

**External Evaluation Committee Preliminary Report  
Department of Linguistics, UNM**

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**I. Preamble**

The Department of Linguistics at UNM exists in a sociolinguistically rich region, with high English-Spanish bilingualism, and one of the most viable Native American populations in the United States. In particular, of all north American native languages north of Mexico, Navajo has the greatest chance of being the only Native American language surviving into the next century – but this is in no way guaranteed.

The Department also operates within a difficult overall university milieu. The funding situation is alarmingly uneven and unpredictable, departments generally tend to be left in the dark, college prioritizing is not transparent and is not communicated well. When someone leaves or retires, there is no guarantee that that person or FTE line will be replaced.

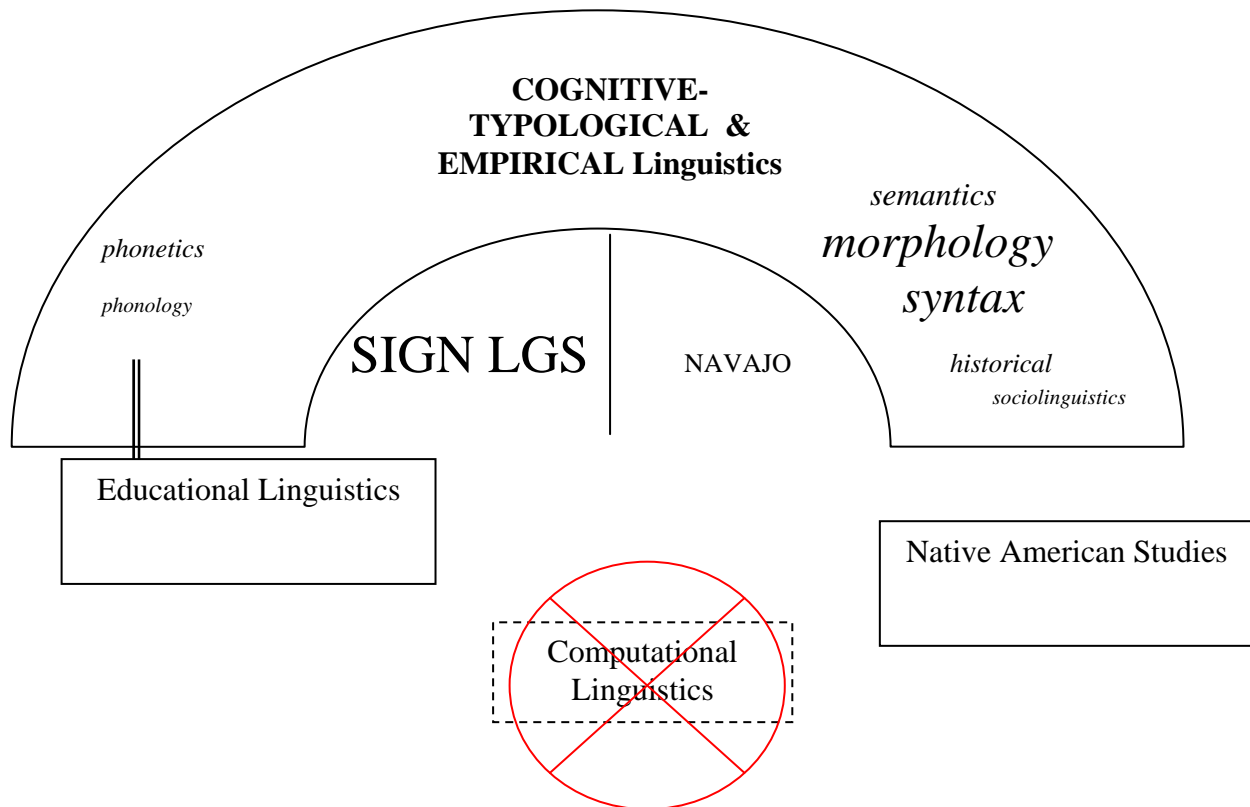


Figure 1. Overview of the Linguistics unit, its programs, and its close extra-departmental UNM relationships.

## II. Overall quality of the unit--regionally, nationally and internationally

The Linguistics Department's Navajo and Southwest programs are unique in the region, and also nationally and internationally. Simply put, no other comparable programs exist. The Department is a leader in having indigenous faculty and an impressive number of indigenous graduate students in their program. Their 30-year record of teaching Navajo in the College of Arts and Sciences at UNM (20 in Linguistics) is incomparable. The research on Navajo in the Linguistics Department (e.g. the Young and Morgan grammar published by UNM Press) is unsurpassed in its depth and quality as an example of endangered language documentary work on a Native American language. More recently, Melissa Axelrod's record of obtaining outside grants is truly impressive. Roseanne Willink has built on the superb foundation of past faculty in this program. Paul Platero's one-year position is laudable, but needs to be extended. Catherine Travis is increasingly being recognized for her important work on varieties of Spanish in the Southwest.

Internationally, there are important connections between the Department and Athabaskan-Dine programs in the northern United States and Canada. There are important points of contact between the UNM Department and work on Native American and other world-class minority language description and documentation programs, for example at the University of Oregon, the University of California at Santa Barbara, Rice University, the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, and the University of Alberta.

Within cognitive linguistics, Phyllis Wilcox, Sherman Wilcox, Barbara Shaffer, Jill Morford and William Croft have international prominence. As indication of their stature in cognitive/functional/typological linguistics, the department was successful in attracting William Croft, an internationally known scholar who was being simultaneously courted at the time by two other universities. Many of Dr. Croft's books, like those of Joan Bybee before him, have been translated into multiple languages and are regularly used in linguistics courses nationally and internationally. In descriptive linguistics, Dr. Axelrod's work is superb. Dr. Jill Morford's Science of Learning grant from the NSF is also of national rank and is testimony to the department's ability to collaborate on major projects that involve scholars from around the country.

Regarding signed languages, the work of Dr. Sherman Wilcox on the origins of sign language and Dr. Phyllis Wilcox on metaphor in sign language rank among the canonical works in the field and are read widely both nationally and internationally. Some of these have been translated into other languages (e.g. Korean). Both faculty members collaborate with research groups abroad. Barbara Shaffer's work in interpreter training is widely known and highly regarded. The Department's very selective program in sign language is one of only about four similar programs nationally and is in extremely high regional and national demand. The continued investment of faculty energy and quality resources into the Sign Language programs since their inception, especially by Phyllis Wilcox, make them worth protecting and building upon within the current departmental structure.

These activities and the quality and placement of the faculty's publications clearly have brought regional, national, and international prominence to the UNM Linguistics Department.

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

We recommend that the Ph.D. Concentration in Computational Linguistics be retired. There is currently only one Linguistics faculty member, Caroline Smith, contributing to this area and it does not represent a particularly central research focus for her or one which she wishes to continue. The one Computer Science faculty member interested in the program is nearing retirement and the single, jointly taught course for the program cannot be taught by either faculty member alone. Moreover, Computer Science shows little interest in expansion in this area. Any new resources put into the Linguistics Department should therefore be devoted to strengthening other areas of recognized uniqueness and distinction rather than building upon this already precarious sub-program.

### **IV. Ways to strengthen (cf. bulleted items) the Department in order to increase international recognition and achieve initiatives outlined under the Unit's future directions**

**1. Challenge:** The faculty are stretched dangerously thin across a number of currently successful sub-programs and the student/faculty ratio is quite high for a graduate program. The current situation makes it very difficult for faculty to take sabbaticals or family/medical leave without something falling apart, courses being cancelled, or students being left supervisorily stranded. Several faculty are nearing retirement and there is already a necessary over-reliance within the Department on emeritus and adjunct faculty for teaching and thesis committee work, which does not serve the Master's or doctoral programs well.

- Retire the Computational Linguistics concentration entirely.
- Hire a sociolinguist with a sub-field in phonology, or phonologist with a sub-field in sociolinguistics to relieve phonetician, Caroline Smith, from teaching in both phonetics and phonology.
- Faculty expertise in quantitative or corpus methodology is also highly desirable for the cognitive and functional goals of the program. A second hire in this area (after a phonologist/sociolinguist) would cement this Department as a national leader in language documentation and empirical approaches to linguistics.
- Hire 3 more faculty in American Sign Language (2 lecturers, 1 tenure-track). Within ASL, start hiring non-UNM graduates, rather than continuing the historic trend to hire Department graduates.
- Hire 1 tenure-track faculty member in Navajo.

**2. Challenge:** A large proportion of departmental resources are being used to sustain the ASL Interpreting program, and yet there is high demand from the state and across the

nation for more Signed Language Interpreters. There is no room to build the program in response to this increased demand, as current faculty and technical facilities are seriously overextended.

- Hire as indicated above.
- Rethink how ASL coursework is delivered technologically.
- Rethink content restructuring within the courses.

**3. Challenge:** Internationally-renowned tenure-track faculty want to teach graduate courses, but are maxed out teaching undergraduate courses in the Signed Language Interpretation program.

- Consider possibility of turning the B.S. in Signed Interpreting into a Professional Program, with its own tuition pricing and funds coming directly to the program for additional faculty hires. The out-of-state ratio of students is already very high (36 out-of-state vs. 55 in-state students since 2002; 50 out-of-state inquiries within the past year).
- Increase delivery of course content in the ASL language classes and out-of-class activities via Web-CT, freeing up additional technological access (e.g. labs).
- Reconfigure the current lab space to accommodate more workstations.
- Consider restructuring LING 201 to make it a Humanities Core course (rather than an option in the Foreign Language Core). This would open up the option of increasing enrollment in LING 201, thus freeing up faculty to teach more graduate courses. (Current classes are capped at 50. If the cap were raised to 100, it would free up half the FTEs used to teach this class.)
- Consider making LING 201 required as a prerequisite for students of interpreting but not counting it toward the major. By eliminating 201 as a major-requirement, ASL IV could be added.
- Offer ASL IV more regularly, hence guaranteeing higher ASL proficiency for Signed Language Interpretation students (as requested by students).

**4. Challenge:** Americans with Disability Act requirements are not currently being met.

- Hire a .5 Signed Language interpreter for staff use within the Department.

**5. Challenge:** The Educational Linguistics Ph.D. program lacks a clear identity or mandate separate from Linguistics. There appear to be annual soul-searching discussions among Linguistics faculty who supervise Educational Linguistics students and the students themselves over “who are we”. Ninety percent of the supervising faculty in Educational Linguistics are Linguistics faculty. In practice, Educational Linguistics students find their practical “home” within Linguistics. Graduate student support for conference travel and some TA support comes entirely from Linguistics. The curriculum requirements for the program are centered in Linguistics as 24 of the non-Linguistics credit hours can be taken across the university (including within Linguistics).

- Consider restructuring the Educational Linguistics program or perhaps completely moving it into Linguistics and rebranding it as an Applied Linguistics stream within the M.A. and Ph.D. degree programs.
- Admit graduate students to the program(s) more selectively.
- Involve the Provost's Office in reconfiguring the program(s) and facilitating better inter-college relationships.

**6. Challenge:** The population of Native American students at UNM-Albuquerque is about 7%, which translates into approximately 1,800 students, most of whom are likely to be ethnically Navajo. This is a significantly high number for universities within the U.S. and Canada. Historically, enrollment in Navajo language classes has been high, but currently many courses have had to be cancelled due to low enrollment. Our understanding is that this is partially due to biased advising of Native American students within University College and American Indian Student Services. Additionally, a troubling development is the recent duplication of Navajo courses outside the College of Arts and Sciences, by University College and the College of Education.

- The Provost's Office must get involved internally in the various college units and with the legislative agenda for Navajo programming within the State.
- Fair and impartial advising of incoming students needs to be addressed.
- Course duplication among units needs to be eliminated.

**7. Challenge:** After 30 years of existence at UNM within the College of Arts and Sciences, the Navajo program is in a fragile state. Core faculty in Navajo studies are close to retirement, and the program is insufficiently and erratically funded. UNM has a moral imperative to continue and expand its commitment to Navajo for two reasons: Navajo is the most viable Native American language within the U.S. and Canada, and the historical treatment of Native Americans demands it. Nationally and internationally, the program also has the potential to attract Athapaskan peoples from other States and from north of the border.

- Secure legislative funding for Navajo tenure-track faculty.
- Advertise the program better to High School students.

**8. Challenge:** The language documentation program has notable strength, particularly under the guidance and mentoring of Melissa Axelrod and Catherine Travis. However, basic technological tools such as software for database management, transcription and analysis appear to be minimal or not made widely accessible to students.

- Hold technology and database management workshops for students.

**9. Challenge:** Undergraduate and graduate sequencing of Linguistics courses needs to be re-evaluated and made more coherent. There is currently some content duplication across courses (particularly among the morphology/syntax/discourse courses), while simultaneously there are gaps in course offerings (e.g., though there are multiple morpho-syntactic courses, there are no regular or required course offerings dealing with

morphology or complex sentence structure). Furthermore, there is always the danger of unhealthy possessiveness over core courses (whether in the Linguistics or Signed Interpreter/ASL programs).

- In some areas, strengthen graduate course content relevant to language documentation (e.g. phonetics-phonology for cross-linguistic work, increase analytical work in complex morpho-syntactic and typological phenomena, database management and analysis [see previous challenge], the socio-linguistic context of language use).
- Hire new faculty in the Sign Interpreting program to free up core faculty for teaching advanced courses and seminars on a regular basis.
- Consider creating a department-wide curriculum committee.
- Redistribute course content in core courses that reflects the general needs of the program, that is sequenced appropriately, that is non-redundant, and that is taught regularly. (The thinness in faculty area depth has clearly exacerbated problems here.)
- Concertedly “prune” listed course offerings to avoid unnecessary duplication of content.
- Properly sequence prerequisites within and across academic years.

**10. Challenge:** The TA and RA funding situation is noncompetitive and makes the graduate program unattractive to the best students.

- Senior faculty have been successful in securing the Greenberg endowment for internationally competitive graduate student fellowships. This is an impressive model for the University as a whole. The Department’s success in this matter should be acknowledged by matching funds from the University.

**11. Challenge:** Research support services from the University seem to exist on an ad hoc and clearly under-advertised basis. Day-to-day grant management (i.e. accounting) falls to either faculty or over-worked administrative staff. There is insufficient support and opportunity for faculty development of grants.

- There must be better research support from OGS and Research Services for both graduate students and faculty.
- Graduate students need better access to research funding information and grant-writing workshops.
- Support for graduate student conference travel needs to be increased.
- Should the Department succeed in obtaining even one more major external grant, a .5 FTE accountant must be added at the Departmental level.

**12. Challenge:** There is inadequate administrative staff to support this research-intensive, community-oriented, and instructionally over-stretched unit. The current staff is excellent and fully professional, but they have been overworked and undersupported for too long.

- Add a .5 technician for Sign Language software, language documentation, and instructional media development (including Navajo).
- If the Sign Language program grows, additional support staff in this area will be necessary. Program coordination and practicum supervision is a full time job and should not fall solely on the shoulders of tenure-track faculty.

**13. Challenge:** We are appalled that the Departmental operating budget has not increased in 9 years. Office supplies and telecommunication expenses, for example, have clearly increased in cost. This budgetary state of affairs is demoralizing for faculty, staff, and students—the backbone of a university.

- UNM Central Administration must advocate more effectively to the State Legislature for increases in basic operating dollars. Any increases received must be transferred to academic units in a transparent and fair fashion rather than funneled into administrative expansion or reorganization.

**14. Challenge:** Faculty salaries are low compared to comparator departments, and there is salary compression at the Associate and Full professor levels.

- The Department may want to re-evaluate how merit is awarded.
- The University needs to seriously address future threats to faculty recruitment and retention as well as clear and present compensation inequities.

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

The undergraduate and graduate programs in Linguistics at UNM have a strong commitment to developing graduates who are prepared to apply their knowledge of language and linguistics in an informed way to practical problems in society (e.g. multilingual challenges, endangered languages, language and education, sign languages and interpretation, second language requirements). This is achieved via the mix of required core courses in each program.

The ASL interpreting program currently operates within state and national certification guidelines, and includes the written portion of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf examination as one of the learning outcomes of the current curriculum. Converting this program to a professional program will further ensure that it meets broad professional standards.

The core curriculum courses (Linguistics and Navajo 101 and Linguistics 201) have begun to institute outcomes assessments. The Department needs to develop these instruments for all of its core courses. Working with the university-wide Assessment Office will help department-wide instruments for measuring undergraduate student success.

At the graduate level, the Department's acceptance of published work as part of the Ph.D. process is an excellent step in the direction of incorporating extra-university criteria into the evaluation of graduate student work.

An undergraduate degree in Linguistics is an excellent opportunity for students to develop analytical skills and hone a scientific way of thinking about social phenomena. At the same time, the problem-solving nature of much undergraduate linguistics work has the potential to result in an overall program requiring very little extended writing experience. Given this, the Department could evaluate undergraduate core courses and elective requirements with an eye to how each course contributes to one or more of the aims of: (a) developing analytical skills, (b) learning to pose and test hypotheses, (c) strengthening writing skills, such that students emerge overall with increased skills in all these areas.

## **VI. Final Comments**

UNM and the College of Arts and Sciences are home to a Linguistics Department that has a history of national and international prominence within the field. The Department has hosted two Linguistic Society of America summer institutes (in 1980 and 1995); these institutes draw not only national but international students and senior scholars to UNM. It regularly hosts a graduate student-run biennial conference, the High Desert Linguistics Society meeting. It supplies Signed Language Interpreters to several major linguistics conferences (most notably, the International Cognitive Linguistics Conference). Several faculty members are internationally recognized as among the most influential and prolific in the field. However, the local support it receives is wholly inadequate, in terms of annual budget, laboratory and teaching facilities, faculty and staff salary compensation, graduate student funding, and administrative awareness—all of which are surprisingly at odds with the Department's superior external reputation. As an outcome of this Academic Program Review process, the reviewers are unanimous in their desire that UNM step up to the plate, recognize this unit's achievements, and reward it with increased focus and administrative attention. The return on any investment in the form of new hiring and budgetary and capital expansion is a sure bet.