

# Linguistics Program Outcomes Assessment 2012

BA in Linguistics / MA in Applied Linguistics

Compiled by Siri Tuttle, Program Head

*The mission of the UAF Linguistics Program is to promote a broader understanding of language structure, acquisition and use. The Linguistics Program strives to serve the people of Alaska by broadening knowledge of languages, especially Alaska native languages, and enhancing the quality of language teaching.*

## **I. Student learning outcome goals and objectives of the program**

Outcome goals and objectives are taken from the Outcomes Assessment plans presently on file with the Provost.

### **a. BA Program**

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of basic concepts and major movements within the field of Linguistics.
2. Students will focus on one area of interest within Linguistics and write a final project exploring this area.
3. Students will demonstrate a working knowledge of two languages other than English.
4. Students will receive a well- rounded education that enables them to pursue a career related to their major field or to enter a graduate program of study.

### **b. MA Program**

1. Students entering the M.A. program are expected be able to communicate at a graduate level in oral and written form.
2. Students will acquire a comprehensive understanding of their area of concentration including its current theoretical perspectives, and research methodologies.
3. Students will be able to produce professional reports and/or publishable papers.
4. Students will be able to independently design and conduct archival, laboratory and/or field research.
5. All students will be satisfied that their training in linguistics provided useful skills for employment, and/or they will seek to continue their education at the graduate level, and/or they will be satisfied that their education has met other personal objectives.

## **II. Methods and criteria used to evaluate whether the goals and objectives are being met**

Methods and criteria used to evaluate success of goals and objectives are taken from the Outcomes Assessment plans on file.

### **a. BA Program**

1. Successful completion of core Linguistics courses, including a capstone course, LING 482, which requires students to synthesize what they have learned.
2. Successful completion of a final paper for the capstone course, which will be presented in a public forum
3. Successful completion of the language requirement and ability to draw on knowledge of these languages for examples in Linguistics courses
4. Exit survey of graduates assesses student satisfaction with the program and the skills obtained.

### **b. MA Program**

1. Upon completion of the degree, all students must submit a written thesis or project and make a public oral defense of the thesis or project.
2. All students must take 15 credits of 600-level coursework in a variety of graduate seminars, including both LING 600 Research Methods and LING 601 Principles of Linguistic Analysis.
3. Students will be required to make a public presentation of their work (e.g., present a paper at a professional conference or departmental colloquium) prior to graduation (usually in their second year). Students will be encouraged to publish their work.
4. All students must submit a written thesis or project and make a public oral defense of the thesis or project.
5. Exit survey prior to graduation (with emphasis on student's overall assessment of quality of education received in the Applied Linguistics program), and repeated as an alumni survey 1 year after graduation (with emphasis on student's success in meeting life goals and how education in Applied Linguistics enabled this).

## **III. Information collected annually**

Information collected annually is taken from the Outcomes Assessment plans on file.

### **a. BA Program**

1. Review of courses taken, faculty observation in class.
2. Program faculty participate in evaluation.
3. Review of courses taken, faculty observation in class
4. A written survey completed by seniors during the semester prior to graduation. Other upper division students are invited to submit surveys as well.

### **b. MA Program**

1. Written thesis or project and oral defense of thesis or project are evaluated by the student's advisory committee.

2. Student performance in graduate seminars is evaluated by faculty instructors. All students complete the Comprehensive Exam. The Exam is written and evaluated by a faculty committee and broadly covers the content areas relevant to the student's area of concentration and research interests.
3. Students are actively mentored in professionalism by their major advisors and advisory committees. Requirements for public presentation are under development and will be listed in the department's Graduate Student Handbook.
4. Written thesis or project and oral defense of thesis or project are evaluated by the student's advisory committee.
5. Both surveys and procedures for administering them are under development. The exit survey will be administered as a condition for signing off on final thesis. The alumni survey will be administered by mail. Survey results will be evaluated annually by the faculty.

#### IV. 2012 analysis

##### a. BA Program

###### 1. Faculty observation data from Linguistics 482 presentations

Four faculty members observed student presentations in Linguistics 482, the capstone class. They completed a questionnaire for each presentation that asked about the student's level of preparation, comprehensibility, demonstration of competence in several basic linguistic areas, and presentation success. Mean and standard deviation are shown for each question in the table below.

Table 1. Faculty observations in BA capstone class

N = 17	Mean	SD
Knowledge of subject presented	4.76	.43
Audience understanding	4.23	.90
Level of information appropriate to student level	4.23	.90
Amount of information appropriate to time allotted	4.17	1.01
General knowledge of linguistics	4.05	1.24
Knowledge of phonology	4.4	.6
Knowledge of morphology	2.17	2.19
Knowledge of historical linguistics	1.4	2.06
Overall impression	4.26	.69

The size of the data set is small, but worth looking at. The impression of faculty observing these students was that they knew their subject matter and had mastered some areas of linguistics quite well. These data are interesting, however, because they show a marked bias for interest in, and knowledge of, phonological aspects of language as opposed to morphological or historical aspects. It may be the case that the program unintentionally overemphasizes the phonological side of linguistics. This could represent a one-time finding, the interests of the students in the present 482 class, but it is worth

investigating whether something in the structure of the program (specialties of faculty, workloads, topics of classes) tends to favor one area of linguistics over others.

## *2. Exit surveys completed by seniors and upper division students.*

Exit surveys were distributed to members of the capstone class, two of whom were graduating seniors and three of whom were upper division students.

The exit survey asks students to rank the amount of learning they felt took place in individual classes, with classes not taken or not required in their concentration omitted from ranking. Both students ranked almost all classes taken at UAF as 4 or 5, the exception being the intro class "Nature of Language," which one student ranked at 1, perhaps because previous learning made it redundant for that student. There was a difference in how the two students ranked English 318, "Modern English Grammar," one giving it a 3 and one a 5. Rankings for electives lay between 3 and 5.

Both students ranked the overall quality of teaching at the top of the 5-point scale.

Students were also asked to rate the degree of difficulty in reaching graduation within 4 years. One student rated this difficulty 3 and one 5. The student who found it easier commented: "I started with all my general ed classes done and two years of foreign language already. Without that I think it would have been even more difficult to graduate, classes offered every two years made it hard."

The student who ranked difficulty at 5 commented: "The required classes not being offered very often, combined with the confusion of transferring from UAA and not being offered much guidance by any advisors. There was also complication of fitting my study abroad in around the Linguistics class schedule."

The same student also offered the following: "I was mistaken in thinking that my language credits could cover more than one requirement, i.e., Major requirement and Perspectives of Human Condition BA substitute requirement...I've met other students who received a similar surprise when they discovered they needed more classes. This also caused confusion about the minor complex as I thought I was taking language classes to cover that requirement as well."

The other graduate wrote: "All the writing-intensive classes offered through the department conflicted with other electives. I had to take another semester to take them through the English Department."

The three challenging themes in these graduates' comments were calls for classes to be offered more regularly (one-year as opposed to two-year cycle), better organization in class scheduling, and a desire for more active advising. The comment about the language requirements is a very apt one, and addresses the status of foreign language study at UAF in general as much as it does the structure of the Linguistics Program. The observation about class scheduling is also important, and is not limited to classes with with Ling designator; classes tend to cluster within the same desirable teaching slots, and students often struggle with this issue.

## *3. Miscellaneous commentary collected by faculty from present students and alums.*

The three themes found in the BA exit surveys are echoed by other students in comments to advisors and instructors. The two-year required-course schedule is frequently brought up, as is the issue with time conflicts. Difficulties with transfer credits are frequently discussed. The desire for more active advising is not heard so often from students who make regular advisor visits, but perhaps it is a difficult one to voice directly to the advisor. Of the three issues, changes in advising structure may be

the easiest to achieve, since they do not require coordination outside the program or approval of program changes.

#### 4. Summary

The two instruments applied to the BA program can be generalized as follows:

- Students are doing good work at the appropriate level in the capstone class.
- Students have a bias toward phonology at the BA level.
- Students have difficulty graduating in four years, which they attribute to:
  - Two-year cycle of required classes
  - Insufficient coordination of major requirements with other requirements
  - A need for more active advising

- Students rate the quality of teaching in Linguistics classes at the top of the 5-point scale. They ranked their learning level nearly as high.

Students have difficulties with the timing of required classes, and with coordinating the major with the UAF core requirements. Despite these challenges, students in the Linguistics BA program are achieving well, and have confidence in their own learning and in their instructors' teaching.

#### b. MA Program

##### 1. Faculty evaluations of student presentations in a 600-level class on the topic of second language acquisition and teaching.

In this class, only two faculty members viewed presentations, so the data set is very small. In this class the faculty impression of student mastery was fairly high and ratings were more consistent than in the larger undergraduate data set. One faculty member in this evaluation was a specialist on the topics covered in the class and the other is a specialist in another area.

Table 2. Faculty observations in a 600-level applied linguistics class.

N = 4	Mean	SD
Knowledge of subject presented	4.63	.48
Audience understanding	4.62	.48
Level of information appropriate to student level	4.75	.5
Amount of information appropriate to time allotted	4.38	.95
Overall impression	4.65	.47

Both observers ranked the students' knowledge toward the top of the scale and had a strong overall impression of their presentations.

## *2. Exit surveys completed by graduating Masters students.*

Two exit surveys were completed by Applied Linguistics MA students, both of whom are graduating in just over two years. A third student, who completed the program in two years, did not return a survey.

In these questionnaires, the MA students (both in the Second Language Acquisition and Teacher Education concentration) rated their degree of learning in required classes near the top of the 5-point scale, each class at 4 or 5 and the majority at 5. They ranked their electives (which were very few) at a solid 5.

Both students ranked the overall quality of teaching in the program at 5, as they did the quality of advising.

Both students also ranked the difficulty of graduation in two years at 5. One commented: "Classes are very challenging (for me) and writing of thesis was very daunting. I wasn't able to do it in two years." The other said: "It is very difficult to finish all classes, do research, and then analyze data all within a short period. However, it is possible."

As might be expected, MA students in the second language acquisition concentration found the program highly relevant to their future careers. One remarked: "This program was very intense, but it prepared me to step into the job market and helped me be competitive in the job market. This program has a lot of great teachers who are excellent and knowledgeable in their fields."

## *3. Alum surveys returned via email.*

We attempted to reach alums of the MA program via email to do a followup survey, but apparently our approach was not successful, as we did not get any responses. We will try this again next year, perhaps via alums' advisors, who may be more likely to get a response.

## *4. Academic and career progress for Applied Linguistics MA students.*

Applied Linguistics MA students have done very well in the past few years in terms of academic and career advancement. Some highlights:

- One of 2012's graduates in SLATE received four job offers while still completing her thesis. She has accepted an offer to teach English as a foreign language at a Chinese university.
- One of 2012's graduates in Documentation and Description received four funded offers from prestigious Ph.D. programs in Linguistics. He will be continuing his studies at UC Berkeley.
- One Ph.D. graduate (Interdisciplinary/Linguistics) has been promoted to Assistant Professor from Instructor status at UAF.
- One MA graduate (2010) has been accepted for an Interdisciplinary/Linguistics course of study at UAF.
- One Ph.D. graduate (Interdisciplinary/Linguistics) has been hired into a term Assistant Professor position within the UA system.
- Two M.A. graduates (2010 graduation) have been hired into positions at their school district's Curriculum Department.

## 5. *Summary*

MA students in Applied Linguistics show a high level of satisfaction with both teaching and advising, and rank their own learning as substantial. They find a two-year course of study to be very challenging but have found it possible to approach it.

MA graduates have done very well in academic and career development, receiving promotions, academic placements and multiple job offers. They find their experience at UAF to be directly relevant to their career development.

## **IV. Suggested followup**

### **a. BA Program**

Issues arise around the coordination of major with general education requirements, infrequency of class offerings, and a desire for more active advising. The program should take a look at frequency and coordination of class offerings, to see what structural changes could make a difference for students. New advising and tracking strategies have been proposed (a BA portfolio, for example, and annual orientation meetings for majors) that might help students organize their progress better.

Our results at the BA level show that students are graduating with appropriate levels of mastery and that they rank their teachers highly.

### **b. MA Program**

We need to further develop our system of tracking graduates of the program; a general survey sent by email did not receive responses. It may be possible to get more information by having former advisors contact students.

MA results show less concern with coordination of requirements than BA students (the specialization at this level makes it easier to keep track of progress.) They show a high level of satisfaction with both teaching and advising. MA students are doing very well professionally, in both academic and career advancement.