Department of Linguistics

Strategic Plan

About the Department

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. Stony Brook's Department of Linguistics is a leading center for research and training in modern theoretical and experimental linguistics, with steadily increasing national and international prominence. Research areas represented in the department include first and second language acquisition, language change, morphology, phonetics, phonology, semantics, and syntax, as well as experimental approaches to these areas. Members of the faculty have expertise in many language areas, especially Austronesian, East Asian, Romance, Semitic, Slavic, and signed languages. The intellectual life of the department has been enriched by interdisciplinary research projects in collaboration with faculty from other departments, especially psychology, computer science, philosophy, and departments of languages, literatures, and cultures. Moreover, four of our faculty members have standing teaching commitments in foreign language programs outside the Linguistics Department. Linguistics is uniquely situated at the hub of concerns addressed by a variety of other disciplines. The department looks forward to continuing its collaborative efforts with the Computer Science, Psychology, and foreign language departments.

The department offers BA, MA, and PhD degrees in linguistics and an MA in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The department also provides classes in English as a Second Language for Stony Brook students. We currently enroll about 140 undergraduate linguistics majors, double the number of a decade ago. Within the BA program, students may choose to complete a program of study leading to state certification in TESOL, and a significant number participate in research during their undergraduate years. Graduates become teachers of English or other languages, or work in computer fields, particularly speech synthesis, or in business, industry or journalism. Others pursue advanced education in linguistics, law, speech pathology, philosophy, psychology, or computer science.

Our TESOL program, widely recognized for its excellence, is unusual in providing future teachers with the intellectual rigor and tools of the academic discipline of linguistics. Its graduates are in demand as highly effective teachers on Long Island, across the country, and globally.

The Ph.D. program prepares students for advanced research in all branches of theoretical and experimental linguistics. Our students are exceptionally active in presenting their research at conferences, more so than those of many other leading linguistics departments. Our graduates have secured positions at prominent institutions, including tenure-track positions at Stanford, the University of Washington, Leiden University, the National University of Singapore, National Tsing Hua University (Taiwan), and research or teaching positions at Harvard, the University of Illinois, Pomona College, Reed College, and the Centre de Lingüística Teòrica (Barcelona).

The National Research Council's recent survey shows that our department ranks particularly high among departments of linguistics in external funding of faculty research. Support has come from the following sources:

Research Grants	
NIH	1
NSF	7
Guggenheim Foundation	1
NEH	1
NSF dissertation improvement	2
Education and Symposia Grants	
US Department of Education (FIPSE)	1
NY State Department of Education	1
US Department of State and Council of American	

Overseas Research Centers	3
International Morris Memorial Symposium on Language & Communication	2

Some of the research supported by these grants has been conducted by Linguistics Department faculty in collaboration with members of Stony Brook's departments of Psychology, Computer Science, European Languages, and Hispanic Languages, with the office of International Programs, and with scholars from other universities: UCSD, Haifa (Israel), Amsterdam, and Edinburg.

Other external funding has supported international education and conferences. Professor John Bailyn, with a grant of over $2 million from the U.S. government Critical Languages Scholarship Program of the U.S. Department of State, established Intensive Russian Language Institutes in four cities in Russia. Bailyn is also the co-director of the New York–St. Petersburg Institute, an advanced study program organized every July in St. Petersburg, Russia as a joint project between St. Petersburg State University and Stony Brook. Since 2003, over 700 participants from 29 countries have received certificates for completing the New York Institute Summer Seminar Program. These programs have brought together students and faculty from Stony Brook and other American universities as well as from various parts of Europe. Another Linguistics Department faculty member, Prof. Dorit Kaufman, who is also the director of Stony Brook's Professional Education Program, has held substantial grants from the U.S. Department of Education and the New York State Education Department for the improvement of the education of future teachers.

Plans for the Future

While retaining theoretical linguistics and the investigation of a wide variety of languages as the intellectual core of the department's research and teaching (including in TESOL), the department intends to continue the path it has taken in recent years toward increasing its range of experimental work. A recent study of the job market for PhD graduates in different areas of linguistics compared the number of job advertisements with the number of dissertations in the five-year period 2004-2008. Demand significantly exceeded supply in six areas: **phonetics, language and cognition, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, and applied linguistics**. Of these areas, our department has a well established and thriving program in **phonetics**. We have recently hired new faculty members specializing in **psycholinguistics, cognitive science, and sociolinguistics**, with a view toward boosting our research position and doctoral training in these areas. These new faculty members have expertise in event-related brain potentials (ERPs), eye-tracking, and virtual reality techniques. Their investigations include studies of the neural underpinnings of language processing and acquisition (both of first and second languages) by normal and impaired individuals and how speakers accommodate their language to their interlocutors and the society around them.

Computational linguistics is an area in which the demand for PhDs exceeds supply by the greatest margin, at least an order of magnitude, and the demand in industry is far greater than in academia. Our next faculty hire should be in the area of the computational investigations of language, an area of interested shared by the departments of Computer Science and Applied Math. Linguistics Department faculty conducted a research project in collaboration with members of the Psychology and Computer Science Departments, with $1.5 million in funding from the National Science Foundation in 2003-2007. We look forward to further developing such interdepartmental projects. Our particular focus within computational linguistics would be in natural language semantics.

In addition to expanding our cross-disciplinary research profile in the intersections of linguistics with neuroscience, psychology, and computer science, our long-range plans include a program in Speech-Language Pathology. A number of our undergraduate Linguistics majors every year are eager to enter this field, and we are frequently contacted by others who wish to study it on Long Island in a SUNY institution. Ten years ago we had approval to establish such a program in collaboration with the School of Health Technology and Management, and the first faculty search was well under way, when the project was halted for budgetary reasons. We anticipate a joint Bachelor's-Master's degree program, in which the Bachelor's component would be housed in the Linguistics Department and the graduate program in the School of Health Technology and Management.

We also plan to extend our TESOL program in new directions, offering advanced certificate programs for teachers and doctoral students in other subjects, such as English literature, and and specialized programs for individuals who wish to teach English as a second language internationally. We have already had discussions with educators in Russia who are eager to collaborate on a program to train English language teachers, and we have had expressions of interest from Turkey.

Stony Brook linguists continue to be heavily involved in the classic work of investigating a wide variety of languages. Two exciting new projects are under way. Professor Robert Hoberman is working with the Native American communities on the East End of the Long Island (Shinnecock, Unkechaug, and Montauket) who are seeking to restore their ancestral Algonquian languages to active use. Another new project is on Turkana, a Nilo-Saharan language spoken in Kenya (and, incidentally, related to President Obama's father's language). Professors Ellen Broselow and Daniel Finer have begun work on the language at the field station of Stony Brook's Turkana Basin Institute, and expect to bring students there to conduct research on Turkana and the many other poorly documented languages spoken in the area.