

California State University, Fullerton
Program Performance Review
Linguistics Program
Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics
External Review Report (Spring 2020)

Review Team Members

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The Review Process

This report is based on the review team's study of the Program Performance Review Self-Study, completed on February 2020, by the CSUF Linguistics Program, followed up with a site visit that took place on February 19th, 2020. During the on-campus visit, the review team met with Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences Dr. Sheryl Fontaine, and Associate Dean for Student Relations, Dr. Jessica Stern. The team also met with Dr. Stephen Mexal, Chair of the Department of English, Comparative Literature and Linguistics, and Dr. Franz Mueller, Coordinator of the Linguistics Program, before visiting the class of adjunct faculty member Dr. Timothy Henry, LING 106 *Language and Linguistics*. After the class, the team met with an undergraduate student; with the newest member of the department, Assistant Professor Dr. Kenneth Van Bik; with Associate Professor and Graduate Advisor Dr. Patricia Schneider-Zioga; and had lunch with the faculty. After lunch, the team met with Lecturer Dr. Timothy Henry-Rodriguez and several graduate and undergraduate students, some of which are or had been involved in a leadership position in the Linguistics Student Association (LSA) for more than an hour. After conferral with Program Coordinator Franz Mueller, the team had a wrap up session before the final meeting with the Dean and the Associate Dean.

This report is organized into three principal sections in which we outline commendations, challenges, and recommendations for the Linguistics Program. Our focus is on the GE courses, minor, major, and MA programs offered by the Program.

Commendations

The review team was positively struck by the level of dedication exhibited by the faculty in their commitment to making the Linguistics Program succeed. This is combined with a strong sense of collegiality that results in a very positive atmosphere. Junior faculty have a mentor and are supported during their tenure years, in addition to the release time allotted to them contractually.

There is a strong student-faculty engagement and the faculty expend a lot of time and energy mentoring and advising the graduate students.

The time-to-degree numbers are quite good, especially given the fact that Linguistics is a field that students tend to discover late in their undergraduate careers. In fact, it is extremely rare for freshmen to arrive at a university already knowing that they want to major in Linguistics. The time-to-degree for transfer students in the department is excellent.

One unusual aspect of the Linguistics Program is that it is enriched by an enthusiastic student association. The review team takes this as evidence of the effectiveness of the faculty in inspiring passion for Linguistics among the students.

The core curriculum of the Program is strong and provides students at the undergraduate and graduate levels with a solid education in the field. Upon completing the Master's program, students are well-prepared to continue their education in competitive Ph.D. programs across the country, enter the tech industry, and pursue university-level English as a Second Language teaching careers.

Lower division courses (LING 102 *Languages of the World*, LING 106 *Language and Linguistics*) are taught by popular instructors and have attracted good numbers of students increasing enrollments and FTES for the program. As linguistics is a discovery major for most students, these General Education courses are the places where students are introduced to linguistics and where new majors can be attracted.

Challenges

The Linguistics Program faces a number of genuinely difficult challenges at this point.

First, faculty (tenure-track and adjunct) are overworked and the senior faculty wear multiple hats (undergraduate and graduate advising, and program coordinator, etc.). While faculty in the English department in general teach 3/3, the Program Coordinator is teaching 3/3, plus coordinating, plus supervising theses in the LING 597 *Project* graduate course. A publication, *California Linguistics Notes*, used to be put out by Schneider-Zioga. However, she was unable to continue this given her workload. The lecturer, Timothy Henry, advises both undergraduate and graduate students too, in addition to his 5/5 teaching load. Put together, this means that faculty do not have enough time for the added engagement that the students seek. In the team's meetings, this point was mentioned explicitly by the students. This is particularly problematic given that that kind of engagement is one of the missions of the program and one of the main virtues for students in a smaller program.

The core curriculum is admirably broad. However, this means that, given current staffing levels, the faculty cannot offer the kinds of in-depth courses that the program needs. Related to this, there are gaps in the current curriculum that should be filled. Specifically, students need courses in morphology, semantics/pragmatics, and computational linguistics that they do not currently have. We have learned that many of the program's graduates find employment in technology companies that develop products that require natural language processing. A computational linguistics background could further enhance the profiles of the graduates of the program seeking employment in the tech industry.

CSUF is a teaching university. However, graduate linguistics students still must conduct original research in order to write their Master's theses or projects. Graduate and undergraduate students specifically mentioned the lack of additional and extended research opportunities as a problem. They realize that this puts them at a disadvantage when applying to doctoral programs. There are no funds available (that we know of) for students to do research or to pay them to do research. In addition,

courses such as LING 492 *Field Methods*, where students could dive into research projects, are not financially supported beyond one semester. (The language consultant for such a course must be paid.) Students specifically mentioned that the Field Methods class was great, but it ended just as they were finding interesting topics and there was no way to continue the research.

Faculty regard student research highly and work very hard to promote it. However, it seems that the level of faculty compensation for guiding student research is not adequate, as they are not compensated for teaching LING 597 *Project*.

Student demand for the graduate program has declined in the past 6 years, unlike demand for the undergraduate program which has remained steady. Applications declined by 58% and the yield from the admitted students declined by 17 points (from 78% yield in 2014 to 61% in 2018). That has resulted in decline in graduate enrollment and FTES from a high of 65 students (43.8 FTES) in AY 2015-2016 to 28 students (17.5 FTES) in AY 2018-19. While factors for the decline are varied and generally outside of the control of the faculty, one possible contributing factor in the program's control might be the number of prerequisites to the program. For students with no BA degree in linguistics, the 15 units of prerequisites may add one or possibly two semesters to the completion of the MA degree, also adding to the cost of the program. And cost is at the forefront of our students' mind in the current economy. As can be seen by the graduation rates, the 3-year rate is an average of 52% for the last 5 cohorts.

In the past five years, First-Time Freshman applications and admissions have almost doubled, yet the number of enrolled students has remained flat. This is an indication that more high school students are becoming aware of linguistics as a discipline and potential major but end up going to other universities. The number applied and admitted Upper-Division transfers has not changed dramatically during the same period. The challenge is to identify strategies to attract more of the admitted students to the university.

It is also clear from meetings with students that undergraduates need more advising for progress toward degree but also for post-college career information.

Recommendations

To address the challenges in terms of workload, curriculum, student support and engagement, we recommend the following:

Allot release-time for faculty to fulfill all the administrative duties that a department —albeit small— requires. This will allow faculty additional time to engage deeply with the students but also to serve on committees beyond the department, which will broaden their view of the issues (and solutions) at the college and the university levels.

Hire a tenure-track faculty member to teach pragmatics/semantics and computational linguistics. An additional faculty member would also contribute to advising and the shared governance of the program, alleviating some the workload issues facing current faculty.

Ensure funding for the field methods course (LING 492). Dean Fontaine mentioned the possibility of applying for Miscellaneous Course Fee funds to provide for adequate pay for a language consultant to work with students in this class for the semester it is offered but also beyond the semester if students

opt to continue research on the specific language for their master's project or thesis. This would be well-spent money as it would advance students' research productivity, with the possibility of them participating in the CSU Student Research Competition, presenting at student conferences beyond their own annual symposium, and building their portfolio and competitiveness for Ph.D. programs.

Explore ways to make LING 597 *Project* a course that counts in the instructor's work load. LING 597 is currently offered every semester, it has an enrollment cap of 10 and the enrollments fluctuate between 4-9. If the course were to be offered only once a year with raised caps and double the enrollment, then instructors could be compensated appropriately. This solution might require enhanced advising to ensure that students' graduation roadmaps are not affected negatively.

Restructure some Master's program prerequisites to reflect the actual background needed to support the more advanced courses in the foundational requirements of the program. Specifically, reduce foundational required courses to 12 units, instead of 15, by dropping LING 412 *Sociolinguistics*. (For students opting for the Language and Society concentration, this course could be taken together with other courses in this area.)

Identify strategies to increase the number of majors in the program. One possible strategy is to engage in more outreach for the BA Linguistics program. We understand that the faculty are already overworked and outreach requires energy and time. But the program is blessed with a very active student association that can be intentionally guided to adopt outreach to high schools as one of their activities. Students then can be recognized with awards or certificates for their outreach efforts, as making lively presentations to high schoolers will sharpen their communication and organization skills and will strengthen even more their sense of community in the program. Another strategy is to discuss career opportunities for linguistics majors in the two 100-level courses. Knowing the sort of skills that the linguistics major hones can be a great motivator for students who like languages but who can't yet imagine how they could use such linguistics skills to build a career around, beyond the careers that their instructors are modeling.

Divide advising into two positions: one covering roughly "getting through the linguistics major" and the other dealing with degree and career information. Publicize and advise students on prerequisites and course rotation for courses not offered every semester to ensure that students keep on track for speedy graduation. On that note, we felt that making the phonetics and phonology course a pre-requisite for the historical linguistics courses would give students the tools needed for a deeper understanding of sound change and reconstruction.

Engage in career advising of your students in all levels. The university's career center would be a great resource and a partner for collaboration. Invite successful alumni (e.g., those in tech, teaching, or in doctoral programs) to CSUF to talk to current students. The undergraduate linguistics association would be a good ally in carrying this out.

Modify LING 406 *Descriptive Linguistics* to meet the requirements of a 300 GE level class. The 100 level linguistics GE courses are already successful in enrollment and this change could potentially contribute to larger numbers in the major.

Summary

The Linguistics Program in the Department of English, Comparative Literature, and Linguistics at California State University, Fullerton is doing an outstanding job in fulfilling the mission of the

University to “combine the best qualities of teaching and research universities” in an atmosphere where “learning is preeminent”. With its very collaborative faculty and enthusiastic students, the program is well positioned to educate new generations of linguists. The faculty are hard-working and reflective and have articulated goals for the next few years that would further the mission of the program, the department, the college and the university. The Linguistics Program has energetic and committed faculty that with the support of the Department and the College has the potential to grow in terms of student enrollments, research capacity for both students and faculty, and tenure-track faculty.