

6 April 2011

To: Gerald Baldasty, Dean and Vice Provost, Graduate School, Box 353770
From: Julia Herschensohn, Chair, Linguistics Department
Subject: Review Committee Report

On behalf of the Linguistics Department, I submit the following response to the final report of the Ten-year Program Review Committee. All of the department faculty have reviewed and endorsed this response. Please contact me if you have further questions.

Cc: Ed Taylor, Dean and Vice Provost, Undergraduate Academic Affairs
Office of Academic Affairs and Planning, c/o David Canfield-Budde

Response to the University of Washington Linguistics Department Ten-year Program Review Report, April 2011

Introduction

The Linguistics Department first wishes to express its gratitude to the Review Committee for all their hard work prior to, during, and subsequent to the Site Visit and to the Graduate School for their careful preparation and implementation of the Visit. We are impressed by the meticulous information-gathering the committee has done and its very helpful suggestions. Indeed, we have already been spurred to action on several fronts to be detailed below, where we respond to each of the “specific recommendations” of the Committee. To demonstrate the immediate effectiveness of the Review Report, I highlight departmental developments of March-April:

- Formation of a Resources Committee (Richard Wright, Alicia Wassink, Emily Bender)
- Formation of a Graduate Curriculum / Admissions Committee (Toshi Ogihara, Ellen Kaisse, Richard Wright)
- Scheduling changes in 2011-12 to resolve bottleneck courses
- Budgeted coverage of certain lab costs (e.g. subscriptions)
- Overhaul of TA selection process to be more transparent and streamlined
- University approval of ASL minor
- Discussion of L2 education / Center with colleagues across campus

We welcome this opportunity to acknowledge the Committee’s work and to respond to their suggestions.

The path ahead: Specific recommendations

The committee highlighted seven areas in which changes should help the Department to better meet its mission over the next decade; they made additional suggestions elsewhere in the report, which are addressed below as well. They also made proposals in the sections on graduate and undergraduate programs that we address within our comments on the specific recommendations.

1. Allocate resources to address the increasingly dire space needs. We completely agree that the department has far outgrown the space available and will need to move to another building that can sufficiently accommodate the faculty, staff, graduates, undergraduates, labs and meetings.

2. Allocate resources to provide more competitive support for doctoral students. To this end, we have formed two committees, the Resource Committee and the Graduate Committee. The former will investigate ways to leverage existing department resources as well as funding opportunities on campus to create more competitive offers and more reliable support for graduate students.

The latter will—in addition to its work in graduate admissions—reconsider our revamped TA selection procedure, TA allocation, time to degree and possible curricular revisions. This committee will consider the recommendations for MA-PhD interface, course requirements and professional preparation. We have already been discussing the MA thesis / first generals papers option, weighing advantages and disadvantages of either equating the first general exam to the MA thesis or awarding the MA once the first general has been accepted. The faculty also decided to change the deadline for graduate applicants to December 15 from January 15.

3. Allocate resources to increase administrative support for research and teaching. On the research side, we welcome the addition of dedicated administrative help with grant related activities and will be evaluating this suggestion in the light of Shared Services of the Humanities. The Resource Committee will address some of the Committee's suggestions in its recommendations for allocation of funding.

With regard to the ongoing costs associated with maintenance of the department's three laboratories, the department has begun developing a plan to allocate departmental funds annually for the support of some ongoing laboratory costs. These might include subscription costs for Linguistics Data Consortium membership, software upgrades and occasional equipment replacements. While this will improve our ability to cover small recurring costs, the department does not have the resources at present to respond to the request for ongoing laboratory budgets to cover larger expenses or specialized equipment needed for faculty or graduate student research (e.g., recording booth, portable ultrasound imaging equipment, telephony devices). Our lab directors and administrator will work closely with the new Humanities Shared Services group to assure that purchasing procedures for the Linguistics laboratories are as efficient and cost-effective as possible and to guarantee the department's continuing ability to control necessary lab purchases. We will be keen to share information with the team, especially given the fact that research laboratories are uncommon in this division.

As for teaching, the faculty have made several suggestions to improve curricular offerings. We aim to have more interdisciplinary and entry-level courses that will appeal to non-majors and serve to inspire students to study further linguistics. A new course offered for the first time this quarter, on MEG neuro-imaging (Ling 582 with SPHSC 594), invites cross-disciplinary collaboration. Clarissa Surek-Clark's new Language and Diversity (probably Ling 234) should attract a range of lower division students. Finally, we will heed the Committee's suggestion to encourage an undergraduate research course by expanding the 499 currently on the books.

The Committee emphasizes the importance of computational methods in linguistic research, not just within the subfield of computational linguistics but across the field as a whole. While the computational linguistics courses in our department are open to students from outside the computational linguistics program, meeting the prerequisites for these courses would not be feasible in a

timely fashion. Furthermore, these courses are generally not focused on the application of computational methods to linguistic research.

We plan to develop a new course to add to our graduate curriculum entitled "Computational Methods for Linguistics". The goals of this course will be to equip students with toolsets to be able to approach research projects involving very large datasets and to improve student awareness of existing resources including corpora and standards. The course will be structured around student projects involving large data sets, and include training in basic text processing (e.g., unix tools such as grep, simple scripting and regular expressions), statistical tests and tools (including R), data management (including version control systems), and discussions of existing and emerging standards for encoding of linguistic data and annotations.

Hargus's class Native American Languages of Washington state (LING 411) was positively referred to by the review committee, but she has not taught this class since the early 90s. This class could be revamped and expanded as an introduction to Native American languages of the U.S. and Canada, possibly cross-listed with American Indian Studies. It could also include applied (sound language pedagogy practices) and/or sociolinguistic (language revitalization) components, which would probably make the course more appealing to non-Linguistics majors.

In discussing the Committee's suggestions for enrollment, we determined that the problem was not scheduling per se or advising, but rather the lack of scheduled courses. Two particularly acute bottleneck courses are Ling 450/550, Phonetics, and Ling 432/532 Socio I, both of which have wait lists even when offered more than once a year. To alleviate the problem next year, one section of Ling 400 was traded out for an additional 450 and 432 was scheduled twice. As for the ideas of Linguistics minors for language majors or vice versa, the coupling of these two disciplines has long been a staple of undergraduate majors, especially of the Romance Linguistics students. We apologize if we didn't make that clear.

4. Rethink the department pattern of administration. The new committees were formed in response to the suggestions and should provide new perspectives on the issues they will be addressing. The faculty wished to point out to the reviewers that Linguistics has an established policy of forming committees to deal with specific problems, rather than constituting several standing committees that continue year to year. It described this policy as allowing "flexible, agile and modular" response to targeted issues. For example, the new Resources Committee will research other schools' models for graduate student funding. This process, and resulting recommendations, will enable focused attention on three interrelated issues identified by the committee, including graduate student funding, time to degree, and research support for graduate students.

5. Foster a broader leadership role for Linguistics in second language education. As a second language specialist, I especially appreciate this suggestion, and so we are already initiating discussions with other L2 specialists

across campus and at other institutions (e.g. CASL, Michigan State Integrative Arts and Humanities).

The review committee recommends that Linguistics “foster a broad leadership role in second language education”. The report identifies several goals for development in this area, including facilitating collaborative advising of grad students who are studying the linguistics of particular languages, facilitating the use of technology and computational linguistics concepts in language instruction, developing new multi-disciplinary majors or minors for language families on the model of the Romance Linguistics major, and fostering research connections. Steps that can be taken immediately to pursue these goals include initiating conversations with faculty who administer language programs across campus, as well as with staff of the Language Learning Center, computational linguists and L2 specialists. The goals of these meetings would be: (a) to identify ways in which existing technology and computational concepts can lead to improvements and innovations in language education; (b) to develop proposals for collaborative advising of graduate students studying the linguistics of particular languages; and (c) consider multi-disciplinary majors or minors. In some cases, matching needs with existing resources might produce tools that could be implemented easily (such as applying Moodle technology in language courses). The meetings might also identify longer-range goals that could be developed over time, such as the development of tagged language files that would be accessible to language students and others. To the extent that ongoing collaboration would advance these goals, the committee’s suggestion for a “center of excellence in language education” might be explored. The center might foster collaborative research on L2 acquisition and facilitate the dissemination of research about it to the broader language and linguistics community at UW. The center might also take on a broader role within the Humanities Division of exploring the relationship between language and culture, with participation by Linguistics and faculty in other Humanities departments. Indeed to this end, conversations with language faculty and the LLC have already been initiated, and the response has been very positive. We propose that the center would not be housed within Linguistics, nor would we expect it to subsume Linguistics, but that Linguistics would be happy to participate in such a center.

6. Integrate and expand Department infrastructure in support of language diversity. We support the recommendations concerning diversity and the importance of ASL. The acceptance of the ASL minor is a good step toward expanding the reach of signed languages and connections to the Deaf community.

On the behalf of ASL program, we support the committee’s recommendations to expand our ASL program with more ASL lecturers to accommodate the heavy demand from students, as evidenced by the long wait list of over 250 students every year since 2007. We also support the idea of hiring a tenure track ASL professor to increase research and scholarly knowledge in ASL and ASL linguistics in our department. In fact, we are already in the process of offering

ASL Studies as a minor by this Fall, along with several new courses such as Deaf History, ASL Literature and Independent Studies in ASL.

The idea of having an Interpreter Training Program at UW is part of our long-term goal. We have no university level ITP in the whole state of Washington, and we are the only ASL program equipped with appropriate resources that can be used to build a full-fledged ITP with national standards and quality. However, Dr. Richard Ladner believes that it's more feasible to have a graduate level ITP so we can raise the interpreter training standards bar to a professional level (a great need in our country). In any way, we are supportive of the review committee's report on the potentials for growth of our ASL program along with the department of Linguistics.

7. Develop a Department plan for optimal strategic hiring. The report recommended that the department prioritize the hiring of new faculty as follows:

- signed language linguist
- psycholinguist (L1 or adult)
- formal semanticist

We concur with these recommendations and their prioritization.

A signed language linguist, if fluent in ASL as the report recommends, would ensure a connection between the ASL language program and the rest of the Linguistics faculty. We do not feel that we lack such a connection at the moment—we are excited to have been able to provide a home for ASL instruction on the UW campus, and highly value our current ASL faculty—but welcome any move which would further integrate the ASL program with the rest of Linguistics. Along those lines, we plan to offer LING 403 (Introduction to ASL Linguistics), which is required for the ASL minor, once a year. (This class is currently taught by a lecturer, 2003 UW Linguistics PhD Lorna Rozelle.)

Psycholinguistics should be a part of any linguistics program that takes seriously the view that linguists should describe what speakers and signers know about their language, not just what they do/produce. The traditional methodology of qualitative linguistics is to inductively infer pattern(s) from a set of data, but there are limits or indeterminacies as to what can be inferred. These indeterminacies can be considered hypotheses to be subjected to experimental testing. That is how we expect linguistics to progress as a science. An experimental psycholinguist would help us move in that direction. A developmental psycholinguist would help build bridges between Linguistics and the important work being done at I-Labs.

We recognize that semantics is an important subfield of linguistics. As the review committee pointed out, some semanticists have a specialization in the indigenous languages of the Americas (witness the annual conference on 'Semantics of Under-represented Languages of the Americas') and this could be an opportunity to build the Native American linguistics component of the department.