High tech and high touch
Lewis-installed AV system called one of the nation's best

Best Presentation Rooms Competition
2005
Top 2 Auditoriums

The new lecture room at Curtin Hall includes simultaneous interpretation booths, surround sound and a projection system that provides standard, wide-screen or side-by-side images.

Simultaneous interpretation, the art of real time oral translation from one language to another, is not an easy skill to teach. It's so difficult, in fact, that there are fewer than 20 facilities in the entire country equipped to teach it.

So when planners at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee decided to renovate their SI classroom, they didn't want just the right tools, they wanted the best tools. That meant the best audio and the best video, since many language interpretation jobs today require the interpreter to work from a live computer or video presentation.

"Because of the electronic equipment located within each chair, we could not let general students into our old room with their sodas and their drinks. So the room was hardly ever used," said Associate Dean Charles Schuster. "We had to find a way to maintain its ability to do interpretation but still have at least 30 hours of scheduled classes in here a week. We're a public university, and we have to make ample use of all our facilities." In the end, several departments contributed funds and the designers were able to pull out all the stops on the audio, video and control systems.

The result is a facility and an AV system head and shoulders above anything generally seen in the education or business worlds–so good Presentations Magazine chose it as the nation's second best auditorium in their *Best Presentation Rooms* competition for 2005.

Language interpretation

Where most SI facilities offer space for one to three interpreters, this one allows six to work at once, from four separate soundproof booths. Visiting lecturers from foreign countries have the rare opportunity to make presentations in their native tongue while the audience listens in up to six other languages. The audience member simply chooses the appropriate channel on his or her wireless headset. Headphone sound quality is optimized by an AudiaFLEX DSP. Digital signal processing also allows the school to provide an assistive listening channel for the hearing impaired through the same headphones.

Two of the SI booths are located at floor level along the left wall of the lecture hall. Each has two language interpreter stations, one facing the lecture hall and one facing a smaller seminar room next door. Each interpreter has a headset and multi-channel microphone with control switch, allowing him to communicate with the audience or the presenter, plus a 20-inch flat screen to monitor presentations going on in either room. Two more

> "...They wanted to create something similar to the United Nations, though they didn't have quite the UN's budget..."

interpreters can broadcast from single-station SI booths located at the rear of the lecture hall on either side of the projection booth.

Versatile video

One of the challenges in designing this room was its use by various university departments. "The

The lecture hall from the front showing the podium with preview monitor and touch screen controls. Two interpretation booths are on the side and two more on a mezzanine level at the back. The inside of one of these booths is shown below.

film classes, is more than impressive.

Control, of course, had to be sophisticated but easy to use. The podium also includes a 15" Crestron Isys touch panel, which offers the instructor full preview and monitoring capabilities as well as simplified operation of the various systems. Menus appear in several languages.

John Morales of Lewis Sound and Video programmed the control systems. "This is very cutting edge stuff," said Morales. "It will let them actually have different control system images for different languages. It gives them a lot of flexibility in terms of creating very high end presentations for this room."

Eight Mackie flush mounted ceiling monitors provide audio to the seminar room, which can be used for overflow audience from the lecture hall or for separate classes

Liberal Arts department wanted it for language interpretation," says architect Falamak Nourzad. "Film Studies wanted it for performance; Art History needed older technology for some of its artwork." Nourzad says the rooms needed to be "high tech, high touch and low maintenance"

A 16mm projector was custom built for Film Studies, which wanted to show older films as well as new material on VHS and DVD. Much of the film department's money was spent on equipping a new video-editing suite at the rear of the seminar room. Work done here can be taken to the lecture hall for presentation. Art History still uses color slides and requested a traditional two-projector dissolve setup.

A/V consultant Phil Roeglin of Professional Audio Design in Milwaukee specified a 7700-ANSI lumen Sanyo UXGA projector fed by a Crestron digital image processor. With the processor, professors can show standard, side-by-side or wide-screen computer or video images. Sources built into the podium include a dedicated PC, inputs for two laptops, DVD, CD, VHS, a slide-to-video converter and high-end RGB document camera. The projector will do 1080i high-definition video in almost full resolution and, since it is native 1600 x 1200, even side-by-side computer images show up at a respectable 800 x 600 resolution.

Concert quality sound

The house audio, an eight-speaker surround sound system, puts three powerful Renkus-Heinz loudspeakers and an 18" subwoofer in the front wall, with four more EAW speakers at the rear and rear sides. The effect, particularly in

> ...The Liberal Arts department wanted a room for language interpretation, Film Studies for performance, and Art History to show artwork..

or presentations. This smaller room holds 15 to 20 people around a central conference table. Its audio and video systems can accept feeds from the main lecture hall, and it includes a 3300 ANSI lumen ceiling-mounted projector. A handheld Crestron remote allows a professor to move around the room during a presentation and still have command of the proceedings.

Nourzad sums up this impressive system this way: "They wanted to create something similar to the United Nations, though they didn't have quite the UN's budget." With its audio, video and interpretation capabilities, this facility is one of a kind.