

# The Ph.D. Handbook

for the program in linguistics at George Mason University

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# Program Objectives

The main objective of the Ph.D. program in linguistics is to train students to be research scientists in academia, industry, and government. Students with a Ph.D. in linguistics will be qualified to work as research and teaching professors at universities around the world. Many applied linguistics programs are in need of faculty who are trained in linguistic theory and second language acquisition. Our Ph.D. students can also work in other areas relating to linguistics and second language acquisition: they can work as administrators of language-learning programs or do government-funded research in theoretical and applied linguistics.

The doctoral program is designed to be accessible to eligible students coming out of our own Master's degree in English: linguistics, as well as to any new qualified student with or without a master's degree in linguistics from another institution. The program accommodates both full- and part-time students. All coursework for a student entering without a Master's degree in linguistics can be completed by a full-time student within four years. Qualified students will gain valuable research and teaching skills from various graduate research assistantships and teaching assistantships. In particular, teaching assistantships will allow graduate students to teach in our growing undergraduate linguistics concentrations.

The program is compact and self-contained, yet designed to allow students to fulfill many of the elective courses from a selected set of other programs, including Modern and Classical Languages, Psychology, Philosophy, Computational and Data Sciences, and the College of Education and Human Development.

# Curriculum

The Ph.D. Program in linguistics consists of the following components: core linguistics courses in phonology, syntax, and semantics, with an optional focus on second language acquisition, fundamental courses in research methods, seminars in the core theoretical areas and in first and second language acquisition, elective courses, qualifying papers, and dissertation research.

All students without a Master's degree are required to do 72 credit hours of course work and dissertation research to complete the program requirements successfully (See below). Of the 72 hours, 33 hours are for core and language acquisition course requirements. 39 additional hours are required: 6 hours of additional advanced seminars, 15 hours of electives (which may be taken in Linguistics, Modern and Classical Languages, Psychology, Philosophy, Education and Human Development, or the School of Computational Sciences), 6 hours of qualifying research papers, and at least 12 hours of dissertation research. (see Appendix A for class schedules)

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| a.) 9 hours in phonology            | f.) 6 additional hours in seminars  |
| b.) 9 hours in syntax               | g.) 15 hours of electives (can be from LING, PHIL, PSYCH, CS, CSS, CSI, EDUC, EDCI, and others) |
| c.) 6 hours in semantics/pragmatics | h.) 6 hours of qualifying papers (two papers)   |
| d.) 6 hours in language acquisition | i.) 12 hours of dissertation  |
| e.) 3 hours in research methods     |   |
| <hr/>                               | <hr/>   |
| = 33 hours of required coursework   | = 39 hours of additional work   |
| <b>= 72 hours total</b>             |   |

For students entering the program from our own Master's degree in English: linguistics, the total hours required is reduced. These students will be required to fulfill 42 hours of coursework and research past their original 30:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| a.) 3 hours in phonology (LING 890)   | f.) 6 additional hours in seminars in two chosen fields |
| b.) 3 hours in syntax (LING 886)  | g.) 3 hours of electives                                |
| c.) 3 hours in semantics/pragmatics (LING 788)                              | h.) 6 hours of qualifying papers (two papers)           |
| d.) 3 hours in language acquisition (LING 882)                              | i.) 12 hours of dissertation                            |
| e.) 3 hours in research methods (LING 770)                                  |   |
| <hr/>   | <hr/>   |
| = 15 hours of required coursework   | = 27 hours of other work                                |
| <b>= 42 hours total, beyond GMU Master's degree in English: linguistics</b> |   |

Students entering the program with a Master's degree in linguistics from another institution may have their total required hours of coursework reduced by up to 30 hours (leaving no less than 42 Ph.D. credit-hours). This will depend upon the types of graduate courses they took while at the other institution.



# Curriculum Requirements

Listed below are the required courses for the program. They include a suggested set of electives. All courses are 3 hours.

## Core Courses

LING 690 Generative Phonology  
LING 692 Phonology II  
LING 890 Phonology Seminar (may be repeated with different topic area)  
LING 786 Syntax  
LING 787 Syntax II  
LING 886 Syntax Seminar (may be repeated with different topic area)  
LING 785 Semantics and Pragmatics  
LING 788 Semantics II

## Acquisition Courses

LING 582 Second Language Acquisition  
LING 882 Language Acquisition Seminar (may be repeated with different topic area)  
-Students who wish to concentrate on Second Language Acquisition must take LING 782 (Second Language Acquisition II) as well as a statistics course.

## Research Methodology

LING 770 Research Methods

## Qualifying Papers (see Appendix C)

LING 898 Advanced Independent Study (taken twice)

## Doctoral Dissertation (see Appendix D)

LING 998 Doctoral Dissertation Proposal  
LING 999 Doctoral Dissertation

## Electives (not exhaustive)

LING 507 Fieldwork in Applied Linguistics  
LING 521 Applied Linguistics: Methods of TESL  
LING 522 Modern English Grammar  
LING 523 Descriptive Aspects of English Phonetics and Phonology  
LING 525 Practicum in Applied Linguistics  
LING 580 First Language Acquisition  
LING 581 Psycholinguistics  
ENGL 592 History of the English Language

LING 650 Introduction to Sociolinguistics  
LING 691 Theories of Language  
LING 686 Special Topics  
LING 798 Directed Reading  
LING 897 Independent Study

FRLN 550 Special Topics  
FRLN 565 Theory of Translation  
FREN 550 Special Topics  
FREN 560 History of the French Language  
FREN 575 Grammatical Analysis

SOCI 531 Statistical Reasoning  
SPAN 500 History of the Spanish Language  
SPAN 501 Applied Spanish Grammar  
SPAN 502 Hispanic Sociolinguistics  
SPAN 550 Special Topics

PHIL 574 Philosophical Issues in Cognitive Science  
PSYC 615 Language Development  
CS 580 Introduction to Artificial Intelligence  
CSI 600 Quantitative Foundations for Computational Sciences  
CSI 606 Scientific Graphics and Visualization Tools  
CSI 607 Database Tools for Scientists  
CSS 600 Introduction to Computational Social Science  
NEUR 604 Ethics in Scientific Research

EDUC 611 Cultural Issues in Second Language Acquisition  
EDCI 516 Bilingualism and Language Acquisition Research  
EDCI 569 Teaching English in the Secondary School

Appendix A provides the scheduling parameters for the proposed program.

## Requirements for Admission

Entering students are accepted only for fall semesters. The department does not usually consider applications that fail to meet the minimum criteria of 3.00 undergraduate GPA, 3.25 GPA in linguistic course work, and combined GRE scores of ~280. The GRE must have been taken within the last five years. The minimum GPA for students with a Master's degree is ordinarily 3.50. No specific set of qualifications guarantees admission.

In addition to admission materials required by the university, applicants must submit the following:

Three letters of recommendation from individuals who have firsthand knowledge of the applicant's academic capabilities or work experience

A one- to two-page goals statement describing professional objectives, training history, and reasons for seeking the Ph.D.

A 10-page writing sample, which may be a paper written for an undergraduate or graduate class or any other material that gives evidence of an applicant's writing skills and analytic abilities.

## Continuous Enrollment

In order to ensure timely progress toward the degree, students are required to be registered for a minimum of 6 credit hours per semester prior to advancing to candidacy.

## Faculty

George Mason University currently has five full-time faculty teaching within our linguistics programs. Full-time faculty in the department are augmented by faculty with linguistics training from the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, the Krasnow Institute for Advanced Study, and the School of Education and Human Development. The university therefore can bring to bear the full range of expertise needed for instruction, advising of students, and engaging students in research.

## Learning Outcomes

Ph.D. graduates are expected to demonstrate the ability to carry out original independent research in linguistics. This may include research in any of the core areas of phonology, syntax, or semantics. Students may concentrate in second language acquisition or areal linguistics, such as Spanish linguistics. The graduates of our program will have a demonstrated knowledge of linguistic theory and first or second language acquisition and will be able to build bridges linking theory to acquisition. Many of the graduates will benefit from a rigorous TA mentoring program where there will be a concerted effort to train students to be effective teachers of linguistics.

Upon completion of the program, each student will be expected to:

- Understand the core concepts of phonology, syntax, and semantics
- Relate the core concepts of linguistics to language acquisition theory
- Develop a thorough knowledge in a subfield of linguistics
- Show proficiency in research methodology
- Pose a focused question regarding linguistic theory and conduct original research to answer it
- Develop written and oral communication skills appropriate to the field
- Analyze and solve career-appropriate linguistic problems
- Continue to contribute to the field of linguistics

## Assessment

Initially, students will be assessed by their successful completion of the required linguistic coursework. Many of these courses will require substantial written work, and faculty will have ample opportunity to evaluate the quality of a student's early progress. As students advance through the program, they are assessed via the quality of their qualifying papers, the argument of their dissertation proposal, their dissertation research, and, finally, the success of the dissertation itself and their dissertation defense.

Students in the Phd program in linguistics receive an assessment on a yearly basis. This assessment is submitted by the entire linguistics faculty, and is meant to give current students an idea of their level of achievement and success in the program. See appendix F for this assessment form.

### Termination at Master's Level

If the quality of the early coursework is not up to advanced standards, a student without a Master's degree will have the opportunity to apply 30 credits of the required coursework and terminate at a Master's in English: linguistics.

### Qualifying Papers

The student must submit two Ph.D. qualifying papers. For students who start the program with a Bachelor's degree,

the first qualifying paper should be submitted after the second year of full-time study—that is, in the semester following the completion of 36 credits of coursework. Students who enter the program with a Master’s degree and have had their coursework credit hours reduced should submit their first qualifying paper during the semester following the completion of 6 credit hours of coursework. The second qualifying paper will typically be submitted after all seminar work and elective courses are taken. See Appendix A for possible timetables. The student will register for LING 898 Advanced Qualifying Seminar for each paper. Work on a qualifying paper may extend to an advanced independent study (LING 897), *but students who are finishing a QP in LING 897 must submit a final draft by the 10th week of classes*. These papers are expected to demonstrate the student’s mastery of the core linguistic principles and research methodology. Each paper will show that the student is qualified to undertake independent research. In order to demonstrate a range of expertise, the papers are expected to deal with different, though possibly complementary, fields of linguistics. The paper topics will typically grow out of some of the advanced seminars that the student is taking, and two LING faculty members determine the quality and adequacy of each paper. The quality of the papers should be appropriate for conference presentation. Upon successfully passing both qualifying papers, the student may move to advance to candidacy by taking LING 998.

**Dissertation Research**

The research dissertation is a basic requirement that demonstrates the student’s ability to carry out sustained independent research in linguistic theory. The program is designed so that, typically, a student will continue to expand and develop the research from one or both of the qualifying papers to a fully articulated dissertation. The student must take a minimum of 12 hours in dissertation credits (LING 998, 999). The student works closely with a dissertation director and the dissertation committee in the proposal, research, and writing of the dissertation.

**Dissertation Committee**

By the time a doctoral student is advanced to candidacy, the dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences appoints a dissertation committee upon recommendation of the Linguistics director. A dissertation committee must include a minimum of three faculty members, at least two of them must be graduate faculty in the Linguistics Program. Additional members may be appointed who are not members of the graduate faculty or from outside the university.

Student-initiated changes in the composition of the dissertation committee may occur only with the approval of the dean or director in consultation with the committee. Such changes may be made for extenuating circumstances only. Faculty may resign from a dissertation committee with appropriate notice by submitting a written resignation.

**Dissertation Defense**

The dissertation must represent a substantial research achievement. It should be of publishable quality. In close consultation with the committee, the student prepares to defend the dissertation. The defense is given as a public presentation of the dissertation, followed by an oral examination by the committee members. If the candidate successfully defends the dissertation, the committee recommends that the final form of the dissertation be completed and that the graduate faculty of George Mason University accept the candidate for the Ph.D. degree.

# Appendix A – Class Scheduling Parameters

**Class Scheduling**

The Ph.D. program includes the following courses.

**Frequency for PhD Courses:**

LING 788 Semantics II	(once per year)
LING 782 Second Language Acquisition II	(once per year)
LING 770 Research Methods	(once per year)
LING 890 Phonology Seminar	(once per year)
LING 882 Language Acquisition Seminar	(once per year)
LING 886 Syntax Seminar	(once per year)
LING 897 Independent Study	(as needed)
LING 898 Advanced Qualifying Seminar	(once per year)
LING 998 Dissertation Proposal	(as needed)

**Sample Semester Offerings**

Below is a list of course offerings for each fall and spring semester. They include all linguistics courses. The current courses support five of our programs at GMU: the MA in English: Linguistics, the graduate TESL certificate, the undergraduate TESL certificate, the linguistics concentration in the English major, and the interdisciplinary minor in linguistics. (Note: there may be changed in this lineup due to staffing and student needs).

**Fall**

- LING 306 General Linguistics
- LING 307 English Grammar
- LING 520 Introduction to Linguistics
- LING 521 Applied Linguistics
- LING 523 English Phonetics
- LING 580 First Language Acquisition
- LING 690 Generative Phonology
- LING 770 Research Methods
- LING 787 Syntax II
- LING 782 Second Language Acquisition II
- LING 788 Semantics II

Seminar (LING 882, 886, or 890)

**Spring**

- LING 306 General Linguistics
- LING 307 English Grammar
- LING 525 Practicum in Applied Linguistics
- LING 520 Introduction to Linguistics
- LING 522 Modern English Grammar
- LING 582 Second Language Acquisition
- LING 650 Introduction to Sociolinguistics
- LING 692 Phonology II
- LING 785 Semantics and Pragmatics
- LING 786 Syntax I

Seminar (LING 882, 886, or 890)



## Appendix B – Application Checklist

*Entering students are accepted only for fall semesters.* The department does not usually consider applications that fail to meet the minimum criteria of 3.00 undergraduate GPA, 3.25 GPA in linguistic course work, and combined GRE scores of 1,100. The minimum GPA for students with a Master's degree is ordinarily 3.50. No specific set of qualifications guarantees admission.

### Admission Materials Required by George Mason University

- \_\_\_ Completed online application (<http://admissions.gmu.edu>)
- \_\_\_ Application fee
- \_\_\_ An unofficial transcript from all previous institutions (if admitted, all applicants are required to submit official, final transcripts prior to the last day to add/drop courses in their first semester)
- \_\_\_ GRE score (combined score should be ~280 or higher)

### Additional Materials

- \_\_\_ 1st Letter of Recommendation – Name of Recommender: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ 2nd Letter of Recommendation – Name of Recommender: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ 3rd Letter of Recommendation – Name of Recommender: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ A one- to two-page typewritten goals statement
- \_\_\_ A 10-page writing sample (analytical)

Please direct all application materials electronically to the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Graduate Admissions Office. More information can be found at <http://chss.gmu.edu/admissions>

## Appendix C – Qualifying Paper Agreement Form

### Qualifying Paper Agreement Form

if you are registered for LING898, there may be a due date

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Qualifying Paper number (circle):    1    2

You must have completed the first QP before attempting the second

The title of my Qualifying Paper is:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please attach a proposal of not more than one page for this QP. A tentative list of relevant bibliographic sources should also be included.*

The following linguistics faculty members have agreed to be on my Qualifying Paper Committee.

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

*If for any reason your QP topic has significantly changed from what is indicated in your attached proposal, you must submit another QP agreement form. This is mandatory if the change requires the formation of a different faculty committee.*

The following section is filled out when the QP has been successfully completed

Completion date: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty committee signatures:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D – Dissertation Proposal (Ling 998)

A dissertation proposal should explain your topic and its significance to a non-specialist audience and should show how you intend to execute and complete your project. The proposal is a preliminary overview of the dissertation you intend to write and not an unalterable blueprint for the project. The proposal can also be the basis for grant applications and fellowship proposals. The complete proposal should be approximately 10–15 pages, plus a tentative bibliography.

Suggested steps for completing the dissertation proposal are as follows:

1. Choose your dissertation committee in consultation with your dissertation director. A dissertation committee must include a minimum of three faculty members, at least two of them must be graduate faculty in the Linguistics Program. The faculty members you have chosen must each receive a one-page description of your research topic.
2. Faculty who agree to serve on your committee must each sign part A of the Dissertation Proposal Form.
3. After Part A has been signed, you may register for LING 998.
4. Write a proposal that is acceptable to your dissertation director. (See below.)
5. Submit the proposal to the other members of your committee and revise the proposal in response to their comments (or otherwise address their concerns).
6. Give an oral presentation of your proposal to the LING Colloquium.
7. When all the members of your committee agree that the proposal is acceptable, have them sign part B of the Dissertation Proposal Approval Form.

The following outline includes basic components of a proposal. Note that this list is best used as a starting point for discussions with your dissertation director, who may have other suggestions. You may arrange the sections of your proposal in any logical order, and one example is represented below. A relatively efficient way to produce a proposal is to write what you perceive to be the easiest pieces first, though eventually you will need to assemble your pieces into a seamless whole.

- Introduction (One paragraph to give readers the briefest introduction to your dissertation topic—the problem you will address—and to make them want to read more.)
- Research question and thesis/argument (What questions will you be asking about your topic? Why are they significant? This section should also include your informed speculation about the answers to these questions, which constitute your dissertation's tentative thesis.)
- Review of the Literature (What have scholars written about your topic? How will your research support or challenge their interpretations? Will your work examine a neglected topic and thereby fill a gap in the existing literature? What scholarly debates does your work address? This section is where, by your knowledgeable discussion of secondary sources, you demonstrate that your dissertation will be a significant contribution.)
- Sources and methodology (What kind of data will constitute the core of your dissertation research?

How and where will you collect these data? Will you employ a quantitative analysis? If so, briefly state what kind.)

- Organization of chapters (In this section, you will explain how you will divide your material into chapters. You should probably devote one paragraph to summarizing the contents of each chapter.)
- Schedule to completion (Here, you explain the current status of your project— what have you done so far?—and then present a detailed schedule for your future work. When will you do your research, write, revise, and finish? What is your target date for defending your dissertation?)
- Bibliography (Citations must conform to the APA Style.)

# Appendix E – Dissertation Proposal Approval Form

## Dissertation Proposal Approval Form

**Part A.** Must be completed before registering for LING 998.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Dissertation Title: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please attach a 1-page description of the research topic.*

Dissertation Director \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

(All dissertation committees must consist of at least three members of the graduate faculty, at least two of whom must be from the Linguistics Program. See the University Catalog for policies on dissertation committees)

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**Part B.** To be completed after colloquium presentation and approval of proposal

Colloquium Completed?    yes \_\_\_\_\_    Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Please attach full proposal.*

Proposal approved by dissertation committee:

Dissertation Director \_\_\_\_\_ approved?    y    n    date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ approved?    y    n    date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ approved?    y    n    date \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member \_\_\_\_\_ approved?    y    n    date \_\_\_\_\_

