Learning Objectives

An undergraduate major in Linguistics provides a strong foundation and a highly respected preparation for professional schools, for careers that are either scientific or humanistic in orientation, and for graduate study in a wide range of fields. Graduate programs in Education respect a background in Linguistics, and the students wishing to pursue graduate study in English or a foreign language will find their application enhanced by a Linguistics major or minor. Schools of business, law, and medicine looking for applicants with a broad intellectual background recognize the analytical skills and scientific rigor which a major in Linguistics represents. To graduate schools and respective employers in computer science, a Linguistics background will be especially attractive. The Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics can thus be the starting point not only for careers in Linguistics, but also in a number of diverse areas, such as education, law, government, business, and computer science.

Specific learning objectives of the B.A. in Linguistics program are:

1. Understanding the Generative Linguistics Program

Students completing a B.A. in Linguistics will develop a clear understanding of why the generative modeling of language initiated by Noam Chomsky has become the dominant paradigm in modern linguistics. Students will be familiar with arguments relating to language acquisition, issues of language complexity and the poverty of the stimulus as foundations for a generative, modular approach to the modeling and scientific analysis of language.
2. Developing knowledge of broad range of sub-fields of theoretical linguistics

Students in the B.A. in Linguistics will engage in courses representing a broad range of different sub-fields of modern, formal linguistics. Four major areas in which students will be able to develop intermediate to advanced skills and knowledge are: syntax, semantics, phonetics, and phonology. With a strong foundation in these areas, students will be able to approach and gain knowledge of other linguistics’ sub-fields such as psycholinguistics, language acquisition, field linguistics, sociolinguistics, neuro-linguistics and the study of contact linguistics. Students will learn to appreciate the major achievements, debates and controversies in each sub-discipline, as well as develop the skills necessary to engage in analysis of novel data within each mode of linguistic description.

3. Practical applications of knowledge of research methodology

In all linguistics courses, students will be required to analyze paradigms and portions of language, making use of specific modes of analysis presented and taught in each course. Students will learn how to interpret the results of experiments and formulate and test the predictions of different hypotheses and approaches to language variation. Additionally, students in the B.A. in Linguistics will be encouraged to undertake individual, extended research projects under the supervision of a faculty member, exploring theoretical issues and/or developing principled, theory-based descriptions of previously undocumented or unanalyzed sets of data from different languages.

4. Developing skills in oral and written communication and the presentation of scientific materials

Students will learn how to present the results of novel scientific investigation and analysis both orally and in written forms, making use of standard conventions present in the different sub-fields of formal linguistics. Students will develop the skills necessary to produce and communicate scientific arguments, present information using theory-driven models or analysis, engage in the discussion of concepts in
modern linguistics, and explicate the ideas of others and themselves in accessible, clear, professional ways.