

LINGUISTICS, PHD

Linguistics is a major that gives students insight into one of the most intriguing aspects of human knowledge and behavior. Majoring in linguistics means that you will learn about many aspects of human language, including sounds (phonetics, phonology), words (morphology), sentences (syntax), and meaning (semantics). At Tulane, we look at how languages change over time (historical linguistics); how language varies from situation to situation, group to group, and place to place (sociolinguistics, dialectology); how people use language in context (pragmatics, discourse analysis); how to model aspects of language (computational linguistics); how people acquire or learn language (language acquisition); and how people process language (psycholinguistics, brain and language).

Our PhD program is unique because it is the only university-level interdisciplinary linguistics program in New Orleans and in the state at large, as well as one of only three in the Gulf South. We have unique resources, physical and human: (1) the Roger Thayer Stone Center for Latin American Studies, (2) the Cuban and Caribbean Studies Institute, (3) the Women's Center, (4) the Amistad Center, (5) the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South, (6) the Latin American Library, (7) the Louisiana Collection, (8) An enticing mix of less commonly taught languages (for example, Kaqchikel, Nahuatl, Yucatec Maya, Spoken Yoruba, Diaspora Yoruba, Swahili, Haitian Creole, Classical languages and writings of the Maya), (9) a growing computer science program with strong emphasis on artificial intelligence and human cognition, and (10) a committed faculty.

The Linguistics Ph.D. program at Tulane is highly competitive. All students admitted to the program receive a stipend and a tuition waiver for five years. If you are interested in applying to the program, please contact the faculty member(s) with whom you are interested in working. You may also contact the Director of the program at ling@tulane.edu.

Requirements

As a graduate student in linguistics, you are required to complete 48 hours of course work before advancement to candidacy, which will include at least one course drawn from each of the following categories:

1. Acoustic phonetics
2. Phonology
3. Morphology or syntax
4. Language variation and change (for instance, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, dialectology, bilingual education, or multilingualism)
5. Semantics, pragmatics, philosophy of language, or discourse
6. A non-Indo-European language other than your native language (Note that this requirement can be satisfied by one of the Less Commonly Taught Languages offered at the 1000 level, which will be covered by the tuition waiver as long as you are a full-time student, but a course below the 6000 level cannot count towards graduate credit. Non-Indo-European languages taught in the Anthropology Department are 6000 level and above and so would count toward the graduate program as well as fulfilling this requirement.)

Depending on your previous course work and training, you may be able to waive some of these courses. Course waivers are to be requested on an individual basis, and must be approved by the program graduate adviser.

This range of courses ensures that you will receive a rigorous and broad background in linguistics, which will prepare you for your own research projects and will make you highly qualified for the job market. You should normally enroll in 12 credit hours (4 courses) per semester until you have completed the required course work for the Ph.D., which will normally take 4-5 semesters, depending on your background. This ensures that you will fulfill Tulane's residency requirement of four semesters of full-time study at the university, as well as Tulane's minimum course-hour requirements. (See the university graduate requirements for more information on Tulane's residency and course-hour requirements.)

In all of your course work, a grade level of B- (B minus) is the formal minimum for a passing performance in the graduate program. Although a grade of B- is a passing grade, it is considered a "weak" pass. One or two B- grades can be cause for probation or dismissal. In addition to your course grades, however, the general assessment of your overall progress in the program will also include the opinions of the faculty. The faculty meets at the end of each semester to discuss graduate students' progress. Renewal of your fellowship from year to year is dependent upon continuing satisfactory progress in your studies.

Language of Scholarship Requirement

In addition to taking at least one course in a non-Indo-European language, you must show competence in a major language of published scholarship other than English. You should meet with your adviser or the program director to discuss your proposed language and your plan for fulfilling the requirement. This requirement must be filled before advancement to candidacy.

If your native language is a major language of published scholarship other than English, you can use English to satisfy this requirement.

For everyone else, competence can be demonstrated by (i) two semesters of language instruction at the junior (3000) level or above, or (ii) a translation exam.

Comprehensive Examinations

Students must take two Ph.D. comprehensive examinations, a general examination covering all major fields of linguistics and a special field examination tailored to their chosen field of dissertation research. The general comprehensive examination is to be taken in early September of the student's third year (fifth semester) in the program, and the special field examination is to be taken in early to mid-January of the third year (sixth semester). You may petition the program to substitute a published paper for the special field exam.

Dissertation Prospectus

Immediately after taking your special field examination, if not before, you should form your dissertation committee. It must consist of at least three tenured or tenure-track Tulane faculty members. Your committee may have additional members as well, but this is not required.

Your first task with the dissertation committee is to write a research paper, called the dissertation prospectus. The prospectus should consist of a substantial dissertation proposal and a comprehensive bibliography. It may be based on a grant proposal to an external funding agency, particularly in the case of proposed fieldwork. The work described in the prospectus should lead naturally into your dissertation. The prospectus should contain a statement of the topic area of your proposed dissertation project, a problem statement, a statement of the theoretical orientation and methodology, and a comprehensive bibliography. Work out the specific details of your prospectus with the members of your dissertation committee. Once it is complete, you will schedule an oral defense of the prospectus before the members of your committee. The prospectus defense should take place before the end of your third year (sixth semester) in the program.

Advancement to Candidacy

After you have passed your comprehensive examinations and your language requirement and your dissertation committee has approved your prospectus, you will apply for Candidacy for the Ph.D. Once you have advanced, you are considered 'ABD' (All But Dissertation). Application for some research grants requires this status.

Fieldwork

You may find it necessary to conduct fieldwork before writing your dissertation. You are encouraged to seek outside funding to support your fieldwork. If you succeed in securing outside funding to replace your Tulane stipend for one year, you may be eligible to bank that year of stipend for use in your sixth year. If your research does not require you to absent yourself in order to pursue fieldwork, you may continue directly to writing your dissertation.

Teaching or Research Training

The program normally requires a total of 6 semesters of training as a Research Assistant, Teaching Assistant, and/or Instructional Teaching Assistant during the first 5 years.

Writing, filing, and defending the dissertation

Following advancement to candidacy, you will normally be eligible for a fifth year of financial support to work full time toward the completion of the dissertation. Receiving your final year of fellowship is contingent upon your having met the following requirements:

- Achievement of ABD status
- Submission of an acceptable plan for research and writing during the final year of support
- Completion of the language requirements

Students generally find writing a dissertation to be a challenging and rewarding process. However, it is also an inherently stressful activity. For this reason, you should meet regularly with the members of your committee at every stage of your project, and keep in touch with them about data collection and writing. And finally, remember that all of the faculty members have also written a dissertation (and likely supervised a number of them too), and are happy to discuss any issues that come up for you.

Upon completion of an acceptable draft of your dissertation, you will then, in consultation with the chair of your dissertation committee, schedule a public defense of your work. All members of the Tulane community are invited to the defense, and anyone else is welcome to attend. You should prepare a short presentation of your work, summarizing the main research question(s), how you went about doing your project, and your key findings. Your dissertation committee will then ask you questions about your dissertation, as may other members of the audience, time permitting.

There are a host of important deadlines to keep track of, as well as very specific formatting minutia which you must strictly follow in order to file the dissertation. Consult the relevant sections of Deadlines for Graduating Students (<https://liberalarts.tulane.edu/academics/graduate-studies/graduating-students/>). As always, you are ultimately responsible for being aware of and complying with all formal requirements and university deadlines. After you have submitted a complete draft of your dissertation, defended it publicly, and made any revisions suggested by your committee, you are ready to file the dissertation. Tulane's general guidelines permit a maximum of seven years from your initial matriculation to file the Ph.D.

When the final version of the dissertation is accepted by the doctoral committee and filed with the university, and all other requirements are certified as fulfilled, you have earned a Ph.D. in Linguistics!

Contact

For more information, contact the School of Liberal Arts (<https://liberalarts.tulane.edu/linguistics/contact-us/>).