

outbursts

● a monthly publication of outreach and international affairs

spotlight on the language and culture institute

volume 2, issue 9

New site designed for language learners

National Capital Region facility encourages a student-centered approach

By Rich Mathieson

NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION — All the chairs have wheels to make it easier for students to team up on activities or in-class readings. Personal whiteboards at each desk let them work together on writing tasks. Special “collaboration rooms” with dedicated computers and large monitors encourage group projects and presentations.

Every detail of the Virginia Tech Language and Culture Institute’s National Capital Region location, which opened this year in Fairfax, Virginia, has been designed with one goal in mind: to help students learn English.

“The space really provides our students with an inviting, learning-oriented



The computer lab at the Language and Culture Institute supplements classroom instruction with state-of-the-art language-learning technology. Students can also use the lab to check email and browse the Web.

atmosphere,” says Andrea Todd, the institute’s director of Northern Virginia operations. “With technology designed specifically for language-learning and furniture that represents the newest classroom options, the institute is able to maintain its focus on high-quality academic preparation.”

So-called teacher-centered approaches have long emphasized a passive transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. Picture a lecturer standing in front of a large classroom. Increasingly, though, researchers say that student-centered approaches, which engage language

students actively in ways that are appropriate for and relevant to them in their lives outside the classroom, are more effective. That’s at the heart of the Language and Culture Institute, Todd says.

In a student-centered class, she says, students don’t depend on their teacher all the time, waiting for instructions, words of approval, correction, advice, or praise. Rather, they cooperate and learn from each other. Classes are smaller, and students are encouraged to interact, with teachers offering guidance and support.

continued on back



The new facility is in Fairfax’s Mosaic District, just minutes from Washington, D.C., and a block from the Dunn Loring-Merrifield Metro station.

 **VirginiaTech**
Invent the Future®



The institute's central lounge area gives students a comfortable place to interact with each other and with faculty members.

"No detail in this new location — which was years in the planning — was overlooked," says Don Back, the institute's director. "We spent hundreds of hours poring over color schemes, furniture choices, classroom configurations — and that work is reflected in this beautiful new facility. The response from our students and our faculty has been tremendous."

The new facility is about four miles from the university's Northern Virginia Center and about 15 miles from the heart of Washington, D.C. The location, in Fairfax's Mosaic District, was chosen because it is close to a Metro stop, making it a convenient destination.

One student says the best part is the view from the sixth floor. "Most of the classes have a spectacular view of the trees and streets, which I find very calming," says Talah AlSecait.

Another student, Salem Almara, has a slightly more ground-level appreciation.

"The thing I like the most is the café," he says. "In the previous building, there were only machines you could buy from. Now, you can have a quick breakfast between classes or take your lunch with friends after school!"

Associate Director Loren Anderson says the new space has really brought students and faculty together. "The student population is more unified and has greater opportunity to interact," she says. "This, in turn offers a sense of community that didn't exist before. The space additionally has more of the look and feel of a language school. This has the benefit of bringing staff, faculty, and students better together for the purpose and goal of educating the students."

Teachers have been praising the facility's design and organization. "The space offers students nice seating areas for breaks and socializing, and there is an impressive number of computers," says instructor Patti Mihm. "The setting is also a teacher's dream, with a nice staff lounge, a spacious and well-supplied copy room,

and an abundance of ESL texts and teacher resources."

Todd says the "executive feel" of the new location is helping attract more than just college-age students. The institute has started offering TOEFL preparation classes as well as highly customized courses aimed at diplomats and working professionals who want to improve their English. Also, she says, the institute is collaborating with the Pamplin College of Business to design an MBA preparation program. Outside of regular class hours, the facility will be available to Virginia Tech Continuing and Professional Education for conference use.

"This additional programming is possible because of the increased space and technology available in our specially designed Fairfax facility," Todd says.

The new Language and Culture Institute is the university's seventh location in the National Capital Region. "This new facility strengthens our ability to offer language and culture education for academic and professional development as Virginia Tech expands its leadership role in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region," said Steven McKnight, vice president for the National Capital Region.

www.outreach.vt.edu

Language and Culture Institute: National Capital Region

2677 Prosperity Ave., Suite 600
Fairfax, VA 22031
703-205-2750
www.lci.vt.edu

- Don Back, director
540-231-6963
dback@vt.edu
- Andrea Todd, director of Northern Virginia operations
703-205-2756
todda@vt.edu

Outbursts is a publication of Outreach and International Affairs

Guru Ghosh, vice president
Susan Short, associate vice president for engagement

Editorial and graphics staff

Andrea Brunais 540-231-4691
Keith Pierce 540-231-7966
Rich Mathieson 540-231-1419
Miriam Rich 540-231-4153

On the Web

www.outreach.vt.edu/outbursts

See the LCI's new website

In August, the Language and Culture Institute launched a completely redesigned website. See it now at www.lci.vt.edu

The Language and Culture Institute connects people across borders and disciplines.

- English language classes
- Leadership training
- Human capacity building

The future is in your hands. We'll give you the tools to invent it.