

**Strategic Plan**

**Department of Linguistics  
University of Washington**

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## WHO WE ARE

Language has been the object of study for millennia. However, a distinct field devoted to its scientific study dates only from the beginning of the nineteenth century and its departmentalization in academia began still later. Very few autonomous departments of linguistics existed before the 1960s. Before then, linguists tended to belong to departments of foreign language, English, anthropology, and psychology. The ‘cognitive revolution’ sparked by the work of Noam Chomsky led to an explosion of interest in linguistics, which from the beginning has served as a focal point for the cognitive sciences. Today in the United States there are 58 Ph. D. programs in linguistics, 94 master’s degree programs, and 100 bachelor’s degree programs.

The cognitive science component of linguistics — that is, the goal of studying how grammar is situated in the human mind — is central to the field. However, linguistics also has a foot in the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the humanities. For example, linguists study the social context of language variation, the physics of speech sounds, and the properties of poetic language, in addition to constructing models of the mental representation of grammar.

The University of Washington has one of the oldest departments of linguistics in the United States — it was founded in 1962. The number of FTE’s has gradually grown from 4 to the current 12. As the department has grown, so has its breadth of areas covered. Formal studies of grammar continue to occupy the central interest of a large majority of the faculty. Recent hirings have added phonetics and sociolinguistics as specializations (One of the new hires works in the area of ‘sociophonetics’, which synthesizes the two areas.) Another major recent change was the 1995 transfer of the Romance Linguistics program, and the 4 faculty associated with that program, into the Department of Linguistics. That transfer has made possible a new specialization in second language acquisition, a research area of two of the Romance linguists. Finally, we have a research professor (the only one in the Humanities Division), whose area is poetics and translation theory.

## WHAT WE DO

The discovery of knowledge about how language works (i.e. research) and its dissemination to students at all degree levels (i.e. teaching) are the twin central functions of the Department of Linguistics. These functions are thoroughly integrated in our graduate program. The typical Ph. D. student has started delivering papers at conferences and publishing his or her research in journals even before passing the general exam. Indeed, given the relative youth of the field, it is not uncommon for even bright undergraduate majors to be involved in original research. We have therefore never seen the research aspects of our unit as in any way counterposed to the teaching aspects. Given the realities of the job market, we see 'pre-professional' training as part of our responsibility. That is, we are careful to try to ensure that each graduate student's program should lead to their employability, whether in academia or in industry.

Undergraduate education has played an increasingly central part of our unit's role in the University. The number of our undergraduate majors passed the 100 mark in 1996-1997; in order to serve them we have added 14 new courses at the 100-400 level since 1990 and, to keep class size small, we teach the beginning syntax and phonology courses several times each year. Our responsibility to the undergraduate majors is to see that they have a broad-based education and, at the same time, one that prepares them adequately for advanced study in linguistics or some discipline in which linguistics plays an important role.

Our role is also one of *general* education. A small minority of students in our high enrollment classes, LING 100 and LING 200, will go on to major in linguistics. But all students will come away from these classes, if we have fulfilled our responsibility, with a deeper understanding of how language works. LING 100, for example, allows us to convey the results of a 2500-year old grammatical tradition to students who plan to study English or a foreign language, while LING 200, a course applicable to the Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning requirement, shows the undergraduate that even a fundamental human attribute such as language can be studied by formal analytic methods. Both courses are ideally suited to promoting critical thinking. Our 300- and 400-level classes typically have as many students from outside our Department as from inside. Whether they come from literature, from anthropology, or from computer science, our responsibility is to provide them with the specialized knowledge about language that they will need to advance in their own disciplines.

To a certain extent, we have performed the role of publicizing what linguists do to the non-UW community. For example, we play an active role in World Languages Day and one member of the faculty was a featured participant in the PBS series 'The Human Language', which has been shown in hundreds of high schools.

Finally, we play a role in the *preservation* of knowledge. Another member of our faculty has devoted much of her career to aiding in the maintenance of Native American languages, especially those spoken in the Northwest, and has received recognition from tribal councils for her efforts.

## OUR MISSION

Linguistics is the scientific study of language, one of the most characteristic human attributes. Courses in the Department of Linguistics provide training in the method and theory of language analysis, as well as studies of language in society and language change. The Romance Linguistics program allows the student to specialize in the theoretical analysis of one or more of the Romance Languages and to study the historical evolution of that language family.

We see linguistics equally as a valuable component of liberal education and as a profession worth pursuing in its own right. The study of linguistics also provides pre-professional training for individuals interested in teaching languages; in areas of rehabilitative medicine such as audiology or speech therapy; in special education; in work in computer science and artificial intelligence; in work with native peoples or with immigrant groups; and in academic disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, literature and language studies.

The centrality of linguistics to a liberal education springs naturally from the fact that it straddles the cognitive sciences, the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. By way of illustration, members of our Department study the extent to which the human mind is pre-wired for grammar, the physical properties of speech sounds, the sociological conditions underlying language change, and the nature of poetic language. And University of Washington linguists are at the forefront in working to preserve a priceless national heritage — the native languages that have been spoken here for thousands of years, but which are now tragically threatened with extinction.

The broad scope of the field of linguistics presents us with unique opportunities for fulfilling our mission. First and foremost, it is our goal to lead our students to the discovery that scientific and humanistic goals are not in conflict with each other. From the first week of their introductory class, students are engaged in building formal models of grammar, subject to evaluation in the same manner as, say, a formal model of some aspect of the physical world. The reasoning skills that these students acquire, as well as their training in the assembly, manipulation, and evaluation of empirical data, parallel those that students come to possess by working in the natural sciences. And yet, the output of their efforts is a deeper understanding of the primary feature that distinguishes humans from other species — the possession of language. We hope that this understanding leads them to view each and every language as a priceless treasure, as worthy of preservation as any species of plant or animal.

Our allied mission is to train students, particularly at the graduate level, to be independent researchers and teachers in the field of linguistics itself. Our goal is to encourage creative and critical thinking in our students throughout their time in the Department. Fortunately, linguistics is still a young enough field that even beginning students can produce work that is original and thought-provoking enough to have an impact outside the walls of Padelford Hall. We also try to ensure that all of our Ph. D.'s have some teaching experience within the Department, so that they can hone their pedagogical skills before setting out in an academic career.

The Department also has as its goal to respond positively to the increasing non-academic call for linguists and for those with training in the field. Vocationally, linguistics has applications wherever language has become a matter of practical concern, as it does in fields ranging from education to medicine to public policy. The influence of linguistic theory is now evident virtually everywhere in language education, from the structure of a grade school reader to 'immersion courses' prepared for those wishing to conduct business in Japanese or French. It has also had far-reaching effects on the way in which first- and second-language skills are taught. Linguistics has also benefited from the growth of computer science, in answer both to a practical interest in developing computational systems that can deal with language in various ways, and a theoretical interest in the relation between natural and artificial languages. One result of this collaboration has been the creation of career opportunities for linguists in the private sector; another has been the creation of new degree programs and research centers aimed at integrating work in linguistics, computer science, logic, and related fields.

Finally, our mission is to prepare all of our students, whether enrolled in the lowest-level introductory class or at the point of defending their dissertations, to function as active and concerned citizens in every public arena in which language plays a role. This might involve debates over the value of bilingual education programs, issues such as 'Ebonics' and the intrinsic nature of nonstandard dialects, and the controversy over whether language can or should be purged of sexist words and expressions. We measure our success in part by the prominence of our students and graduates in this aspect of public life.

## **OBJECTIVES OVERVIEW**

### **Department-Internal Goals**

- To improve our teaching
- To better mentor and nourish our junior faculty
- To expand into the area of computational linguistics
- To increase the number, size, and prestige of the grants we receive
- To meet the growing demand for courses in Spanish Linguistics
- To exploit recent technological advances in teaching and research, and to insure that all students have experience with relevant technologies
- To increase the number of departmental sub-area study groups

### **University-Internal Goals**

- To build an interdisciplinary Cognitive Science Program
- To further interdisciplinary work in Sociolinguistics
- To make better use of the Center for the Humanities

### **Broader Community Goals**

- To carry out locally-relevant research
- To support language arts instruction in area schools
- To aid in the development of localized software
- To develop internship opportunities for undergraduate majors
- To develop a protocol for faculty-industry interactions
- To foster ties with other linguists in the Northwest

## DEPARTMENT-INTERNAL GOALS

### To improve our teaching

- Better use of technology

We are now working to revise the LING 100 and 200 curriculum in a technologically current format that will take advantage of multimedia technology and create interactive materials on the LING 200 website. Eventually we will do the same for all of our undergraduate courses.

- Experiential learning

We plan to enhance the experience of our majors by encouraging them to seek experiential learning through internships in the community, international study, and participation in research projects guided by faculty.

- Better support for our teaching assistants

Our TA coordinator and Lead TA now organize an autumn TA orientation for new TAs. We plan two or three additional workshops throughout the year to allow faculty and TAs to update their perspectives on teaching and to exchange ideas. We also plan to expand the offerings available at the Language Learning Center for TAs and their undergraduate students, such as more problem sets in phonology and syntax and expansion of our database of the inventory of the sounds of the world's languages.

- More vigilance at pinpointing and solving teaching problems

For both faculty and TAs, we will insure that if the teaching evaluations for any course drop below a certain level, remedial steps will be taken to prevent a second occurrence.

**To better mentor and nourish our junior faculty**

- Clearly define professional expectations

The junior faculty member will meet more often than is currently the case with the Chair and with his or her mentors. To the best of their ability the latter will explain to the former where they stand in the tenuring process and what needs to be done to remedy any deficiencies. The mentors will better communicate to the senior faculty the results of these meetings and solicit their input to aid the mentoring process.

- Support their right to say 'no'

New faculty often receive requests for guest lectures, committee memberships, community service, the supervision of students outside the normal teaching load, and so on. Too often they feel that they have no choice but to accept. We will encourage them to analyze these requests realistically, and to say 'no' when the burden caused by acceptance is inappropriate.

**To expand into the area of computational linguistics**

- Make our next new hire in computational linguistics

Computational linguistics — the application of linguistic theory to computer-related tasks — is an obvious area of expansion for the Department. Most of us now do the kind of theoretical work that lends itself to application, the demand from students for a computational linguist is great, and the job situation for graduates is rosy. A computational linguist would act as a natural bridge to joint work with local high-tech firms and (if the right hire were made) be a linchpin in an interdisciplinary cognitive science program.

- Increase contact with local high-tech firms

Over a dozen of our graduates work for Microsoft and other local companies as computational linguists. Having proved our usefulness to these firms, it is time to raise the possibility of a more structured interrelationship with them. This might range from industry-sponsored internships for our students to a soft-money funded faculty position.

## Department of Linguistics

### **To increase the number, size, and prestige of the grants we receive**

- Create and implement a plan for mentoring faculty in proposal authorship.
- Devise a plan to reward increased grant funding successes by faculty.
- Identify and create collaborative research groups within the Department
- Identify opportunities for collaborative interdepartmental research
- Attract industry-supplied grants through initiatives to fund specific projects within the department

**To meet the growing demand for courses in Spanish Linguistics**

- Work to increase the number of Evening Degree Program courses in Spanish Linguistics from one per year to several per year

Our first Evening Degree SPLING course will be offered this winter. We will do all that we can to make it a success.

- Increase collaboration with the Spanish-Portuguese Division

This division has primary responsibility for the popular SPAN 406 course (Advanced Grammar). We will encourage them to continue to offer it every quarter and to provide instructors from our Department, if possible.

- Offer more 'pan-Romance' courses within the Department

We can and will offer courses that treat the entire Romance Language family and (at the same time) will be of value to students specializing in Spanish Linguistics.

**To exploit technological advances, and to ensure relevant experience**

- Create and implement a plan for mentoring faculty and students in use of appropriate technology in teaching and research
- Develop and implement a policy regarding maintenance of teaching and research equipment/supplies and adapting it to future needs
- Develop a plan for technical support of existing and future equipment
- Incorporate computational linguistics into the curriculum
- Identify opportunities for collaborative interdepartmental research in the area of computational linguistics
- Increase connections with industry through overall department initiatives to fund specific efforts within the department
- Incorporate technology into coursework
- Implement a policy for ensuring computer literacy for both faculty and students, as well as familiarity with the most appropriate current applications

**To increase the number of departmental sub-area study groups**

Within the linguistics department, there are currently several research/discussion groups, including the syntax roundtable and the phonetics/phonology lab group, which exist to stimulate discussion and cohesion among students and faculty in these subdisciplines. The Department will promote opportunities for the similar exchange of ideas in those subdisciplines that do not currently have discussion groups in place.

## **UNIVERSITY-INTERNAL GOALS**

### **To build an interdisciplinary Cognitive Science Program**

Our strategy will be to build 'upwards' from a focus in psycholinguistics (i.e. the psychology of language). Several members of our own department, along with others in Speech and Hearing Sciences (SPHSC), Psychology, and a new hire in Electrical Engineering will form the natural core of such a group. Within a few years we hope to have a full-fledged interdisciplinary program involving individuals in Philosophy, Anthropology, Computer Science & Engineering, and some language departments as well. In the meantime, we can aid this process in the following ways.

- Coordinate course offerings in the relevant departments
- Encourage students from linguistics to take more courses in SPHSC and Psychology (and vice-versa) and to compose their M.A. and Ph. D. committees with faculty from more than one of these departments
- Initiate an interdepartmental discussion group devoted to psycholinguistic topics
- Hold more colloquia of interest to faculty and students in the relevant departments

**To further interdisciplinary work in Sociolinguistics**

With a sociolinguist now on our faculty, we are in a position to form the nucleus of those scholars on campus with interest in language and society. We can help to do this:

- By continuing to play an active role in the weekly meeting of junior faculty teaching sociolinguistics-related courses in several University departments
- By using these meetings as a vehicle for stimulating formation of interdepartmental research projects in sociolinguistics
- By following up on the request of researchers in the School of Education to learn about the findings of sociolinguistic research as an aid to curriculum research and development
- By building a sociolinguistics track within our own Department
- By having as a long-range goal an interdisciplinary sociolinguistics program

**To make better use of the Center for the Humanities**

The uniqueness of the field of linguistics with respect to the 'humanities', as traditionally conceived, has discouraged us from submitting proposals to the Center for the Humanities that advance the mission of the Department of Linguistics. However, the goals of the Center also involve furthering collaborative research, interdisciplinary work, team-teaching of interdisciplinary courses, as well as K-12 educational programs. These are areas in which we can participate. We resolve to make better use of the Center, and, in particular, to apply for one or more grants before the next deadline.

## **BROADER COMMUNITY GOALS**

### **To carry out locally-relevant research**

- By continuing our work on the indigenous languages of the region

Our dictionary and grammar projects for languages spoken in Washington and British Columbia will continue and deepen, as will our ties with Heritage College in Toppenish.

- By initiating research on the English spoken in the state of Washington

An initiative is underway to describe dialectal variation in American English in the Pacific Northwest.

**To support language-related instruction in area schools**

- Continue to be the department at the University most involved in World Languages Day.
- Work with K-12 language programs in conjunction with local businesses and social service organizations. We will use our position on the advisory board of the John Stanford International School (JSIS) to facilitate exchanges between UW Spanish teachers and JSIS. (Graduate students in the Department have already begun doing valuable longitudinal studies of child second language acquisition, deriving from this partnership.)
- Help to set educational policy standards regarding bilingual and multilingual children in K-12 schools.
- Advise the schools in matters concerning the linguistic competence of minority children, particularly speakers of African-American Vernacular English.
- Strengthen our ties to bodies such as the Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Extension certificate program in Multicultural Teaching by continuing to work with them in an advisory fashion.
- Maintain ties with our graduates currently teaching linguistics and language-related courses in the area schools

**To aid in the development of localized software**

We will continue to play a role in the development of software intended for the culturally 'local', as opposed to the 'global', marketplace — that is, software designed to be culturally consonant with the intended audience. For example, UW Educational Outreach is planning to launch a certificate program in software localization this fall. This program involves the adaptation of software and web-related products and their documentation for a specific target-language market or markets. A member of our faculty joined its advisory board and will provide advice on admissions requirements, curricular focus, and so on. Here and elsewhere, we will use our (applied) linguistics knowledge wherever issues such as language policy and translation arise.

**To develop internship opportunities for undergraduate majors**

We will use the Carlson Leadership Office to develop opportunities for undergraduate majors in linguistics to do work in the community through both General Studies 350 and service learning. We plan to make contacts in the community in educational, social service and industry contexts in order to create a pool of internship opportunities for undergraduates.

**To develop a protocol for faculty-industry interactions**

Recently, department faculty have been approached by local software companies for short-term consultation in building software using research findings of instrumental phonetics. As opportunities grow for this type of interaction, we will develop a departmental protocol for consulting with industry and disseminating the findings of our research.

## Department of Linguistics

### **To foster ties with other linguists in the Northwest**

- Initiate an annual meeting of linguists in Washington and British Columbia
- Continue to support the (student-run) Northwest Linguistics Club
- Increase exchange of colloquia speakers from regional universities