

## **Response to APR External Report**

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The faculty of the Department of Linguistics thanks the APR Evaluation Committee (Diane Brentari, Natasha Kolchevska, Doris Payne, and Sally Rice), Bessie Gallegos, and all of the team from UNM who made this process both beneficial and pleasant.

This reply to the External Evaluation Committee's Report represents an outline of a more detailed strategic plan for the development of the Department of Linguistics over the next seven years.

The following sections describe our response to the corresponding sections of the External Evaluation Committee's report.

### *I. Preamble*

In the Preamble to the External Committee Report, the Committee describes the unique multicultural social and linguistic milieu of New Mexico. The Department of Linguistics has played a significant role in understanding and maintaining unique cultural and linguistic environment, and contributes in a significant way to the University's goals in this respect. Maintaining a strong Department of Linguistics at UNM will demonstrate the University's commitment to the goals it has outlined for its role in the New Mexico community.

### *II. Overall quality*

We appreciate the recognition of the regional, national and international standing of the Department of Linguistics and its faculty. The Department is based on three pillars: functionalist linguistics; Navajo and Southwest Native languages; and signed languages. As the Committee notes, the department has scholars of national and international standing in functionalist linguistics, signed languages and Native American language documentation; and the Navajo/Southwest Native Languages program is unique. The Department is in a position to establish itself as the leader in these three areas among its intellectual peer institutions mentioned in paragraph 2 of section II of the Committee Report, as well as among UNM's peer institutions. A proper investment in the Department of Linguistics, as described in the "Ways to Strengthen the Department" discussed by the External Review Committee (see below), will allow UNM to take advantage of this opportunity and make UNM a national and international leader in the discipline of linguistics.

### *III. Weaknesses not identified in the Unit's self-study report*

The Committee recommends retiring the Concentration in Computational Linguistics at the MA and PhD level. The Department accepts this recommendation, to take effect at the point when the Computer Science faculty member involved in the program, Prof. George Luger, retires. This is likely to happen in the near future.

*IV. Ways to strengthen the Department in order to increase international recognition and achieve initiatives outlined under the Unit's future directions*

The Committee points out the perilous state of the Department: low level of faculty compared to preceding years of the Department and compared to linguistics departments at our peer institutions, and a correspondingly high student/faculty ratio as a result. In effect, it appears that the University is allowing the Department to decline at a time when its international standing is rising.

*Challenge 1: Faculty staffing levels.* The Committee makes a number of recommendations to resolve the staffing level problems. We agree with and strongly support the faculty hiring recommendations.

Given the current state of affairs in the University, the Department of Linguistics will set up a plan phased over the next five years to propose restoring the strength of the Department of Linguistics.

The Committee's first recommendation (apart from retiring the Computational Linguistics program) is to hire a tenure-track sociolinguist/phonologist. Our Department has long recognized this need and have requested this position as our two sociolinguists and our one phonologist have retired, and the Committee's recommendation reinforces the fact that there is a major gap in the Department in these two areas.

The Committee's second hiring recommendation, after the sociolinguist/ phonologist, is for a scholar in quantitative or corpus methodology in order to 'cement this Department as a national leader in language documentation and empirical approaches to linguistics'. We agree with this recommendation. The Department specifically plans to hire such a scholar in specifically quantitative/documentary linguistics in Native American languages, in order to maintain our reputation in Native American language documentation and revitalization.

The Committee's third recommendation is for increasing the staffing of the Signed Language Program, specifically two lecturers and a tenure-track faculty member. We strongly agree with this recommendation, and it will be discussed immediately below in the context of the Committee's Challenges for the Signed Language Program (Challenges 2-3).

The Committee's last recommendation is for hiring one tenure-track faculty member in Navajo. The Department also strongly agrees with this recommendation, since it is central to the maintenance of the Navajo Language Program, it is necessary for the use of funds provided directly to the Navajo Language Program by the State Legislature, and it supports the University's goals towards diversity. Fortunately, the Department has been authorized to hire a tenure-track faculty member in Navajo.

### *Challenges 2-3: The Signed Language Programs*

In our view, this is the single greatest challenge facing the Department of Linguistics today. The Department of Linguistics' tenured faculty, in combination with three signed language lecturers, have built up a nationally outstanding—in fact, the best—Signed Language Interpreting program in the country. But a major consequence of this success is that the Signed Language Interpreting program takes up almost all of the teaching and research time of three tenure-track faculty, thereby reducing the effective size of the Linguistics programs from 7.5 FTE—already much lower than our peer institutions or the Department's recent past—to 4.5 FTE. Yet demand for signed language interpreters is increasing, and the quality of our Signed Language Interpreting program attracts large numbers of out-of-state students.

We cannot abandon such a strong and outstanding program. Yet it is imperative that the Signed Language Interpreting program be made self-sustaining, and thus allow our tenured signed language faculty to resume their roles as internationally recognized scholars in one of the best functional-cognitive linguistics programs in the United States.

At the same time, it is equally imperative that the department take advantage of its potential to offer a state-of-the-art graduate program in Signed Language Linguistics. As we documented in our APR, the university has expended the resources necessary to implement such a program: three research-active faculty with expertise in signed language linguistics teach in the Signed Language Interpreting Program, and one research-active professor (Jill Morford) is also available to offer quality graduate courses focused on signed language linguistics. The graduate program would allow the Department to take advantage of the research strengths we have in signed language linguistics, which in turn would feed back into the Signed Language Interpreting program. The new courses offered in this program would also vitally improve the cognitive-functional core linguistics program.

Both of these imperatives would be achieved by the Committee's recommendation to hire two lecturers and one tenure-track faculty in signed language.

The Committee also recommends exploring the possibility of turning the B.S. in Signed Language Interpreting into a professional program, with the goal of converting the national excellence of the program and the high demand for it across the country into an

income stream that would support the program more effectively than the current arrangement. Related to this but not noted in the committee report, there is a trend towards accreditation of signed language interpreting programs. A national accrediting body has been established, and the first university programs are beginning to undergo the accreditation process. While UNM's program could delay this process for a while, ultimately, in order to maintain our strong national reputation, we will need to plan for accreditation.

We are in complete agreement with the Committee's goal of making the interpreting program more self-sustaining and even permitting expansion of the program to better meet the need for more qualified interpreters in New Mexico. We plan to explore the means by which we can achieve that goal, and the Committee's suggestions are certainly excellent places for the faculty to consider.

We also take to heart the Committee's recommendation to explore delivery of course content via Web-CT or other innovative technological approaches. We will explore these possibilities. We agree as well on the need to find a solution to the restriction of lab space (in the language laboratory area of Ortega Hall).

#### *Challenge 4: Complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act*

At the time of the APR site visit, we faced a serious challenge in meeting the requirements of the Americans with Disability Act. Since that time, however, this situation has resolved somewhat. As a result of meetings between the chair and representatives from the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, changes to the UNM Accessibility Services/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services policies and procedures were implemented which we believe will greatly improve interpreting services for faculty and staff. The department would still, however, want to explore the possibility of hiring a .5 signed language interpreter for staff use within the department if this need should again emerge.

#### *Challenge 5: The Educational Linguistics program*

Under the direction of the current coordinator of the program, Educational Linguistics has already begun to address many of the issues raised by the Committee: identity, policies on active faculty participation, graduate student support, curriculum, structure of the comprehensive examination, and so forth. We feel that it would be best at this time to allow the Educational Linguistics faculty (which of course come from Linguistics, the College of Education's Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies (LLSS), as well as a few other departments across campus such as Anthropology and Speech and Hearing Sciences) address the programmatic and structural issues raised by the Committee. If as a part of that process the possibility of restructuring the program along the lines mentioned in the Committee's report seem appropriate, the Department of

Linguistics will certainly engage in dialog with LLSS, the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Education, and the Provost's Office.

*Challenges 6-7: The Navajo Language program*

The Committee recognizes the 'fragile' state of the Navajo Language program, and recommends various means to strengthen it. The University has been successful in obtaining funds from the State Legislature to restore the Navajo Language program, and the Navajo Language program staff are actively developing projects to maintain the program and coordinate with other Navajo language programs in the colleges and UNM branches in Navajo country. Most important, the Provost's Office released Target of Opportunity funds to allow the hiring of a tenure-track Navajo linguist for the program. We note that this opportunity will require planning from the department and the College of Arts and Sciences, since the Provost's funding commitment was only for two years.

The Department intends to work with the Provost's office to eliminate course duplication and improve student advising, in order to increase enrollments in Navajo language courses at UNM. The Department will also advertise the program better to High School students.

*Challenge 8: Language documentation technology*

We accept the Committee's recommendation to hold technology and database management workshops for students.

*Challenge 9: Linguistics core curriculum*

The Committee recommends a number of changes to clarify the organization of the linguistics core curriculum, streamline the courses that form the core curriculum, and strengthen coverage of certain areas in the core curriculum. The Department initiated a rethink of the syntax/semantics/discourse courses in the core curriculum in 2006, and was in the process of revamping course content at the time of the visit of the External Committee. We agree that the core curriculum requires some restructuring, and we plan to fold the ongoing review of the syntax/semantics/discourse courses into a more general review of the linguistics core curriculum. This review will be conducted in the context of the development of goals and student learning outcomes for the undergraduate and graduate linguistics degree programs (see section V below).

*Challenge 10: Graduate student funding*

The Committee notes that the graduate program is unattractive to the best students due to the 'noncompetitive' character of the graduate funding situation. This point was reinforced later this academic year: we received three times the number of applications to

the PhD program as ever before, including several truly outstanding students; and none of the highest rank students accepted our offer of admission.

Another example of our dire need for support to attract excellent students comes from our Fulbright scholar applications. Of the 20 Fulbright applicants to The University of New Mexico this year, eight were applicants to the Department of Linguistics. Of those, four students would have been well-suited to our program and were offered admission. Unfortunately, our offer package was not strong enough to attract any of them.

The Committee notes the Department's success in attracting a large endowment for the funding of graduate students (the Greenberg endowment) and recommends that the University acknowledge our success by providing matching funds. The Department has been informed by the UNM Foundation that the Greenberg endowment is now in place at \$1,500,000. We are now exploring ways in which the University can provide matching funds, especially for out-of-state and international students, so that we can leverage the scholarships that this generous endowment will support. We also are working with the College of Arts and Sciences Development Office to initiate a fundraising campaign to add matching funds to the endowment.

The Department is presently reviewing the allocation of teaching assistantships. One of the goals of this review is to find a way to offer more competitive teaching assistantship support to students from outside our MA program to whom we have offered admission to our PhD program.

#### *Challenge 11: University research support services*

The Committee makes several recommendations regarding the provision of research support services to graduate students and faculty in the Department. We strongly endorse all of their recommendations. We will urge the University to provide better research support for identifying funding opportunities, including graduate student funding; for preparing grant proposals; for funding graduate student travel to research conferences; and for providing accounting support for ongoing grants.

#### *Challenge 12: Administrative staff*

We agree that our support staff is excellent but heavily overworked, given the substantial strength of Department faculty in external research activity and service to the community. We support the Committee's recommendation to add a .5 technician for language documentation and instructional software development; for a .5 FTE accountant to serve the growing needs of the department; and for additional support staff to maintain the quality of the Signed Language Interpreting program.

#### *Challenge 13: Operating budget*

The Committee is ‘appalled’ that the Department operating budget has not increased in 9 years – which means that it has actually *decreased* by the rate of inflation during that time). The Committee recommends advocacy for an increase in basic operating expenses, and for any increase to be transferred to academic units.

We strongly support the Committee’s recommendation, and are dismayed that the University has instead asked us to make substantial cuts to our current operating budget, while increasing the number of Vice Presidents and their staff at the central administrative level.

#### *Challenge 14: Faculty salaries*

The Committee recommends that the Department re-evaluate how merit is awarded, and that the University address the dreadful salary compensation in comparison to our peer institutions. The Department accepts the recommendation to review Department merit award guidelines, and strongly supports the recommendation for the University to take the faculty salary inequities seriously.

#### *Summary*

In sum, the Department accepts and strongly endorses virtually all of the External Evaluation Committee’s recommendations of ways to strengthen the Department. The task before us is great, and will require substantial effort on the part of the faculty as well as firm support from the University over a multi-year period to prevent the loss of the nationally and internationally recognized strengths in the Department’s teaching programs, research and service to the community.

#### *V. Advice for formulating and evaluating learning outcomes*

The Department is working with the university-wide Assessment Office to develop program goals and student learning outcomes measurements for the undergraduate and graduate Linguistics programs. The goals and learning outcomes for the undergraduate Linguistics program will include the general scientific and writing skills that are recommended by the External Evaluation Committee. Our planning for goals and outcome assessment for the graduate Linguistics programs and the Signed Language Interpreting program include the features that the Committee compliments us on in their report.

#### *VI. Final comments*

The External Evaluation Committee concludes their report by describing the huge discrepancy between the high external standing of the UNM Department of Linguistics in

the field of linguistics and the inadequate local support it is receiving in comparison to its external standing. In concluding our reply to the External Committee's report, we would like to emphasize the potential in investing in the Department of Linguistics.

Linguistics is unusual among arts/humanities disciplines in its strength in research, in particular in obtaining external research grants. The UNM Department of Linguistics is no exception. Supporting a department that is strong in research serves two major goals of the University. First, supporting research generates income to the University through external research grants and external grants for graduate student support. Second, supporting research is critically important for achieving the University's goal of joining the Association of American Universities (most of UNM's peer institutions are already members of the AAU).

UNM's Department of Linguistics is also unusual in its very direct connection to the community. In particular, UNM's Department of Linguistics directly serves communities that have been historically disadvantaged – namely, Native American communities and the deaf/hearing-impaired community. These communities require correspondingly significant support from the University, and the Department of Linguistics plays a major role in the University's support of these communities.

In other words, the Department of Linguistics plays an unusually large role in the University's goals for research strength, diversity, and service to the community. In order for the Department to continue to play this role in the University, it needs the kind of support from the University that is recommended by the External Evaluation Committee.