Plans for Student Outcomes Assessment
Department of Linguistics
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I. Undergraduate Program

A. Mission

The undergraduate program in Linguistics offers courses in general linguistics and in non-Western languages. The courses in **general linguistics** cover the full spectrum of sub-fields of Linguistics and are intended to prepare students for various careers in which the scientific study of language is of significance, among others: anthropology, speech and hearing science, psychology, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, computer science, foreign language teaching (including English as a foreign language), lexicography, stylistics, and text and discourse analysis. They are, furthermore, the basis for continued professional training toward the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in this field. The n**on-Western language courses** are offered regularly in Arabic, Modern Hebrew, Hindi, Sanskrit, and various African languages (Bamana, Lingala, Swahili, Wolof, and Zulu), and are useful for those interested in area studies, such as Asian or African Studies.

B. Assessment

Current assessment practices
The department does not currently have a comprehensive assessment plan in place for the undergraduate program but assesses undergraduates through their performance in classes. The department strongly encourages majors to pursue departmental distinction by registering for at least 4 hours of LING 390 (Honors Individual Study) and submitting a senior honors thesis. The thesis is read by two faculty members who assess the work and provide feedback to the student.

Future plans for outcomes assessment
The undergraduate program in Linguistics has seen rapid growth in recent years, including increased enrollment in undergraduate courses (required, elective, and General Education) and an increase in the number of declared majors and minors in Linguistics. The department has responded by adding several new courses and offering some existing courses more frequently. These developments call for new assessment practices to provide information about learning outcomes. The following practices will be adopted:

- Capstone courses and Senior Honors Individual Study
- Examinations and Term Research Projects
- Surveys

- Institutional data
- Individual or Group Interviews

Capstone courses. The Linguistics faculty are currently discussing the incorporation of one or more capstone courses for Linguistics majors to take in their senior year. A capstone course would be focused around a research project in which students would collect linguistic data that they would then analyze drawing on theories of grammar and language use introduced in the courses required for the Linguistics major. In the capstone course students would engage in all the kinds of activities that comprise linguistic scholarship, including original data collection, analysis using formal, computational and/or statistical methods, library research, small group discussions, oral presentations and writing. At the end of the course, participants would present their research projects to the broader UIUC linguistics community at a Linguistics Senior Symposium, held on the UIUC campus. An evaluation will be administered at the end of the capstone course, to capture students' evaluations of their own learning outcomes over the major program of study. The faculty member(s) directing the capstone course will also be surveyed for their input about specific skills and areas of knowledge in which students demonstrate strengths and/or weaknesses. This data will inform faculty decisions about courses and teaching methods in upcoming semesters. *The first capstone course will be planned during 2008-2009 for submission of a new course proposal in Fall 2009. A pilot version of the course will offered under an undergraduate seminar course number in Fall 2009 or Spring 2010.*

Senior Honors Individual Study. Students majoring in Linguistics are strongly encouraged to pursue a degree with distinction by writing a senior honor's thesis. The thesis-writing process is supervised by a faculty member during a semester-long (minimum) Honors Individual Study. This supervised interaction allows the department to assess the accomplishments of its most highly achieving students. *Faculty supervising a section of Honors Individual Study will be asked to submit a brief (under 1 page) report to the Department Head and Director of Undergraduate Study for review of student outcomes assessment.*

Examinations and Term Research Projects. Many of the required and elective undergraduate courses in Linguistics culminate in a final comprehensive exam and/or a term research project and paper. These are among the standard assessment tools already being used by the department to assessment student outcomes. These data are already used to inform the department's selection of undergraduate students to receive departmental awards for accomplishment in research and overall academic achievement. *The use of examinations and term research projects for student outcome assessment will continue.*

Surveys. We will create surveys to assess learning outcomes relative to students' expectations, targeting students enrolled in one or more of the courses required for the Linguistics major. There will be three surveys, one administered in the Fall semester to students entering the major (selected based on enrollment in a beginning-level required Linguistics class), one to the same set of students a year later, and an exit survey administered to seniors at the time of graduation. These surveys will include questions about the reasons why the student chose to study Linguistics, their goals and expectation, their rating of the quality of courses and instruction, and their satisfaction with the outcomes they perceive. For exiting students, we will also ask information about their plans for employment or graduate/professional study. Free response

comments will be invited from all students. Surveys will be developed using guidelines provided by the Center for Teaching Excellence and administered online. *The entering student survey will be designed during the summer in 2008 and administered to the first group of new majors in Fall 2008. The continuing student survey will be administered annually beginning in Fall 2009, and the exit survey in Spring 2010.*

Institutional Data. Using institutional data available from the university, we will track data on the GPA of majors by class level and overall, enrollment trends for required, elective and GenEd classes, drop rates, graduation rates for majors, and numbers of majors achieving distinction (e.g., Bronze Tablet). We are also interested in looking at admissions records for majors to determine entering GPA, ACT/SAT scores and high school rank, to construct a profile of the kind of student who eventually seeks the Linguistics major. *The department will develop a plan in 2008-2009 for retrieving institutional data. We plan that the data collection work will be done by support staff in the School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics.*

Interviews. The Linguistics Department is home to an active *Linguistic Student Organization (LSO),* which includes graduate as well as undergraduate student members. We plan to conduct an annual interview with undergraduate majors and minors who are members of the LSO, to find out about student concerns and needs, and to get feedback on features of the program that students like and value. Interviews will be conducted in a small group format led by one or two faculty members, including the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Opportunities for individual interviews will be made available for a small number of students. *The first set of interviews will be planned for Spring 2009.*

II. Graduate Program

A. Mission

The graduate program in Linguistics offers courses in both applied and formal linguistics. The M.A. program provides students with a foundation of knowledge spanning the core areas, and prepares students for work in the communication and computer industries, in language teaching, or for doctoral study in Linguistics. The Ph.D. program offers advanced study in seven areas of sub-specialization, comprising computational linguistics, historical linguistics, phonology/ phonetics, psycholinguistics, semantics/ pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and syntax. Courses in the Ph.D. program engage students with the leading ideas in Linguistics and introduce critical tools and research methods spanning the discipline. Students gain skills in research, writing, oral presentations, and in teaching linguistics and/or language courses at the undergraduate level.

B. Assessment

Current assessment practices
Graduate student outcomes are currently assessed through classwork, including classroom examinations at both the M.A. and Ph.D. levels. In addition, the qualifying exams are used to assess a broad range of learning outcomes at the M.A. level, and student presentations in the

weekly Linguistics Seminar assess outcomes at the Ph.D. level. The current system reflects changes implemented in 2005 that affect the way M.A. students are evaluated for advancement to the Ph.D. program. Under the new program, students must complete 7 "core" courses with a GPA of 3.5, submit two Qualifying Exam papers representing two distinct sub-areas of Linguistics, and pass an oral examination on those papers conducted by a committee of three faculty members. This new program places emphasis on core knowledge in the discipline and on skills related to research and writing, which together comprise essential preparation for study at the doctoral level.

In addition to classwork and the qualifying exams, student outcomes are also assessed based on direct student input, in informal discussion between the Head and the student representatives of the *Linguistic Student Organization.*

Annual review of student progress. Beginning in 2007-2008, the department has undertaken a comprehensive review of student progress at the end of the spring semester. The annual review is attended by the tenured and tenure-track faculty, and its purpose is to update faculty on the progress of students in the graduate program, and to discuss any students who are not reaching milestones of progress identified in the graduate program guidelines. The annual review is undertaken by the Director of Graduate Studies, who collects annual reports from each student. The annual report includes information about conference presentations, publications, outreach and awards received, as the primary categories. Submission of the annual report is required if the student wishes to be considered for any financial award and/or teaching appointment in the following year, and in the 2007-2008 there was 100% compliance from students submitting annual reports. The Director of Graduate Studies compiles data from student transcripts and from the submitted annual reports, and presents an overview of student progress to the faculty at large. In addition, individual faculty advisors provide brief overviews of the progress of each student in the Ph.D. phase of the program.

M.A. level assessment

Comprehensive **classroom examinations** are used in the core (required) M.A. courses to assess the students' mastery of material that is judged to be key to linguistic theory and its application. Instructors determine the weight assigned to exams and other work in the courses they teach, but exam scores are in all cases factored into the semester grade for the course, and therefore contribute to the Core GPA, one of three evaluation metrics for advancement to the Ph.D. phase of the program.

Qualifying exams. Students in the M.A. program select topics from two sub-specializations in linguistics, conduct original research on those topics under faculty supervision, and write two qualifying exam papers based on that research. In the semester prior to submission of the exam papers, students register for the required Practicum course, where they receive guidance in the research and writing process and take part in peer review. The qualifying exam papers are submitted to the department at the end of the fifth semester of the M.A. program. After submission, the exam papers of each student are read by a committee of three faculty members, who also conduct an oral examination of the student on those papers.

Evaluation process. The qualifying exam committee assigned to each M.A. student reports on the quality of the written papers and the outcome of the oral examination in a memo sent to the Student Examination & Evaluation Committee (comprised of 5 voting faculty members). This committee reviews the memo, the student's Core GPA, and considers any special circumstances pertaining to the student (e.g., illness or family emergency) and then decides on the student's advancement to the Ph.D. phase of the program. The student receives written notice of the decision and a brief report on the criteria on which they were evaluated. Students who are not promoted have the option of appealing the decision of the committee through a petition submitted to the department head. Appeals are reviewed first by the Student Examination & Evaluation Committee, and if not resolved there, may be passed on to the Grievance Committee for final decision.

Ph.D. level assessment

Student learning outcomes at the Ph.D. level are assessed through classroom performance, typically evaluated through research presentations and written term papers. Some Ph.D. level courses may also incorporate exams. In addition to these traditional assessment means, student outcomes are also assessed through student presentations in the Linguistic Seminar series, and through the annual review of student progress conducted by the faculty (described above).

Linguistic Seminar presentations. Students in the Ph.D. program must make at least one presentation in the weekly Linguistic Seminar forum. The Seminar presents original research by faculty, graduate students and other invited guests. Doctoral students typically focus their presentation on their Ph.D. thesis work. Graduate student presenters benefit from the experience of public speaking and from comments and questions from the audience. Numerous department faculty are present at each seminar.

Future plans for outcomes assessment

The current assessment tools and evaluation process result from a thorough revision of the graduate program. Future planned enhancements to outcomes assessment include focus groups with graduate student members of the *Linguistic Student Organization* and student surveys. Surveys will be developed similar to those developed for the undergraduate program, and will be administered to incoming students to assess learning expectations, to students three years later at the end of their M.A. program, and to students in the final year of the Ph.D. program. These surveys will include questions about students' goals and expectation, their rating of the quality of courses and instruction, and their satisfaction with the outcomes they perceive. For exiting students, we will also ask information about their plans for employment or post-graduate study. *The entering student survey will be administered to incoming graduate students in Fall 2009. The follow-up surveys administered at the end of the M.A. and Ph.D. programs will be introduced in Spring 2010.*