situation. It was decided that an abbreviated trial tape be ventured. She then arranged with our Media Center to provide a student skilled in the use of videotape equipment, wrote a preliminary script, and made a few visual aids.

The day of the trial arrived and the filming began. For the initial test, one librarian was filmed explaining the circulation of books and reserve reading materials. After the filming, the equipment was hauled back to the Media Center and the test product received its first screening. The result was not satisfactory but it was encouraging.

The staff of the department spent the next few days brainstorming methods of improving the video. We noted four defects. First, the camera had remained stationary. Second, the graphic samples were difficult to see. Third, the script needed to be modified for simpler, clearer presentation. Fourth, the film was too tedious for the viewer if only one person presented all the material. To compensate for these problems, several changes were made.

One of the major improvements, and simple to perform, was to use the blackout and zoom features of the camera. By carefully planning the script for each segment, it became possible to have wide-angle views showing the entire area of concern in each segment with the presenter properly framed and then, when an item was mentioned that needed to be seen clearly, a closeup of the item would immediately appear after a momentary blackout. For example, during the presentation on reserve materials, the viewer is first introduced to the person explaining that segment in a wide-angled shot which shows the reserve desk and reserve stack area. When the presenter began to tell how a student signs out a reserve reading, the screen fades to black and then opens again to reveal a closeup of the reserve card itself. Thus, the viewer sees a detail missing from the trial video.

A second improvement was a better method of presenting any graphic item. Each form regularly used by student employees in the department was mounted on a board of a contrasting color in order to make it more visible. The zoom shots were tried in various ways in order to eliminate glare from the overhead lights and we quickly learned by trial and error the proper way to slant the boards. To further aid the viewer we compiled a book of samples. Each form shown in the video was mounted in clear plastic covers in a notebook in the order corresponding to its presentation in the video. As a

result, as students watch the video, they can also see an actual form in the notebook.

Additionally, the script was improved as was its presentation. Although completeness was a priority, the script for each segment of the video had to be fairly compact. The number of segments was decided upon and divided among the staff. One librarian presented reserve readings and shelving/shelfreading procedures. The other librarian explained the circulation of books and fine policies. One of the support staff discussed interlibrary loan while the other delved into the intricacies of the photocopiers and the change drawer. Each staff member wrote his or her own script and made visual aids for that section of the video. It was then practised before the others who would suggest changes, additions, and deletions. By the time the actual filming was done, the script was fairly well memorized. In addition, each person devised a test for the material he or she presented. Generally the questions paralleled the order of presentation in the video. These questions were compiled into a test which each new student must complete successfully after viewing the video.

The day finally arrived for filming. Each segment was done individually with a personal introduction of each staff member. As a result, new students can at least identify the staff visually. As filming progressed, errors and mistakes often arose. If an error or miscue was major but not found until after the segment was completed, the entire segment was retaped; if caught as it occurred, the smaller section only was retaped immediately. Most of one day was spent in the filming. After the initial filming, the director of the library added an introduction to the video which was edited onto the beginning of the tape. The resulting video has a run length of over an hour.

Although the product has an obvious amateurish quality, the results from students have been positive. The written test has shown that the students have heard and retained, at least temporarily, much of the information. If a student does poorly on a section of the test, he or she can view that part of the videotape again. Furthermore, if a student's performance on the job shows a lack of understanding, the videotape can be seen and the written test taken again. Other students have viewed the tape as a refresher after a long break such as Christmas or summer vacation. We realize that the evolving nature of the department will cause the video to become dated quickly, but the experience gained will produce an even better product next time.

As time has passed, we continue to identify areas that were neglected in the video. To compensate for this, we keep a list of items about which we must personally tell each new student. In this manner we have been able to interact personally with the students and to keep them current on policy and procedural changes.

The use of a videotape and written test for training purposes has substantially reduced the amount

### Equal time with typists!

Gregg Sapp, science librarian at Idaho State University, shares with us the following letter that appeared in the December 17, 1987, issue of the prestigious British scientific journal, *Nature*, under the heading, "Credit where it's due":

"Sir—I note with interest and wonder at the reasons why authors in your journal and others so seldom acknowledge help obtained from library and information services while according fulsome praise to typists, photographers, graphic artists, technical assistants, colleagues and practically everyone else.—Judith Palmer, Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, Herts AL5 2JQ, U.K."

Why, indeed? Are authors in other disciplines or other scientific journals more generous?—*GME*

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of time that librarians and staff members are directly involved in training new student circulation employees and has insured that all the students are

presented with the same material. The results have been noteworthy. ■■

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# Online databases and book preservation

By Danielle Mihram

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*Two topics of increasing interest to literary scholars were discussed at MLA.*

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This year's annual meeting of the Modern Language Association (MLA) took place in San Francisco on December 27–30, 1987. The attendance was quite large—approximately 11,000 participants—and the sessions which were distributed over that period reached a bewildering number—721. Even for a single scholar, the attempt to attend all concurrent sessions of interest within a single subject specialty was nearly impossible.

Though much of the program had to do with literary studies, a few sessions proved quite interesting from the librarian's perspective: those that related to online literary databases, and, for the very first time, to book preservation. There were also sessions dealing with desktop publishing, the ethics of publishing, and the evaluation of educational software. Anyone interested in obtaining a comprehensive view of the program should consult the November 1987 issue of the *PMLA*. This report will concentrate on a few sessions that brought together teams of librarians and academics in discussions regarding online databases and book preservation.

The main focus of one session (#230) was the

question: "Should there be a Library of Great Britain like the Library of America?" while another (#137) concerned itself with "Dating Manuscripts: Current Science Techniques for the Identification of Paper and Ink." Another session of note (#130) was chaired by Geoffrey D. Smith (Ohio State University) and entitled "Literature on File: Prospects for a National Literary Data Base." Smith had attended an MLA meeting in 1984 where he had presented the results of his work on the American Fiction Project; this time, the session included presentations dealing with the "Afro-American Novel Project" (Maryemma Graham, University of Mississippi) and the "Black Periodical Fiction Project" (Henry Louis Gates Jr., Cornell University). Librarians interested in obtaining information about these two databases are encouraged to contact each of the two speakers.

The session began with MLA's Eileen M. Mackesy's "Overview of Current and Future Development in Online Literary Data Bases." Mackesy's presentation echoed many librarians' concerns about the impossibility of obtaining an accurate tally of existing online databases in the humanities.