

Summary of Diversity Plan for Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Minorities (rev 5/18/06)

1 Mission statement

The Department of Linguistics recognizes the value that diverse perspectives can bring to scholarly endeavor. Accordingly, we are committed to improving our recruitment and retention of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff from groups that are historically underrepresented in our department and field including (but not restricted to) speakers of endangered languages, stigmatized linguistic varieties, deaf and hearing speakers of signed languages. Linguistic diversity is important to the discipline of linguistics because the central focus of the field is to understand the human capacity for language. Thus, linguistics scholarship benefits from inquiry into a range of families and types of human languages, used in a range of settings.

2 Recent progress

Linguistics has made some progress recently in several areas. The flexibility of the CLMA program has increased the age diversity of students in our department. The addition of faculty members in sociolinguistics and computational linguistics has increased the ethnic diversity of the faculty body, and the pool of students from underrepresented minority groups has increased somewhat. The department has successfully supported family leaves, and is more welcoming for those caring for aging parents and young children.

Two key areas in which linguistics needs to improve relate to recruitment and retention of students of underrepresented backgrounds. The following paragraphs describe the obstacles to recruitment and retention, and outline activities to support department efforts. This section of the strategic plan summarizes the content of a longer document prepared by the Linguistics Department ad-hoc Committee on Diversity (E. Bender and A. Wassink).

3 Recruitment

3.1 Obstacles

We have identified the following obstacles to minority recruitment at both the undergraduate and graduate levels of study. Several of these items are true for students not from minority groups, so that addressing these issues will benefit the department more broadly.

- Linguistics is not a well-known field. Linguistics at the University of Washington is not well-advertised. Recruitment begins with making prospective students aware of us.

- Even prospective students who are aware of Linguistics as a field are not well aware of the career paths open to linguists, and the field is perceived as not economically viable.
- Our current degree programs are designed around full time study, while many students from non-mainstream backgrounds may be seeking degree programs which allow part time study.
- According to the results of a survey of minority scholars conducted recently by the LSA's Committee for Ethnic Diversity in Linguistics (CEDL), more underrepresented minorities pursue careers in the linguistics subfields of sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, and creole linguistics than in the traditional subfields of syntax and phonology. Thus, few students from underrepresented backgrounds are currently attracted to the traditional subfields, which is reflected in the composition of the student body. Building on our emerging strengths in non-traditional subfields should improve our ability to attract and retain minority students. At the same time, we wish to learn from the efforts of CEDL, which is at present investigating how more minorities can be attracted to these subdisciplinary areas.

3.2 Recruitment Plan

Our recruitment activities should target the following student populations:

For the undergraduate program:

- Undergraduates at UW looking for a major
- Prospective undergraduates who may or may not be already considering UW

For the graduate program:

- Undergraduates finishing/finished elsewhere who may or may not be already considering graduate school
- Prospective graduate students interested in studying Linguistics, considering which graduate programs to apply to

We need to communicate to these student populations both about the field of Linguistics and about the Linguistics department at UW.

3.3 Necessary Information

It has become apparent that several types of information are necessary if we are to support recruitment activities, and better communicate the opportunities within the field of Linguistics to new and continuing students. Among those types of information identified, the following are key:

- Funding sources—particularly those UW-internal sources available for minority students

- Career opportunities—including careers at the intersection of Linguistics and other disciplines
- Department-internal announcement of internships and specific job opportunities—including information culled from discussion lists and individuals receiving notices (possibly in a UW Linguistics wiki website or archived mailing list)
- Alumni Network—including tracking and publicizing information about the types of jobs held by our alumni, and maintaining a list of alumni willing to serve as contacts for our graduates
- Advertise research projects and courses in this department focusing on less commonly analyzed languages

We feel it possible to more effectively use the department's web page as a portal to information about the scholarly community of Linguistics at UW so that new students can quickly become connected to the life of the department. We will develop a web page linking our department to organizations on campus (e.g., McNair Scholars, GO-MAP, DO-IT) and in our field nationally (e.g., CEDL, COSWL) which work towards increasing minority recruitment and retention. By creating these links we not only connect our students to mentoring opportunities but also reaffirm our commitment to minority recruitment and retention.

4 Retention Plan

Our retention activities should be focused in the following areas:

Mentoring CEDL identified mentoring (of both students and junior faculty) as one of the greatest expressed needs in the field. In response, a mentoring system was created to serve student majors, graduate students, and junior faculty. We will educate ourselves regarding the findings of the CEDL survey and what the CEDL mentoring program offers. We will then advertise it as a resource to our students. CEDL mentoring program website: <http://www.lsadc.org/info/lsa-comm-ethnic.cfm>

Critical mass For underrepresented minorities, the community of one department might not provide critical mass. Thus in addition to promoting within-department community (e.g., through support of LSUW), we will seek ways to support networking between students in our department and those in allied fields.

Including undergraduates We will increase the participation of undergraduates in the life of the department, by including them in faculty research, groups/committees, and departmental activities (subdiscipline discussion groups, colloquia, etc). This need holds for students not from minority groups, as well, so that addressing this issue will benefit the department more broadly.

Flexibility Our current degree programs are designed around full-time study. The Compling MA Program has been developing part-time options. We will consider whether and how the other degree programs can be adapted to part-time study in a way that works well for students who need work while in school while not unnecessarily prolonging the time to degree.

5 Action Item Summary

The Department will establish a standing committee on minority recruitment and retention, to include faculty, staff and students. In the short term, the committee will:

- Take advantage of UW-internal opportunities for recruitment, including tabling at events and using of the GO-MAP list to identify potential minority applicants.
- Incorporate the best practices as identified by GO-MAP.
- Publish this diversity mission statement on the departmental website.
- Develop a packet of information/web-site that will be presented to undergraduate students when they declare a Linguistics major. This packet will include links to the goings-on of the department, information about financial aid/internships, etc.
- Familiarize the faculty with the results of the CEDL survey and discuss how it might connect students and faculty with CEDL mentors.
- Solicit feedback from GO-MAP and identify other departments (at UW and elsewhere) which can serve as role models in this process.
- Apply for a GO-MAP recruitment fellowship to provide one year of support to one in-coming graduate student, and work to pair that with a guarantee of support for the second year as well. We will consider how other sources of funding (e.g., IGERT fellowships) can be used in recruiting minority students.

In the long term, once the department's diversity plan is implemented, the committee will meet at least annually to review progress, track response rates to particular outreach efforts, and make recommendations for adjustments as necessary. Progress will be measured by tracking our success in recruiting and retaining minority students and by comparing ourselves to peer departments at peer institutions.