

Speech Recognition Technology Comes To WCC

The Cougar Cry staff visited with Sam Sink, our Spanish instructor, to find out what "speech recognition technology" is and how it will help the students who want to learn Spanish. Here is our conversation.

CC: "What is speech recognition technology?"

Sam: "This computer technology allows a comparison of the voiceprint of a native speaker with the voiceprint of the student's recording and shows the student how well s/he is reproducing the sounds and intonation of the model. This is done by a needle which moves between 'native' and 'tourist' according to the match of voiceprints."

CC: "In other words, the student gets a response from the computer that evaluates pronunciation and intonation in Spanish."

Sam: "That's right!"

CC: "How does the student record his/her voice?"

Sam: "First, the student selects a word or phrase or even a whole sentence that s/he wants to practice. Then the computer plays back a recording of a native speaker pronouncing that item. Next, the student repeats the words speaking into a microphone hooked into the computer. The final step is a playback of both voices and then a visual rating somewhere from 'native' to 'tourist.' This process can be repeated as many times as desired as the student practices and tries to move the needle more toward 'native.'

CC: "Can this software run on any computer?"

Sam: "It will run on both Macintosh and

PC platforms, but the voice recognition component only works under Windows. Of course, there are minimum requirements as far as hardware configuration."

CC: "Is this software only available to students in our Spanish class?"

Sam: "I'm glad you asked that because it is available to everyone. The course SPA 181 is an optional Spanish lab which any student may take as an elective. This includes those in the community who want to start to learn Spanish as well as those who want to brush up on skills they learned in high school or elsewhere."

CC: "What time of day is it offered?"

Sam: "That's another nice thing about using computer technology. Our computer labs are scheduled to be open several hours each day including some hours in the evening so that students may schedule lab times at their convenience."

CC: "And if they need help?"

Sam: "There will be a lab technician in the labs at all times to help with technical problems. For questions about Spanish, students can contact me by phone, by mail, in person or by email. My office hours and numbers are in the student packet."

CC: "This sounds like a terrific advantage for WCC students."

Sam: "It is! And I hope they take advantage of it."

CC: "Thanks, Sam."

Sam: "Thank you."

Larry Caudill Is New Dean Of Student Services

By Sandy Sheets

Larry Caudill began serving as the college's Dean of Student Services on July 1, 1997, replacing Dr. Bob Thompson, who retired after 27 years of service to the college.

Larry has served as Director of Counseling Services at WCC since 1985. He came to WCC as Financial Aid Counselor in October, 1982, from Mayland Technical College where he was Director of Counseling and Student Activities. Prior to that, he served as a counselor at Western Carolina University. Since coming to WCC, he has been active in Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation, Reengineering, Quality Council and Vision 2000 as well as assisting with numerous program audits.

Recognized throughout the state for his expertise, Larry is a member of the North Carolina Counseling Association and serves on the executive board of the North Carolina Career Development Association and treasurer. He is a member of the North Carolina Stu-

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Mr. Larry Caudill

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