

Assessment Plan

Department: Linguistics

2011-2012

Mission statement (from course catalog)

Our mission is to help Macalester students develop a scientific understanding of human language. Through classroom activities, as well as hands-on research projects, the curriculum introduces students to the methods of investigation, conceptual analysis, and application most characteristic of a wide range of subdisciplines (e.g., phonetics; syntax; experimental procedures in linguistics; field work). In addition to its contribution to a humanistic and scientific education, linguistics offers students tools for the learning and the teaching of all languages and careers based on this, and for the pursuit of post graduate studies.

Student Learning Goals

General goals

Student should possess the ability to

- speak and write with precision, clarity, and organization
- solve problems and analyze data in a systematic way
- acquire basic scientific and technological literacy in linguistics

Knowledge Goals for Linguistics Majors

The linguistics department aims to teach its students a number of practical and theoretical skills.

- All students should have more than a casual acquaintance with some language other than English. Our language requirement is satisfied by students' deep familiarity with a single language (three semesters of study beyond the college-wide foreign language requirement), or relatively superficial acquaintance with a number of different languages (those three semesters of extra study may be spent on a semester of study of each of three different languages).
- All students should understand what is meant by, and have acquired a proficiency in, linguistic problem solving: the problems may be either synchronic or diachronic.
- All students should have some awareness of the non-linguistic context within which linguistic structures and abilities are embedded. (These will include traditional sociolinguistic concerns as well as questions relating to the embeddedness of language in gesture, and the inseparability of language from the medium in which it is expressed.)
- Practically, students on the cultural track should be able to confront an unstudied language and, using the skills developed in LING 100 Introduction to Linguistics, 104 Sounds of Languages, 200 Syntax, 204 Phonology, 300 Analysis, and 400 Field Methods, analyze that language and produce an insightful grammar and lexicon of that language, showing how its structure reflects universal properties of human language, and also how it is unique.

- Practically, students on the cognitive track should be familiar with the analytical technology available in the Linguistics Laboratory for analyzing properties of the acoustic speech signal, and be able to recognize and address themselves to theoretically interesting issues that arise in subjecting raw acoustic data from a given corpus to such analysis.
- All students should have a fundamental knowledge of the methods used by linguists. Students on the cognitive track should be able to design and implement an experiment.
- Theoretically, our students should have an acquaintance with the major theoretical schools in linguistics (e.g. the various formalist schools and the various functionalist schools) and be able, first, to recognize what constitute interesting problems in the field, and second, both to wield some theoretical apparatus, and to justify their preference for a single or an eclectic approach in analyzing linguistic data or various types.

We hope to prepare our students for graduate programs so well that they will be better equipped for many or most classes and courses of study than students from other programs. Irrespective of their post-graduate ambitions, we hope that our students will go through their lives with a heightened sensitivity to the beauty and complexity of the languages they speak and encounter.

General Assessment Strategies and Processes

In classes taken by majors and those taken by general students, assessment is based on a varying mixture of assignments, take-home tests, projects, class participation, and final examinations. In no class is assessment ever based on less than a minimum of three pieces of individually completed written work. And, in those cases like Language and Alienation where this minimum is all that is expected, one of the pieces of work is a lengthy essay. In the lower obligatory classes (Introduction, Phonology, Syntax, and Analysis), the grade is largely determined by problem sets which are completed weekly. In one class, Advertising and Propaganda, the “essay” component of the course is an original 30 second commercial. In Sounds of language, assessment is based on an individual oral production exam and five perception exams. And, in Experimental Linguistics, assessment is determined by four lab assignments and a final project where students research their own question in the field of phonetics, using the equipment available in the Linguistics Laboratory.

Capstone for Cultural Track: Field Methods

The capstone course for majors is Linguistics Field Methods, which usually entails that all students entering this (six credit) class will have taken Introduction to Linguistics, Sounds of language, and at least two of: Syntax, Phonology, and Linguistic Analysis. Needless to say, by the time they assemble in this class, the faculty will have got to know them very well. Consequently, grading for this course has come to depend on:

A) individual in-class tests on the language of study, based on data the students have elicited and analyzed;

B) a final paper. In many of the past years, this final paper has been a group project that amounts to a sketch grammar of the language in question.

It is easy to see that in this class alone, the final grade of any student may partly reflect a joint effort, but we feel that there is little risk by now of an individual shining his or her light under a bushel.

Capstone for Cognitive Track: Independent project

The capstone for the cognitive track in linguistics is an independent research project experimental project conducted in the linguistics, psychology, or computer science laboratory facilities. Students create, design and implement the project on their own with supervision from a faculty member.

Assessment strategies

Evaluations will be administered at the end of each semester. Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, an annual survey will be distributed to graduating seniors majoring or minoring in linguistics. The results will be reviewed by the chair and discussed with the department faculty.