Linguistics, PhD

The Linguistics program in the Department of Languages, Linguistics, Literatures, and Cultures has particular strengths in multilingual language acquisition, phonology, and syntax. Students are encouraged to take courses in a wide variety of departments and programs across the university.

The phonology curriculum emphasizes current theoretical perspectives, including Optimality Theory, and the collection, description, and interpretation of novel phonological and phonetic data. Students may also study phonological acquisition and development. Courses feature extensive work in data analysis and problem-solving, focusing on the construction and evaluation of phonological theories, particularly in light of new empirical data.

The syntax curriculum includes the dual emphases of empirical and theoretical perspectives. It offers a variety of foundational courses that build analytic and argumentation skills, as well as specialized coursework on current issues in syntactic theory. The courses consist of intensive work in problem-solving. They combine the discovery and description of new linguistic data with the exploration of the implications of such facts in testing and constructing syntactic theories.

The acquisition curriculum emphasizes multilingual language syntax and phonological development in simultaneous, sequential, and late learners across a variety of learning contexts. Students have research opportunities that provide an overview and analysis of current language acquisition research.

PhD students may enroll in the Certificate in Cognitive Science of Language program of study offered through the Graduate College. This certificate provides students with multidisciplinary training in cognitive science—a field that complements linguistics in many diverse ways—and the opportunity to work closely with faculty and graduate students from other departments across campus.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- be familiar with the fundamental concepts of phonology, syntax, and an additional specialization area typically focused on an aspect of language acquisition in multilingual populations;
- conduct original research in the field of linguistics by writing two comprehensive exam papers, of publishable quality, to be presented to the department no later than their third year in the program;
- conduct original research that will culminate in a dissertation, defended by an oral exam;
- gain experience with experimental methods and analysis through participation in faculty-run labs and discussion groups across campus that focus on language acquisition and development;
- expand their understanding of how the fundamental concepts of linguistics relate to those of cognate areas determined with their advisor, such as psychology, education, anthropology, and computer science, providing them with a broad perspective on human language;
- take courses in statistical methods and have a clear understanding of how to carry out and interpret statistical analyses at an intermediate to advanced level;
- be encouraged to submit abstracts to conferences (national and international) to disseminate their research and to work toward publishing their comprehensive papers before graduation; and
- be encouraged to participate in cocurricular activities outside of their regular coursework.