**Project Overview:**

The project consists of setting up a language laboratory that both public and private institutions in the community will be able to use to improve foreign language learning. The physical space will be provided by the Escuela Media 207, a local public school in Pehuajó, Argentina, which will also provide the internet access and utilities.

I am expecting the language laboratory will achieve two goals: 1) improve the effectiveness of teaching methodologies by integrating technology with education, and 2) make the subject of study more “tangible” by setting up videoconferences where students will actually be able to interface with native speakers of the language that is being studied. These two goals will lead to an even greater, long term outcome. Students from different countries will meet virtually over the internet and will get to know more about each other’s cultures.

**The Project:**

The project will set up fifteen computers interconnected between each other through a network. Six of these will be acquired with funds from the grant and the rest will be provided by the school. These will be placed in “stations” so that students can individually access to class, multimedia, homework, and assignments provided by their professors. The software design for this purpose will allow to interact with students as a whole class, in groups or individually, enhancing learning opportunities. Furthermore, the language laboratory will have access to broadband internet, provided by the partnership established with the school, which will serve as the main resource for setting up videoconferences with foreign students learning Spanish who will be able to talk to native speakers in Argentina. At the same time, Argentinean students learning English or French will be able to talk to foreign students in their countries. Several Spanish professors at Washington and Lee University have already shown interest to participate by utilizing the multimedia center at the university. Also, the laboratory will count with a DVD player, a VCR player and a projector with a screen to facilitate visualization of any kind of audiovisual material to everybody in the room. This will include presentations, movies, on class exercises and the videoconferences.

While the intention of the project is to primarily be available to language students of the Escuela Media 207, the institution has made a commitment to keep the language laboratory open for professors of other public and private institutions who will also benefit from the project. The Headmaster of the school will be working ad honorem as a coordinator to ensure that a schedule is established so that all participants of the project can make use of it. In this way, no ongoing periodic costs will be incurred other than the utilities needed to keep the site in usable conditions and the laboratory running, which will be allocated to the school’s existing budget.

Participating professors will be trained in the use of the software and other equipment so that it can fully be taken advantage of. I will be implementing the
knowledge I have acquired by working at the Multimedia Center at Washington and Lee University to provide the necessary training to professors.

Timeline:

March – June
- Set up the contacts between all interested language professors in the community and the Escuela Normal 207 headmaster.
- Set up contacts between professors involved in Argentina and professors involved abroad.
- Contact local Secretary of Culture and Education to obtain official support from the municipality (donations, further fundraising to improve the site).

June – August
- Commence infrastructure work and refurbishment of the site.
- Purchase of technology equipment.
- Set up of the equipment.
- Training of professors.

August – Ongoing
- Development of partnerships with other language teaching institutions in the community and neighboring communities
- Development of partnerships with foreign institutions interested in videoconferencing with native Spanish speakers.
- Fundraising to afford future expansion and update of the laboratory.

Expected Impact:
Firstly, an immediate expected outcome will be the improvement of the teaching by means of using non traditional classroom tools such as movies, online exercises, a more personalized teacher-student relation, and videoconferencing.
Secondly, integrating technology with education will not only improve the learning opportunities of language students in Pehuajó, but it will also make students and professors more aware of the world outside the community in which they live. By the same token, foreign students will indirectly receive the same benefit when interacting with Argentinean students. Overall, this will lead to a stronger sense of international understanding and a deeper connection between different cultures.

Personal Significance:
Whereas Pehuajó, the community where the project will take place, is not extremely impoverished, the reduced number of resources allocated to education does not help its citizens become aware of the world outside the community. In consequence, it is often the case that all kinds of stereotypes and labels are put on persons foreign to the community and feelings of hostility arise even between neighboring cities. I perceived the first evidence of this upon my arrival back home after being two years at the United World College of the Atlantic. Friends and relatives asked me about friends from different countries and tried to link each of them to the “corresponding” negative stereotype. I also noticed that most of them also focused on the differences they perceived, instead of focusing on the similarities.