

Linguistics Program
Coordinator's Response to the Program Performance Review External Review Team Report
March 16, 2020

I greatly appreciate the thoughtful and helpful report prepared by the Linguistics Program's External Review Team – Dr. Reyes Fidalgo (California State University, Fullerton), Dr. Roula Svorou (San Jose State University), and Harold Torrence (University of California, Los Angeles). It was my pleasure to host these three outstanding colleagues for their February 19, 2020 site visit, during which they met with H&SS Dean Sheryl Fontaine, H&SS Associate Dean Jessica Stern, Department of English, Comparative Literature and Linguistics Chair Stephen Mexal, linguistics tenure-track and adjunct faculty, undergraduate and graduate students in linguistics, and me. I hope that I can return the favor by serving in a similar role for their respective programs again in the future.

In addition to their gracious commendations and lucid description of our challenges, the review team offered several specific recommendations. I will address these recommendations individually below:

1. The review team repeatedly commend the strength of our core curriculum but find noticeable gaps in our current curriculum, specifically in the areas of morphology, semantics/pragmatics, and computational linguistics. The former is beginning to be remedied since Dr. Kenneth Van Bik will be proposing a new course on morphology as soon as he has shepherded his current new course proposal – on English as a World Language – to fruition. The latter will require a new hire. As the review team note, the tech industry has emerged as a new venue of employment for our linguistics graduates in recent years. In order to be able to offer our students a solid preparation for these jobs, we will need to have a computational linguist on board to develop a certificate for our undergraduate students and a new concentration for our graduate students. I will discuss with Dr. Stephen Mexal, Chair of the English Department, and the Dean's Office how the hiring of a computational linguist can fit into the hiring plan of the department given the current strength of the Linguistics Program. These discussions are also the best venue for raising the review team's welcome call for providing release time for our faculty.
2. The review team noted that the number of prerequisites for the linguistics MA program is so high that it may dissuade some otherwise very qualified students from applying. They suggest that we reduce these prerequisites from 15 to 12 units, specifically by removing LING 412 Sociolinguistics. This recommendation is in line with discussions that the linguistics faculty have had off and on for some time. Seeing the review team's support for such a move, we will now implement it. Students who are interested in the course in question will still be able to take it as part of the MA concentration on language and society, or as their 3-unit elective.
3. The team propose two useful strategies for more outreach to increase enrollment in our BA program. The first seeks to involve our Linguistics Student Association in outreach to local high schools. We will explore how to best do this amongst the faculty and with the LSA leadership. Further, we will immediately implement the second strategy, which calls for discussing career

opportunities for linguists in all 100-level courses and indeed in all levels. We will do likewise for the review team's proposal to invite successful alumni to talk to our current students.

4. By contrast, we are reluctant to follow the review team's suggestion to convert LING 406 Descriptive Linguistics into a 300-level course. While we appreciate that this move would make it possible to turn it into an upper-division GE course, we use this course as a senior-level introduction so that it can serve as a prerequisite for incoming graduate students in both, linguistics and TESOL, who mostly come to us with undergraduate degrees in fields that are related to linguistics. This is why we have found it essential for them to take this senior-level survey of our field before they go into the more specialized courses that LING 406 is a prerequisite for, such as LING 408 Syntax or LING 430 Historical Linguistics.

5. A final group of recommendations concern advisement and course prerequisites. One of these suggests making LING 351 Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology a prerequisite for LING 430 Historical Linguistics. Though not listed as such in the university catalog, this actually is de facto policy of our program since we advise all students to take LING 351 before attempting LING 430. More generally, the review team very sensibly emphasize the need to publicize and advise students on course rotation and prerequisites. I concur wholeheartedly.

In sum, the review team's report contains astute observations and valuable suggestions that the program will consider in both short-term and long-term planning. In order to accomplish some of the tasks that the review team recommends, we will require support and resources from the H&SS Dean's Office. We look forward to working with the College and University to create a stronger Linguistics Program.