

Chapter 9: Undergraduate Discipline Spotlight

Each year the Assessment Almanac chooses to highlight the assessment methods of one Truman discipline. This year features the Linguistics program. Linguistics is a program and first was assessed in Spring 2004. It is important to highlight this program, because Truman is the only COPLAC (Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges) with a Linguistics major. Since it is a new program, a process of assessment had to be created by the Linguistic team. This report will discuss the current methods of assessment for the Linguistics program.

There is not currently a nationally normed test for Linguistics, as it is a rare undergraduate major. Even basic data could not be compared across COPLAC schools because none of them have Linguistic majors and only three have Linguistics minors. Even in private schools that do have a Linguistics program, means of assessment were unfortunately rares. Further, universities with more mature and established Linguistic majors usually also had graduate programs. This means that they used the graduate program's goals to set capstones for the undergraduate programs. Since Truman does not have a graduate program, our programs must tailor assessment that would measure readiness for any graduate program, not Truman's specifically.

Faculty in Linguistics devised an assessment program to suit their unique needs. Every student must take a capstone course, the Senior Seminar. In this course, they must begin with a portfolio including a self-assessment of the eight learning outcomes in the Linguistic major. They are as follows:

- i. Displays appropriate command of linguistic terminology
- ii. Displays knowledge of linguistic theory

- iii. Displays knowledge of previous scholarship in the area of study
- iv. Collects and presents data appropriately and ethically [which may include, e.g., real instances of spoken or written language (which the student may or may not have gathered him/herself), language judgements/attitudes/perceptions, native speaker intuitions about language...)
- v. Performs original and appropriate analysis of linguistic data
- vi. Demonstrates awareness of and sensitivity to linguistic diversity and variation, recognizing that there is no such thing as a homogeneous speech community, that everyone speaks an idiolect and participates in various dialect communities, that different registers of language are used in different situations and for different purposes, and that no variety of language is inherently ‘superior’ (more logical, more beautiful, etc.) or inferior.
- vii. Demonstrates ability to make appropriate connections between linguistic research and other academic disciplines and/or “real -life” endeavors.
- viii. Demonstrates command of academic discourse conventions

Each of the above categories are graded from one to five by the students for a self-assessment.

One to two is inadequate, three is proficient, and four to five is excellent. The undergraduate students provide projects and papers that support their proficiency in each outcome. Using this method in the beginning of the course will highlight any shortcomings that may be present in the Senior Seminar. Students can also earn disciplinary honors with this portfolio. At the English and Linguistics conference, students present a project and turn in a paper to be assessed. The project

and paper are evaluated (using the learning outcomes again) by two faculty members that are not the seminar instructor. To graduate, the students must reach proficiency in the presentation to graduate.

The department head or program coordinator uses the major portfolio to see how the student can improve for their scores for the presentation. The projects in the portfolios give the department head or program coordinator a firsthand account of what is going on in the Linguistic classes. Based on the assessments in the Capstone course, the department head or program coordinator can make adjustments in the curriculum to better assist the student to be prepared for the capstone course.

Finally, the Linguistics program uses Truman's assessment information for the betterment of their program. Interpreting university-wide data is often problematic because of the small sample sizes in any given year. Even major fluctuations can be attributed to differences across cohorts of students. However, if the past 5 year reviews are showing trends of the same kind of data, that is when the department head or program coordinator step in to adjust accordingly.