



The University of Georgia

University Council
Athens, Georgia 30602

March 21, 2012

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Dear Colleagues:

The attached proposal to offer a Non-Thesis Option in the major in Linguistics (M.A.) will be an agenda item for the March 28, 2012, Full University Curriculum Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

David E. Shipley, Chair
University Curriculum Committee

cc: Provost Jere W. Morehead
Dr. Laura D. Jolly

Proposal to add a non-thesis option to the M.A. in Linguistics Linguistics Program

Program Description

The Linguistics Program offers master's and doctoral degrees focusing on subfields of linguistics in which our faculty have special expertise, namely in the broadly defined areas of formal linguistic theory, language acquisition, and language variation and change. The graduate faculty of the Linguistics Program would like to propose the addition of a non-thesis option for the M.A. degree. The current thesis option for the M.A. will remain in place.

The requirements for the proposed non-thesis option would be parallel to those for the M.A. with thesis. Both the thesis and non-thesis degrees will have the same required core courses, but the non-thesis M.A. would require two additional elective courses (to be chosen in consultation with the student's advisor; see detailed requirements below) and a rigorous written examination. Required Proseminar and Colloquium courses are also being added for all graduate students beginning in Fall 2012. These courses are designed to help students develop professional skills and to provide a forum for the presentation of research in progress. The additional course requirements are not expected to have a negative financial impact or unduly increase faculty workloads; see the financial impact statement below for more information.

The non-thesis M.A. requirements proposed here are in line with practices at other major research universities offering graduate degrees in Linguistics. Out of our comparator and aspirational peer institutions (as defined by the University System Board of Regents and the University of Georgia, <http://www.uga.edu/oir/comps/peergrps.html>), 15 offer an M.A. in Linguistics, and 10 of these offer an M.A. without thesis. Other top-ranked graduate programs, such as Indiana University, UC Santa Cruz, and the University of Delaware also offer non-thesis M.A. degrees; most of the other top 20 Linguistics programs not included in our comparator and aspirational peer groups admit students exclusively or almost exclusively at the Ph.D. level (see attachment for details). A non-thesis option would improve our ability to compete with these institutions in attracting students. As will be explained in more detail below, a non-thesis master's degree is the best choice for most students at this level. The M.A. in Linguistics is primarily a degree for students who wish to pursue a Ph.D. but who lack the necessary background to be admitted directly into a Ph.D. program, or for students who wish to pursue careers involving practical applications of linguistic theory. An M.A. thesis is not necessary to achieve either of these goals.

Comparison of M.A. degree requirements

Non-thesis option	Thesis option
<p>Required courses:</p> <p>(a) LING 8100 Proseminar (1 hour, S/U) (b) LING 6021 Phonetics & Phonology (c) LING 8150 Syntax (d) <u>One</u> of the following courses (formal linguistic theory): LING 6022 Advanced Phon & Phon LING 6160 Compositional Semantics LING 8120 Morphology LING 8160 Advanced Generative Syntax LING 8170 Seminar in Syntax/Semantics LING 8180 Seminar in Phon/Phon (e) <u>One</u> of the following courses (language acquisition, variation, and change): LING 6170 Second Language Acquisition LING 6690 Historical Linguistics LING 6710 Languages in Contact LING 6860 Sociolinguistics (f) LING 8101 Linguistics Colloquium (2 hours, S/U)</p> <p>Elective courses: 7 elective graduate courses, chosen in consultation with the student's advisor to create primary and secondary areas of concentration</p> <p>Total: 36 hours</p>	<p>Required courses:</p> <p>(a) LING 8100 Proseminar (1 hour, S/U) (b) LING 6021 Phonetics & Phonology (c) LING 8150 Syntax (d) <u>One</u> of the following courses (formal linguistic theory): LING 6022 Advanced Phon & Phon LING 6160 Compositional Semantics LING 8120 Morphology LING 8160 Advanced Generative Syntax LING 8170 Seminar in Syntax/Semantics LING 8180 Seminar in Phon/Phon (e) <u>One</u> of the following courses (language acquisition, variation, and change): LING 6170 Second Language Acquisition LING 6690 Historical Linguistics LING 6710 Languages in Contact LING 6860 Sociolinguistics (f) LING 8101 Linguistics Colloquium (2 hours, S/U) (g) LING 7300 Master's Thesis (3 hours)</p> <p>Elective courses: 5 elective graduate courses, chosen in consultation with the student's advisor to create primary and secondary areas of concentration</p> <p>Total: 33 hours</p>
<p>Written examination on two reading lists related to the program of study and oral defense of examination</p>	<p>Oral examination (oral thesis defense, combined with an oral examination on the program of study)</p>
<p>Research skills requirement</p>	<p>Research skills requirement</p>
	<p>M.A. Thesis</p>

Faculty Vote

The Graduate Faculty of the Linguistics Program voted unanimously in favor of the proposed non-thesis option in April 2011.

Justification for the Proposed Non-Thesis M.A. Option

In contrast to fields such as history, literature, mathematics, psychology, or foreign languages, students beginning their undergraduate programs of study have typically had no prior exposure to linguistics, and may be completely unaware of the existence of linguistics as an academic discipline. They often are attracted to linguistics through related courses, or by taking an introductory linguistics course as part of their general education requirements. Consequently, many begin their study of linguistics late in their undergraduate careers. In addition, smaller colleges and universities often do not offer undergraduate degrees in linguistics, so students may only have the opportunity to take a limited number of courses in the field in any case. Several of our current faculty members came to linguistics after completing undergraduate degrees in other disciplines, so this is in no way unusual.

At the same time, a number of the most highly ranked Linguistics departments have essentially eliminated their M.A. programs, preferring to accept students directly for the Ph.D. level. Without a B.A. in Linguistics, even the most promising students usually cannot compete successfully with other applicants. Students are expected to begin independent research early in these graduate programs, and those without strong undergraduate training are simply not prepared for this. For the same reason, a traditional M.A. degree requiring a thesis is not ideal for such students. They would benefit more from additional coursework, to provide them with a broader and deeper foundation in the discipline, and from conducting smaller research projects in a range of different linguistic subfields, which typically involve different methodological approaches. For such students a non-thesis M.A. would provide a useful stepping-stone to admission to a Ph.D. program.

Recent patterns of applications to our own graduate programs conform to this picture. Students with a strong undergraduate background are most often admitted directly to the Ph.D. program, and those with a need for additional training are admitted at the M.A. level. Students who perform well at the M.A. level are allowed to apply for a change of degree objective to Ph.D. if desired, bypassing the M.A. degree and thesis. The number of students who apply to our M.A. program seeking a terminal degree as a qualification for employment is considerably smaller.

The fact is that an M.A. thesis is no longer necessary for the majority of students in either of these categories. A Linguistics M.A. without thesis is no disadvantage to students applying to other Ph.D. programs. A full thesis is not required or even expected as a writing sample, and students with an M.A. in hand are typically still expected to complete the same degree requirements as students who enter the Ph.D. program with only a B.A., with the exception of possible waivers for duplicate course work. Many if not most prestigious departments now require qualifying papers of publishable quality for admission to candidacy, so students will still acquire substantial research and writing experience prior to undertaking their dissertations. (Note that our own Ph.D. requirements have also recently been revised to include qualifying papers.) These qualifying papers are more advantageous to students from a professional perspective, since they are much more easily publishable than a thesis-length work.

An M.A. degree in linguistics is also a desired qualification for a variety of jobs in industry, where linguists may be employed to work with speech recognition, natural language processing, search engine optimization, corpus linguistics, etc. However, a thesis is not essential for employment in any of these areas.

Many highly ranked U.S. graduate programs in Linguistics offer an M.A. degree without thesis (see the attachment for additional information). The addition of a non-thesis M.A. is thus in keeping with current practices in our discipline and will allow us to compete better with other institutions in attracting the best students. We should also note that some of our own M.A. students have been lured away to other Ph.D. programs before completing their thesis requirement here. Most of our students work, either as teaching assistants or outside the university, and they often have real difficulty completing the required coursework and thesis in two years given these other obligations. Since an M.A. degree (with or without thesis) is not a requirement for admission to Ph.D. programs, the thesis may be seen by some as an obstacle that unnecessarily delays their plans for continued graduate study. Requiring a thesis for all M.A. students thus puts us at a potential disadvantage in retaining students, as well as in attracting them to the program in the first place.

Given these facts, the question may arise as to the value of the M.A. degree with thesis, which we propose to retain. While we expect that most students will elect to pursue a non-thesis M.A., we feel that we should continue to offer the traditional M.A. with thesis as an option. Students with a strong background in linguistics may choose to pursue an M.A. degree for various reasons, and they may be interested in completing a thesis-length independent research project. Foreign universities or employers may also expect an M.A. thesis, unlike their counterparts in the U.S. A thesis option is therefore still appropriate for a minority of students.

Admission Procedures for Domestic and International Applicants

Admission standards are the same for both the thesis or non-thesis options. Admissions are open to all qualified graduates of accredited institutions. Admission materials are available through the Graduate Admissions Office, and information for prospective students is provided on the Linguistics Program website.

Students will select the thesis or non-thesis option when applying to the M.A. degree program.

Change of Degree Objective

Students enrolled in the M.A. program may switch from the thesis option to non-thesis option (or vice versa) by completing a Request for Change of Degree Objective Form and submitting this form together with a new program of study to the Graduate Coordinator for approval. Such requests will normally not be considered after the third semester of study.

Impact on Current Students

No adverse effect on current students is anticipated. The desired effective date for the non-thesis M.A. is Fall 2012. All students who matriculated in the M.A. program in Fall 2010 or earlier should complete their degrees under the existing requirements. Students who matriculated in Fall 2011 would be able to change their degree objective, if desired, according to the procedure described above as soon as the new program is in effect.

Financial Impact

The addition of a non-thesis M.A. should not place any significant additional burdens on faculty resources. We typically have no more than 10 new M.A. students entering the program each year. We offer a wide range of courses at the graduate level, many of which are cross-listed with other departments, so the additional elective courses that students are required to take should lead to only marginal increases in enrollment in any given course. The new Proseminar and Colloquium courses (required of all M.A. and Ph.D. students, beginning in Fall 2012) will meet once a week during the semester, with individual sessions led by a different faculty member each week. We expect that the majority of students at the M.A. level will select the non-thesis option, which will reduce the demand for supervision of thesis research and help offset the additional faculty obligations to participate in these new courses.

Desired effective semester and year: Fall 2012

Detailed requirements for the non-thesis M.A.

A. Coursework

Students are required to take 33 hours of coursework (11 courses) plus a 1-hour Proseminar in Linguistics (LING 8100, graded S/U, to be taken in the first semester) and at least two hours of Linguistics Colloquium (LING 8101, graded S/U).

Required courses:

- (a) LING 8100 Proseminar (1 hour, S/U) [new course, proposal submitted in CAPA]
- (b) LING 6021 Phonetics & Phonology [new course, proposal submitted in CAPA]
- (c) LING 8150 Syntax
- (d) One of the following courses (formal linguistic theory):
 - LING 6022 Advanced Phonetics & Phonology [new course, proposal submitted in CAPA]
 - LING 6160 Compositional Semantics
 - LING 8120 Morphology
 - LING 8160 Advanced Generative Syntax
 - LING 8170 Seminar in Syntax/Semantics [new course, proposal submitted in CAPA]
 - LING 8180 Seminar in Phonetics/Phonology [new course, proposal submitted in CAPA]
- (e) One of the following courses (language acquisition, variation, and change):
 - LING 6170 Second Language Acquisition
 - LING 6690 Historical Linguistics
 - LING 6710 Languages in Contact
 - LING 6860 Sociolinguistics
- (f) LING 8101 Linguistics Colloquium (2 hours, S/U)

Students should take all required courses listed in (a)-(e) above during the first year of study, if possible.

Elective courses:

7 elective graduate courses (21 hours, excluding LING 7000, 7005, 7300). A maximum of 6 hours of LING 9010 Directed Readings may be included. Relevant graduate courses that do not carry a LING prefix may be included in the program of study with approval of the Graduate Coordinator and the student's Advisory Committee.

Primary and secondary areas of concentration:

The program of study must include at least three courses (9 hours) in a primary area of concentration and two courses (6 hours) in a secondary area of concentration, to be determined in consultation with the student's advisor and the graduate coordinator. The areas of concentration may include LING 9010 Directed Readings or courses specified in (b)-(e) of the list of required courses, in addition to elective courses.

The program of study must include at least 12 hours of courses open only to graduate students.

B. Other degree requirements

1. Research skills

M.A. students must achieve one research skill from the list in the Linguistics Graduate Student Handbook. Courses taken to satisfy this requirement cannot be counted among the courses on the student's Program of Study if they are undergraduate courses.

2. Final Examination

Students will take a written exam, normally in the final (fourth) semester of the program. The candidate will choose two areas related to courses s/he has taken (these will normally correspond to the student's primary and secondary areas of concentration) and will prepare a manageable reading list for each area with the help of the major professor. After the two lists have been approved by the major professor, they will be e-mailed to the other two professors on the student's M.A. Advisory Committee. It is the responsibility of the student to provide the two finalized reading lists to all three professors on her/his committee at least two weeks in advance of the exam.

The exam will normally be a take-home exam and will contain separate sections on each of the two reading lists. The student may refer to items on the reading lists or other published sources when writing the exam. The exam will be given to the student at 5:00 pm on a regular operating day of the university and must be turned in at 8:00 am on the third day following (e.g., from 5:00 pm Friday until 8:00 am Monday). The student will write the exam in a format determined by the Advisory Committee and e-mail it to all committee members by the deadline.

If the committee finds it appropriate, based on the areas covered in the reading lists, they may choose to administer a closed-book exam in lieu of the take-home exam. In this case, the exam will last for three hours. The exam may be written by hand or using a computer, at the discretion of the committee.

Committee members will have two weeks to grade the written exam and will inform the major professor if the student has passed or failed each portion; a two-thirds majority will determine whether the student passes or fails. Once the student has passed both portions of the written examination, a one-hour oral exam will be scheduled.

The oral examination will begin with a defense of the written exam, but thereafter questions may cover any areas included in the student's program of study. The student's overall performance on the oral and written exams together will be evaluated by the committee on a scale of High Pass/Pass/Fail. A two-thirds majority is required to pass.

Students who fail any portion of the exam may retake it once, no sooner than two weeks after the first attempt but within one additional semester. Students who fail the exam a second time will be dismissed from the program.

Comparison of degree programs and requirements in other Linguistics programs

Linguistics Programs at Comparator Peer Institutions (*one of the top 20 Linguistics programs)	
Iowa State University	(M.A. and Ph.D. in TESOL/Applied Linguistics only)
Michigan State University	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. has both thesis and non-thesis options
North Carolina State	M.A. only, thesis is required.
Ohio State University*	M.A. is offered only as part of a combined B.A./M.A. degree and as an optional degree for students en route to the Ph.D. M.A. has both thesis and non-thesis options.
University of Arizona*	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. Two specialized M.A. degrees, one of which requires thesis. Students en route to the Ph.D. receive an M.A. upon completion of course requirements and qualifying paper.
University of California Davis	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. No thesis required for M.A.
University of Florida	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. has both thesis and non-thesis options.
University of Iowa	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. has both thesis and non-thesis options
University of Kentucky	No graduate degree in linguistics
University of Maryland College Park*	Ph.D. only
University of Missouri Columbia	No graduate degree in linguistics

Linguistics Programs at Aspirational Peer Institutions (*one of top 20 Linguistics programs)	
Cornell University*	Ph.D. only (apart from a special M.A. program offered by all departments as a benefit to Cornell employees)
Pennsylvania State University	(Offers only an M.A. in TESOL and a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics)
University of California Berkeley*	Students are admitted only to the Ph.D. program, but all students earn an M.A. en route to the Ph.D. The M.A. has both thesis and non-thesis options.
University of California Los Angeles*	Normally admits students only to the Ph.D. program; all students complete requirements for the M.A. en route to the Ph.D., including thesis.
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. students who wish to continue in the Ph.D. program write a qualifying exam, terminal M.A. requires thesis.
University of Michigan Ann Arbor*	Ph.D. only
University of Minnesota	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. No thesis requirement for M.A.

University of North Carolina Chapel Hill	M.A. only, requires thesis
University of Texas Austin	Primarily a Ph.D. program (the website states that M.A. students are admitted only to the program in Computational Linguistics, but no degree requirements for this program are listed.)
University of Virginia	M.A. only, thesis is optional
University of Washington	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. requires thesis
University of Wisconsin Madison	Admits students to the Ph.D. program only. An M.A. is awarded to Ph.D. students upon completion of course requirements and the defense of the first Ph.D. qualifying paper.

Other top-ranked Linguistics programs	
Georgetown University	Offers M.A., M.A.T., M.S. and Ph.D. M.A. has thesis and non-thesis options; M.A.T. requires portfolio, with option of research paper. M.S. requires either a research paper or thesis.
Indiana University	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. thesis is optional.
MIT	Ph.D. only
New York University	Ph.D. only
Northwestern University	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. requires thesis.
Stanford University	Primarily a Ph.D. program. Students may be admitted for an M.A. degree, which requires a thesis or equivalent project, only under special circumstances.
UC Santa Cruz	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. requires only a qualifying paper.
University of Chicago	Offers a combined B.A./M.A. to undergraduate students. Graduate students are admitted only to the Ph.D. program.
University of Delaware	Offers both M.A. and Ph.D. M.A. has no thesis.
University of Massachusetts Amherst	Offers a one-year M.A. (without thesis), limited to recent graduates of the Five College Consortium who need additional preparation before entering a Ph.D. program. Otherwise accepts students only for the Ph.D. level.
University of Pennsylvania	Primarily a Ph.D. program. Students may be admitted for an M.A. degree (with thesis) only under special circumstances.
University of Southern California	Ph.D. only