Many Snafus Finally Surmounted, Language Labs Now In Operation

By JACK EGAN

At long last—after a marathon of technical snafus, overheating machines and insolvent subcontractors—the Language Labs are finally finished and in use.

Dr. Andrew Louis, Professor of German, said that "we have tried for a set-up which offers great flexibility as well as great learning potential to the individual language student, and the building process just took time."

LOOKING LIKE a cross between Buck Rodgers and Rube Goldberg, Dr. Louis, replete with headphones, trailing wires and rubber-soled shoes, demonstrated with justifiable pride the mechanisms of his domain.

There are a pair of identical labs, whose master control consoles (the yet-to-be-familiar term for tomorrow's mechanical professors) can be run independently. Up to eight different programs or "lines" of study may be broadcast to the sixty sub-booths.

A STUDENT can select any one of these eight lines with the controls on his own console, or he may decide to doze—his privilege—completely cutting off the lecture with a casual flick of a switch.

"The major reason we allow such freedom for the student," explained Dr. Louis, "is expressed in the old proverb: You can lead a horse to water, but ..." He flicked another switch and a tape began to rewind with whining RPM. "We don't want to drive him to drink, and with these machines a pupil can learn at his own pace."

According to Dr. Louis, for the first year only, primary or "elementary" tapes are available. (Though most tapes were bought from commercial publishing houses, Rice's own German Department records the programs under their section.) Use of the facilities in advanced courses, not planned at present, is still in the experimental stage.