2015

Excuse Me. Is that a Video Studio in Your Library?

Lori S. Mestre  
*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Eric Kurt  
*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Read the complete Re-think it Conference Proceedings here: [http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/rethinkit_proceedings/1/](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/rethinkit_proceedings/1/)

Learn more about the corresponding conference presentation here: [http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/rethinkit/2015/presentation/13/](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/rethinkit/2015/presentation/13/)

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/library_and_information_science_commons)

Recommended Citation

[http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/rethinkit_proceedings/3](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/rethinkit_proceedings/3)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Re-think it: Libraries for a New Age - Conference Proceedings by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
Excuse Me. Is that a Video Studio in Your Library?

Lori S. Mestre, MALS, Ed.D
Professor and Head. Undergraduate Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Eric Kurt, M.S.
Media Commons Coordinator, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

Although many faculty now require student projects to be presented in a multimodal format, it is rarely feasible for each department or school to acquire all of the technology needed to support those efforts or to require that each student purchase the equipment. This article provides details of the Video Production Studio in the Media Commons at the Undergraduate Library, which serves as a centralized service space that houses a robust loanable technology program and collaborative studios that facilitates the creation of video and audio projects. It is an environment that helps to foster discussion and collaboration from students and faculty to help create solutions through technology. The Media Commons is a service space that offers faculty, students, and users the ability to create, disseminate, use, and curate digital media. It meets a need for broad access to media creation tools, video and audio training, and instruction in media literacy.

Introduction

The Media Commons at The Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign opened in March 2013. This was the result of progressive library decision-makers and colleagues on campus. They collaborated on a groundbreaking initiative that resulted in an increased array of library services and space use that was not available elsewhere on campus.

Although many faculty require projects presented in a multimodal format that incorporate
students’ research, it is rarely feasible for each campus department to acquire all of the technology needed to support those efforts or to require that each student purchase the equipment. The Media Commons was the solution to the problem on campus of no centralized place where students, faculty, and staff, regardless of department, could borrow needed technology and equipment and find needed software and hardware to edit video, audio and photography projects. It now also houses two professional audio and video production studios.

To create this centralized service, we needed to develop a shift in the service philosophy and roles of the library and the services provided by librarians, staff and campus partners, including a reassignment of major floor space, budget dollars, and staffing time. A major contribution to the success of these efforts was ongoing engagement with a long list of diverse campus units and interested faculty, to create a new approach in providing services in entirely new ways, while still maintaining the Library’s critical role in research, instruction, and curricular support.

The Media Commons at the Undergraduate Library provides students and faculty opportunities to experiment with emerging technologies and to learn best practices in educational technology. In addition to a robust loanable technology program, the Media Commons is a service space that offers faculty, students, and users the ability to create, disseminate, use, and curate digital media. It meets a need for broad access to media creation tools, information technology training in multimedia hardware and software, and instruction in media literacy. For more on the development of the Media Commons in general, please see Mestre (2013). For some video clips and more details about the Media Commons, please see the web page at

http://mediacommons.illinois.edu.
Evolution to a Media Commons

The Undergraduate Library, built in 1969, is in the middle of campus, connected by tunnel to the Main Library. The top floor is the collaborative floor and the lower floor is the quiet study floor. Services such as research, circulation, reserves, loanable technology, instruction services, partner services, a computer lab, the video studio, the Media Commons, and technology support are on the upper floor. The collections, quiet study, and an audio studio are located on the lower floor.

In 2005, we began formally exploring the creation of what we called a “learning commons.” The goal was to create an information support system of the services students need located in one place (physically and online). The Undergraduate Library had characteristics of a learning commons for over twenty years. In addition to providing reference, reserve and circulation services, it incorporated a space for the writers workshop, a campus-run student computing lab, a Career Resources Center, advising support, a seminar room, study rooms, and an Espresso Royale Cafe. We extended our research support to be more responsive to student needs, and because of assessment efforts, we also restructured our services and spaces to reflect the needs of students.

Since 2005, the Undergraduate Library had been increasingly providing loanable technology that students could check out to help them with their audio and video projects, especially for students who were not already part of a department that provided that equipment. Originally, we started with very low-end equipment and basic 2-hour loan items.
Mestre & Kurt – Is That a Video Studio in Your Library?

Over the years, the program grew to incorporate basic equipment, adapters, and cables that students check out, as well as high-end media equipment. The growth of loanable technology occurred due to the increased coursework requiring multimedia projects, direct feedback and requests from library patrons, and the creation of the Media Commons that provided a need for a more media focused direction. We started with about 40 items that we loan out and now have over 300 types of items (with multiple copies) that we circulate. Some items are for 2 hours in-library use only. However, cameras, presentation equipment, tablets, and data storage items circulate for one week. Chart 1 gives an idea of the amount of circulation of these items by semester since the implementation of the Media Commons and the growth.

Chart 1: Loanable Technology Circulation Growth
Loanable Technology Demand and Expenditures

Before the implementation of the Media Commons, we had been spending about $3,000 a year on equipment. We needed to increase our expenditures in order to include high-end equipment and equipment requested by students and faculty for classes. We believe we are now at a stable cost of approximately $10,000 a year for equipment. Sander, Mestre & Kurt (2015) published a book that provides detailed information for establishing a loanable technology program, including the setup, policies and procedures.

The need for video equipment has increased since the implementation of the Media Commons and the class presentations that our Media Commons staff have provided. Please see our loanable technology webpage at http://www.library.illinois.edu/ugl/mc/loanable.html for the categories, options and policies. To see a visual of the breakdown of equipment checked out by category, please see chart 2.

Chart 2: Loanable Technology Circulation by Category
In the 2014-2015 school year, loanable technology circulated over 38,000 times to over 500 individual classes. Almost 60% of the departments on campus used our loanable technology.

Although students now have greater access to higher end equipment available through our loanable technology service for their own video projects, there was still an unmet need on campus for a centralized, free video studio. After five years with the Learning Commons, we realized that one of the areas that we still needed to improve was our services for technology assistance to faculty and students. We had a robust technology loan service to help students in their class projects, but no support. We submitted a successful proposal to get funds from the Library/IT student fee to create a Media Commons.

Adding in the Support

Prior even to the inception of the Media Commons we knew that we needed to provide expert support, along with the technology we were making available, in both the Media Commons and in our loanable technology program. We identified various partners on campus who could offer consultation services and workshops in the Media Commons.

The initial idea was that the staff, who were hired for the Media Commons specifically because of their video production skills, as well as the designated campus media partners, would provide consultation via a centralized help desk as a walk up service. What we discovered was that patrons preferred to set up appointments for assistance as they planned and worked on their projects. We also found that it was critical to work directly with the instructors, outside of the Media Commons, to enhance our ability to provide support for larger projects and course media
requirements. Increasingly, the faculty at the University of Illinois want to add media
components in the form of both educational tools and student-based projects to their curriculum. However, they have little experience in the creation of these items and the proper grading techniques for a media project. We can either consult with the instructors to offer advice on effective ways to grade and create media, or we can work with the instructor to become involved with the course itself. The idea was that by working with the instructors directly to help frame media assignments and to offer to come into the classes and offer demonstrations and presentations on the basics of media creation, we could reach a much larger number of students than if we tried to work with students individually.

Video Production Studios

One of the goals of the Media Commons was to provide a centralized service for media production that would be available to students, faculty and staff. The creation of a video production studio with support staff to assist with video shoots was the single most critical aspect of realizing this goal.

We felt the creation of a video production studio was important for two main reasons. The first is that a video production studio allows us to provide a higher level of support beyond the media based loanable technology that we offer our patrons. The needs of our faculty, staff and students sometimes exceed even the highest level of camera and audio equipment we offer in loanable technology. Being able to bring them into a controlled video environment is essential. This space allows us to control the lighting and provide high quality and high data rate video recording. The video production studio also allows us to give patrons access to a higher level of media
technology that we would not feel comfortable offering access to in loanable technology. It also gives patrons access to a green screen background for more versatile options in video shooting environments. The second is to allow our patrons to gain experience and to learn the use and process of a video production studio. We felt it was important, as part of our “Do It Yourself” model of offering media creation assistance to patrons, to offer access and education in running a video production studio in a controlled environment. The video production studio is staffed during a patron appointment. However, we attempt to involve the patrons, as much as they are comfortable or have interest, in the running of the scheduled video shoots. For students who are interested in media creation, this gives them access to an essential learning tool and project space that they may not get anywhere else.

History of the Video Production Studio

Even though the Media Commons received a startup budget, we made strategic decisions in expending the money and worked in revised stages as the needs of the patrons became clear. We followed this philosophy in the creation of the video production studio, which started with just one DSLR (digital single lens reflex camera), a couple of lights, and a portable backdrop.

There are a couple of major benefits to starting simple and revising or expanding, versus starting with the plan of building a fully formed and final video production studio. The first benefit is time. Creating a major space like a video production studio can take a large amount of time in planning, purchasing, and construction. We wanted to be able to provide a space almost immediately, even if it only afforded a basic setup. The second benefit of starting simple is using minimal budget compared to the cost of an expensive full video studio. The third, and possibly
most important benefit, is the limited risk and enhanced efficiency of building and revising based on user need and expectation. By starting small, we were able to identify what our patrons’ practical needs were and could then expand and grow based on that practical need. To date, our video production studio has gone through four main phases; each was a minor upgrade but it has resulted in a fully formed professional, and extremely effective, video production studio. The following is a basic description of each of the phases of the Video Production Studio:

1. The first phase, as stated above, was just enough to get us started. We started with a Nikon d600 DSLR, a Helios travel three-point light kit, a portable framed backdrop, and a wireless lavalier. This was enough to begin production and to start providing support for DIY video creation needs. Even this basic setup provided the availability of a professional studio environment, whereas previously students shot video without any lighting control, with any type of background, and with medium to low grade equipment.

Image 1: Phase 1 of the Video Production Studio
Mestre & Kurt – Is That a Video Studio in Your Library?

There was also a commitment to provide Media Commons support to those using the studio. This initial setup also had the benefit of being portable and allowing us to use it in other spaces in the case that patrons needed us to come to them. Image 1 displays the first phase of the video studio.

2. The second phase was to expand our setup. This phase added a second camera (Nikon 7200), 5 professional Lowell lights and stands, additional audio equipment, and various power and cable upgrades. This setup allowed us to support more than one person on screen at a time and still have good quality audio. It also allowed for camera changes during the shoot. This phase, as illustrated in image 2, had the added benefit of making the studio look more fully formed and professional.

Image 2: Phase 2 of the Video Production Studio
3. The third phase focused on expansion. At this point, we had most of what we needed to run the studio, but we wanted to improve what we could support. By this point and at all of these phase points, we saw a substantial increase in usage and popularity, so our phase revisions also focused on being able to support the added demand. We purchased studio specific cameras that would stay in the studio at all times. This, then, freed up our DSLR’s to use as travel cameras and for other uses (marketing, on location shoots, website needs, video tutorials, etc). We also upgraded our portable backdrop by painting an entire wall in Green Screen paint and the others black. Once again, we reduced some cost by using a standard bright green color from Sherwin Williams (Jolly Green) instead of paying a large amount for a specific Green Screen paint. Whenever possible we looked at practical solutions that would provide the same or similar results at a reduced cost.
4. The fourth phase focused on automation and allowed us to hire student workers and other work support to run the production studio, which freed up the Media Commons’ full-time staff to focus on other endeavors. At this point the video studio was being used once a day and at that rate we had full–time staff who had to focus almost entirely on the running of the studio day to day. We purchased a lighting grid that took all of the lights off the floor (for safety), installed automatic light dimming, direct recording and encoding to the computer, and made other minor updates that simplified the process based on our experience providing video support. Image 4 provides a glimpse of the final studio.

Image 4: Final Phase of the Video Production Studio

Each of these phase revisions incorporated suggestions from patrons who used the studio and from the staff who assisted them.
Video Production Costs

Below is a basic list, along with the estimated cost of each phase of the video production studio 2012-2015.

**Phase 1: Where do we start?**
- Initial Nikon d600 dSLR Camera and Lenses = $6000
- 3pt Lighting Kit = $300
- Portable Green Screen and Frame = $1000
- Wireless Lavalier = $650
- Miscellaneous cables and equipment

**Phase 2: What did we miss?**
- Nikon D7100 (Secondary Camera plus more lenses) = $3000
- 2\textsuperscript{nd} Sennheiser Wireless Lavalier = $650
- Audio Control Mixer = $300
- Video Monitor = $200 (black magic mini monitor)
- Miscellaneous cables and equipment = $200

**Professional Lights**
- 4 * Lowell 450 = $2000 each
- 1 * Lowell 250 = $1500
- Light Stands = $300 (6* $50)
- Miscellaneous cables and equipment = $200

**Phase 3: How do we make it easier?**
- 2* Black Magic Cameras = $2000 each
- Painted Green Screen Background (Sherwin Williams Jolly Green) = $100
- Painted Black side walls (matte black) = $100
- Black Magic Ultra Studio Express = $500
- Miscellaneous cables and equipment = $200

**Phase 4: What did we add based on need and efficiency?**
- Lighting Grid = $8500
- Dimming Light System = $500
- Mac Pro = $6000
- Miscellaneous cables and equipment = $200
Use Cases of the Video Studio

Initially the video production studio was used extensively by media professionals needing a space to shoot, and by University of Illinois departmental staff and faculty who wanted to create educational content or promotional marketing videos. Gradually, through class presentations and marketing, students became aware of the ability for them to reserve the studio.

Currently we provide support to a wide variety of classes and programs throughout the campus. Programs and courses within the College of Media, including journalism and media and cinema studies, are an obvious and heavy user of the loanable technology as well as the production studios. An interesting and altruistic usage of the studios has been through non-profit and student groups, with little to no budget, looking to help market their message and spread knowledge of the support that they offer. Programs like that are services that we try to support whenever possible, and this has even led to the idea of creating some form of free or low cost editing support. This assistance would be offered with the help of student workers or video editing student groups across campus.

We now average at least one video shoot per day, with most days having a second and sometimes even third shoot scheduled. An example of a given week of shoots includes: two shoots from Media and Cinema Studies, a shoot for an Informatics course, a shoot for Instructional Learning, a student organization, and two student projects for personal needs (a commercial advertisement for an invention and a web series helping students with a variety of issues).
Audio Production Studio

Early on in the use and design of the video production studio, we found that there was also a demand for audio-specific recording. Although patrons could also do this in the video production studio, there were two real concerns. The first was that we wanted to avoid utilizing a large, high demand video studio for audio-only recordings. The second was that the video studio, while a quiet space, did not provide the audio isolation that we were looking for in an audio recording sound booth. Our initial idea was to convert a couple of smaller study rooms into audio booths by providing sound insulation and other infrastructure changes, along with the needed audio equipment. By a strange coincidence, the Media Commons Coordinator was speaking with someone on campus about our plan to convert study spaces and learned about a pre-existing audio studio on campus that was being removed due to space needs. After immediately contacting the Beckman Institute, we were just in time to take advantage of this before they disassembled it. After a quick planning meeting, the Media Commons was able to secure the audio booth in exchange for the cost of removing the studio and transporting it to the Undergraduate Library. As a result, the Media Commons was able to open a sound proofed audio recording studio, with the help of donor funds for the equipment. Image 5 shows the audio studio being dropped into the Undergraduate Library Courtyard and Image 6 provides an illustration of the audio studio’s two rooms.
Image 5: Lowering the Audio Booth into the UGL

Image 6: The Audio Booth in Action
The audio booth contains two rooms; a smaller control room to isolate the sounds of computers and other audio recording equipment, and a large sound isolated audio recording space. The audio recording studio setup is easy to understand and run, with generally a five-minute orientation. It then functions as a self-use studio. This has been important for the Media Commons staff, as we can provide a much larger use model for audio recording because return users do not require the presence and support of the Media Commons staff in most cases. The audio recording booth has been even more popular than the video production studio with students who need to record interviews, podcasts, and other audio recording projects for class. Students have also used the space for interesting personal projects, such as for music recording and voice narration of animated web series.

Alternatives to an Audio Studio

As was stated earlier, the Media Commons was fortunate to be able to acquire this professional audio recording studio. However, audio recording is possible in a much smaller and less permanent space. Two things are necessary for audio recording and space is generally not one of them, especially if the use is for one or two people at a time. Any private study space or walled in area should suffice. The first essential component is to have sound dampening. Sound dampening can be added in a variety of ways, based on size and budget. Simple examples are acoustic panels or added insulation, even something that covers the opening at the base of a door can provide a small level of sound dampening. You also want to be aware of any heating and cooling vents that are in the room and their noise level when turned on. The second component is a decent vocal recording microphone. There are many of these, but a reliable recommendation is
a Shure sm7b. It is a pretty timeless and quality mic that, when combined with a sound dampened space, will create a very high quality audio recording.

Self-Use Media Studios

The popularity of the video production studio and the heavy personnel resources needed to assist our users required that we look at expanding the video creation services within the Media Commons. We knew that many of the patron projects using the studio required a much less robust setup, as they often needed simply to have one person recorded in front of a blank background. This understanding, combined with the simplistic setup we had for the audio studio, lead us to focus on creating a more automated video recording space that could be used without an orientation or Media Commons staff person present. This would allow us to accept a much higher volume of video recording reservations and save the video production studio for larger studio requirements or those specifically needing a green screen. This plan would also have the added benefit of freeing up Media Commons personnel to focus on other long-term Media Commons projects.

We determined that the best plan for us would be to renovate two pre-existing study rooms instead of purchasing a freestanding audio-video booth. The 4-foot by 8-foot study rooms, located in the lower level of the UGL, are cinderblock rooms with a large window. The cinderblock reduces the amount of sound dampening needed. We only needed to add a few acoustic panels to limit echo. The windows needed some acoustic dampening, as did the cracks under the door frame. These efforts reduce the possibility of external sounds and the possibility of sound from within disturbing students who are studying on the floor. We looked at a variety of
“all in one” recording boxes that would allow us to record video from a camera, encode it, and then either save to a patron supplied drive or a network share. After our assessments, we chose the Extron SMP351, as it provided us with the options we were looking for as well as a simplistic and easy to use front interface. We combined this with the Panasonic AW-HE2P camera, as we wanted a high definition camera that would record a good signal without many external buttons and options that might confuse patrons. Ease of use in our equipment was a main priority during the selection process. The goal is to have even a patron who has never used the studio be able to walk in and intuitively understand the setup without a large amount of signage or labeling.

Strategies for Developing Resources

In addition to taking advantage of competitive proposals at campus for funds, we also worked with other departments to acquire student interns or student workers to help with the demand for video and audio use. Another excellent opportunity is working with campus departments who will provide media support, training, and even equipment that students can check out. When students do not need the equipment for classes, that equipment can be checked out by others. We also post in our “Library is Looking For” Advancement newsletters to donors for specific equipment. That is how we funded a good portion of the equipment in the video studio, audio studio and for the DIY studios.

Conclusion

The Media Commons is a centralized area where faculty and students from all disciplines can explore possibilities with technology. It provides users an opportunity to turn ideas into
multimedia projects through consultation services, free loanable technology, high-end video and audio studios and media editing equipment. Faculty and instructional technologists recognize the value of this centralized service point, especially for the benefits it offers to a broad range of users. Rather than maintain small pockets of technology, they are exploring ways to contribute to the Media Commons, whether it is with technology, consultation hours, workshops, student peer mentoring hours or videos of examples of projects created because of services in the Media Commons.
References


Biographies

Dr. Lori Mestre

Dr. Lori Mestre is the Head of the Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. From 2005 to 2009 she was the Digital Learning Librarian at UIUC. Prior to 2005, Lori was at the University of Massachusetts Amherst for nearly 15 years where she was the Head of Research and Instructional Services and previously the Education Librarian. In addition to her M.A.L.S. degree, she has a doctorate specializing in multicultural education.

Eric Kurt

Eric Kurt is the Media Commons Coordinator at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has a B.S. and M.S. in Computer Graphics Technology from Purdue University. He has presented and written on the topics of the Media Commons, media and video editing, loanable technology selection and use, and the value of collaborating with faculty to enhance technology support at Libraries.