

Learning Goals and Outcomes in the Linguistics Program
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Linguistics, as it is construed at Carleton, is the study of the human language faculty, surely the most central capacity of those which constitute human nature. The discipline is driven by two fundamental questions. First, what is it that people know that allows them to deftly use the stupendously complicated systems that underlie human languages? Second, how is this capacity acquired, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically? To put this in a less technical way, we ask, what happens to individual humans, over the first few years of their lives, that allows them to gain complete mastery over systems of knowledge that are so complex that they continue to defy complete and accurate explicit description, and to do so at a time when other sorts of elaborate cognitive and social skills are quite out of reach? We also ask, what happened over the millions of years from the dawn of the primitive replicator to emergence of modern humans that makes our brains capable of a skill that, adaptive though it is, appears to elude all other species with whom we share the planet?

These are extraordinarily complicated questions, and as in every other intellectually sophisticated discipline, we find that there are a great number of specializations, which both characterize the subject matters constituent of the field as we understand it, but also serve as useful initial descriptions of the expertise of individual linguists. We might give a first approximation list of the various aspects of the human faculty we're trying to describe, which we might call the "core":

- * semantics, the meaning of words and sentences
- * syntax, well-formedness conditions on sequences of words
- * morphology, the shape and structure of words
- * phonology, the sound pattern for languages
- * phonetics, the production and perception of the linguistic signal

Of course, there is much more we are interested in. We want to know about the acquisition of each of these components, how they change over time, how the capacities to acquire and use them arose in the species, how they are deployed in social and artistic contexts, how they are realized in the human brain, how they are managed in signed languages, how writing systems work, what all of this tells us about human nature, and much more.

Varying methodologies and subject matters make linguistics a particularly attractive component of an undergraduate major at a liberal arts college, where the investigation of significant aspects of human nature from a variety of perspectives has a high priority. To mention a few: phonetics requires knowledge of physics and human anatomy, and uses sophisticated laboratory equipment; syntax can benefit from the use of the theory of recursive functions; semantics can rely on formal logic; acquisition often involves experimental work with human subjects; metrics requires knowledge of poetic forms, and

how these evolved over time; metatheory requires familiarity with the central questions of philosophy of mind, from Plato to Quine. For others we need sociology, biology and more. Linguistics is a rich area of intellectual inquiry, with significant affinities with other disciplines. Here at Carleton, we're fortunate to have many faculty in wide array of disciplines who are interested in linguistics, and who are prepared to help students build a special course of study that exploits the many interdisciplinary connects that exist on campus.

Our expectations of students who major in linguistics are these:

- To be able to read insightfully in each of the core areas, to have the skill to begin to evaluate proposals in the professional literature, to know relevant questions to ask, to be aware of alternative views.
- To be able to write crisply, carefully, and in depth about nature of language in at least one subdiscipline.
- To be able to speak clearly and engagingly in public about several areas of linguistics.
- To be able to give a careful, *original* argument about some topic in linguistics.
- To help other students achieve the goals above, and to celebrate with them when they do.

The program is designed to help students achieve these goals by providing many opportunities for writing and speaking. Students write research papers in every linguistics class, and give oral presentations in just about every class except Linguistics 110. Our comps process is intensive, and aims at all of our goals. Students write a sophisticated description of some original research, and give a public, formal presentation of their argument and conclusions.

These outcomes are assessed through a senior exit interview and the application of a department rubric to the comps exercise.

Exit Interview Questions in Linguistics

Exit Interviews in Linguistics

1. Are you happy with the theoretical orientation of the department?
2. How about our array of courses? For example, was there something you wish you could have learned about but were unable to?
3. What did you think of our comps procedure? (general structure, presentation, faculty support)
4. (For those who spoke at a conference) was it a good overall experience? Did you feel well prepared?
5. (For those who were at TA), what did you think of this experience. Could we make it more satisfying for TAs, and still get the job done?
6. Did you have a moment that was particularly intellectually satisfying, a kind of epiphany?
7. Were there times of intellectual frustration?
8. We worry a bit about 115, in that it is clear that some students are uncomfortable with a class in which there are no definitive right answers. Is there something we could do to make this a less stressful experience?
9. In retrospect, what do you think of 110? We do this course in a very unconventional way, i.e. it varies a lot from term to term, and its coverage of the field is eclectic. Should we adopt a more conventional approach? Should we drop the course altogether?
10. How was your interaction with other students? We try to build a kind of community. Did we succeed from your point of view?
11. Do we manage letters of recommendation and other support well?
12. What about our physical plant, offices, classroom?
13. What advice would you give to new students in the department?
14. We say that you should be ready for just about anything after majoring in linguistics at Carleton. Are you?
15. What else would you like us to know?

Rubric for comps evaluation, Linguistics Department
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	1	2	3	4
choice of topic	topic is overly cautious	a good topic, but one less likely to lead to new insight	topic is very challenging but somewhat distant from the department mainstream	topic is very challenging, has a bearing on a fundamental question of linguistic theory, and aligns with the department mainstream
level of linguistic expertise displayed	fails to significantly engage theory	displays good understanding of relevant theory	displays mastery of relevant theory	project displays very high level of insight into the nature of the relevant aspect of linguistic theory
originality of the proposal	proposal only minimally extends current thinking on the topic	proposal is a good idea, but tracks ideas of others rather closely	proposal is clever, and is an extension of ideas in the current literature	proposal is imaginative and goes well beyond anything available in the current literature
degree of engagement with scholarly literature	paper largely ignores relevant scholarly work	paper invokes some relevant scholarly work, but discussion is at times superficial	paper engages meaningfully with relevant scholarly work	paper is clearly situated within the extant literature and explicitly discusses its contribution to this body of work
organization of the paper	paper is not well organized; prose awkward in spots	some sections not relevant to thesis; occasional opaque passage	good organization, with very few redundant, irrelevant, or unclear sections	thesis is very clear, and developed efficiently and convincingly
delivery of the defense	somewhat confused presentation; poor response to questions	some obscurity in the presentation, but the point emerges	good, successful defense; some problems managing questions	defense is well-organized and graceful; responses to questions display understanding and an ability to think 'on one's feet'