Linguistics


The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Ellen Broselow, Stony Brook University, State University of New York
Gennaro Chierchia, Harvard University
Sandra Chung, University of California, Santa Cruz

Main Issues

The report described a department that has long had a stellar reputation, both nationally and internationally, as a leader in theoretical linguistics and graduate education. The committee left with the clear sense that the department continues to be a leader in the field, continuing its tradition of innovation. The department has grown since the last review in terms of both faculty and students; the undergraduate major has more than doubled in size. Many faculty have noted the high quality of the graduate program as a major factor in the attractiveness of the undergraduate major. The review committee noted the dedication of the department’s faculty to teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The graduate program has maintained a tradition of excellence in research, ranking in the top three in two important facets of the NRC ranking. The department accounts for nearly half of the total external funding in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts as a whole. Over 90% of the department’s Ph.D. graduates have found positions in academia. However, graduate student funding remains below that of institutions with whom the department competes for students.

The reviewers offered a number of recommendations:

- The team recommended allocating funds to hire a mid-career tenured professor in phonology. Roughly 25% of the department’s graduate students are phonologists and the department has a long history of being a leader in the field. However, with John McCarthy’s ascension into the central administration and John Kingston’s appointment as department head, teaching and advising responsibilities have increased dramatically for the remaining faculty in the field.
- In order to increase the undergraduate research experience and prepare undergraduates for graduate work in the field, the team recommended that the department reconfigure its TA resources in order to allow a research-intensive semester for advanced graduate students.
- To remain competitive among peer institutions in terms of recruitment and retention, additional resources need to be procured to support graduate students in the department.
- The team recommended that the faculty establish more extensive and continuous venues to meet as a group with graduate students to discuss topics of mutual interest.
Results of the Review

The Linguistics Department discussed the report of the external reviewers and offered a number of responses and recommendations.

- In its self-study, the department proposed a schedule of increased investment from the department, the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, and the Graduate School to raise funding levels for graduate students with a goal of meeting average peer institution levels in three years. At this time, the College of Humanities and Fine Arts is unable to make a major investment in the graduate program of a single department, so additional sources are being explored.
- The department faculty has met as a body with graduate students in the department in response to an experience survey performed in the spring, addressing concerns raised about the clarity of expectations in the department.
- The department is examining various ways to engage undergraduate students in research. A number of undergraduates have already served as graders in courses led by graduate students. An analysis done by the department confirmed that the department could not currently provide all four-year students with a research-intensive semester. Means to provide this sort of experience will be discussed between the department and the Dean.
- The Dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts has voiced support for the hire of a specialist in phonology in anticipation of retirement, but not as a new line. If a funding strategy can be agreed on, the department will pursue a phonology hire in 2014-2015 and a syntax hire in 2015-2016.

Outcomes Assessment

The Department of Linguistics has an established set of student learning objectives for the undergraduate major, which include identifying patterns in data, arguing to a conclusion, identifying important movements in the field, and literacy in a wide range of methodologies, among others. The department uses a series of measures to determine if these learning outcomes are being met including a specifically designed survey relating to curriculum, learning objectives and satisfaction with the major. Since the survey was implemented in 2009, the department has made a number of revisions to better prepare students in the major.