Advancing Linguistics as a Science in Undergraduate Programs: Issues and strategies

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Background

• Ph.D. in Linguistics from USC
  – Phonology, phonetics, and psycholinguistics
  – Teaching Assistant for *Language and Mind* course for 2 years

• Assistant professor at Boise State since Fall 2009
  – Linguistics is housed in the English department
    • Within College of Arts and Science
  – As of Fall 2009, only 7 linguistics courses
  – Several venues for proposing new courses

• New courses include *Language and Mind*, *Phonetics and Phonology*, and a revamped *Psycholinguistics* course.
As a TA for Language and Mind

- Firsthand experience working with undergraduate students on application of scientific methods in relation to speech.
  - Drove home the explicit emphasis on how linguists bring the methods of science to the study of language
    - In lab meetings, there were several experiments students participated in and conducted
    - Lectures and discussions reinforced scientific thought process
  - There were constant connections of science and linguistics to real-world issues
Options for new courses at BSU

• Within English department/linguistics program:
  – Special topics courses
  – Advanced topics courses

• University-wide options:
  – General Education offerings
  – Honors seminar
LING X97 - Special Topics

– Only requires departmental curriculum committee approval to be taught
– May be taught up to three times before having to submit official course proposal to university curriculum committee
– Allows for flexibility of level – 197, 297, 397, 497

LING 497 – Phonetics and Phonology

• Articulatory and acoustic phonetics (including vocal tract and ear anatomy)
• Phonological representations
• Now required course for all majors as part of new linguistics curriculum
LING 424 – Advanced Topics

– Only requires departmental curriculum committee approval to be taught
– Allows instructors to create course around research interests
– Builds on students’ previous knowledge in more depth

Possible topics:
• Laboratory phonology
• Experimental methods in psycholinguistics
• Experimental methods in phonetics
• Research methods in linguistics
HON 392 - Honors Seminar

– 3-unit upper-division seminar course
– Course approval through Honors advisory board
– Honors College encourages courses that “feature multiple intellectual and/or disciplinary perspectives [and are team-taught]”
– Encourages faculty to recruit from Honors College

Language and Mind (Fall 2011, Fall 2012)

• 3-unit course, 75 minutes twice a week
• Examining cognitive science through a linguistic lens
• Discussions of readings, lectures, experiments, in-class group work
General Education Offerings

• Courses qualifying for a **natural or physical science** must meet the following learning outcome:
  
  – *Apply knowledge and the methods characteristic of scientific inquiry to think critically about and solve theoretical and practical problems about physical structures and processes.*

• Courses qualifying for a **social science** must meet the following learning outcome:
  
  – *Apply knowledge and the methods of inquiry characteristic of the social sciences to explain and evaluate human behavior and institutions.*
Remaining Challenges

• Linguistics viewed as a liberal art/in the humanities
  – Some students are surprised to find the scientific nature of the class more challenging than expected.
  – Although we were able to purpose a GE course of linguistics as a social science, we have yet to get buy in from colleagues in the hard sciences to be able to offer a course like *Language and Mind* as natural or physical science course.
Thank You!

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