

# The Graduate Field of Linguistics

Director of Graduate Studies  
Michael Weiss

Graduate Field Assistant  
Angie Tinti

**Please direct email inquiries to: [lingfield@cornell.edu](mailto:lingfield@cornell.edu)**

**The online application: <http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu> (apply to Cornell)**

## The Graduate Program

The curriculum is designed to assure that Ph.D. students receive an adequate grounding in all of the fundamental areas of linguistics, while leaving them the freedom they need to become independent researchers. The first year is devoted to course-work, to give students a strong foundation, and to enable them to quickly begin contributing to the research life of the department. Beyond the core, students are relatively free to design their own program of study both within the discipline and across disciplines, within a framework of requirements set by the field and the graduate school. This program is organized in consultation with a Special Committee of the student's own choosing. Committee members represent the student's major and minor subjects. Minors may be chosen from disciplines other than linguistics, so that it is possible, for example, for a Ph.D. student to major in General Linguistics and minor in such areas as Computer Science, Latin American Studies, or Cognitive Studies. The Special Committee system makes the Ph.D. program maximally flexible and allows students to avail themselves of the entire university's resources. Progress towards the degree is attained by (1) completing the core course requirements, (2) passing the Admission to Candidacy Exam, (3) completing and defending dissertation.

### A. Core Courses

To assure that Ph.D. students receive an adequate grounding in all of the fundamental areas of linguistics, the field has defined a core requirement in the areas of Syntax, Phonology, Semantics, Historical Linguistics, and Field Methods. Candidates are expected to achieve a level of knowledge in these areas equivalent to that acquired by taking the following courses: Phonology I, Phonology II, Syntax I, Syntax II, Field Methods, Historical Linguistics, and Semantics I, as well as one other general linguistics course either in the area of linguistic structure (e.g., morphology, phonetics) or in the area of language use (e.g., sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, language contact, computational linguistics). The general expectation is that all students will take all core courses. If a student requests an exemption on the basis of comparable graduate-level coursework at another institution, this exemption can only be granted after consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies and the instructor of the relevant course. Ph.D. students are also expected to attend at least 6600- or 7700-level courses in the two areas which they choose for their research papers. In addition, Ph.D. students must participate in the Research Workshop (LING 6604) in conjunction with another workshop (no seminars) or Independent Study during the fall semester of their third year. The students enrolled in the research workshop are required to submit an abstract to the LSA the summer before taking the class. The Research Workshop provides students with an opportunity to develop an original research paper through a number of revisions, some of which are presented to an audience of fellow students. The final version is presented at a year-end conference.

### B. In-depth language study

The field has an in-depth language study requirement, which may be satisfied by

- (1) *two semesters* of formal language study of a single language [ex. Chinese 101/Chinese 102], or
- (2) Structure of Language X (ex. Ling 430, Structure of Korean), or
- (3) Language Typology (Ling 400).

## **C. Ancillary skill sets**

In the course of research a student may need to master one or more ancillary skill sets. These might be familiarity with other languages of scholarship, or training in statistics, logic, or programming. The student, in consultation with his/her committee, is expected to determine which skills need to be acquired and how and when this should be done.

## **A-Exam and B-Exams**

Students in the Ph.D. program are required to take an Admission to Candidacy Exam (A-Exam). All doctoral students must take the Examination for Admission to Candidacy before beginning their seventh semester of registration unless special permission is obtained from the Dean. The format of this exam varies from case to case, depending on the expectations of the Special Committee. The Field requires that the candidate submit to the committee in advance of the exam two research papers of high quality in two distinct areas and to have completed a study of the history of a subject of his or her choice (typically related to the proposed dissertation topic). This can be done by completing an independent study course with the chair or a committee member, or in some other way deemed appropriate. In addition, the Special Committee will normally ask the candidate to prepare written answers to two questions, and to submit a dissertation prospectus of ten to twenty pages. Students should consult with members of their Special Committees well in advance of the examination date about the specific expectations. Candidates who pass the A-Exam and who do not already have an M.A. in linguistics may be awarded a special M.A. at that time.

The B-Exam (thesis defense) is taken after completion of the Ph.D. dissertation. The B-Exam includes a presentation of the highlights of the dissertation followed by questions from the committee and others in attendance.

## **M.A. Program**

We do not offer a Master's program. The exception is through the Employee Degree Program (a benefit for Cornell employees).

## **Teaching and Research Assistantships**

Admitted graduate students are supported with a combination of fellowship and teaching assistantship support. Prospective students should make every effort to investigate other potential sources of aid (see financial assistance below). After the first year, most students are supported with a teaching assistantship of some kind. A linguistics teaching assistantship involves the student in one of various undergraduate courses in the basic areas, and entails leading sections, holding office hours, and grading assignments and exams. We also have teaching assistantships in language courses. All of these positions provide not only financial support, but also valuable teaching experience. Applicants who feel that they may qualify for a teaching assistantship in a commonly-taught language (Spanish, French, Italian, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, etc.) should indicate this on their application and describe their language background in detail in their application letter.

## **Financial Assistance**

Applicants and continuing students nominated by the Field of Linguistics are eligible for a variety of fellowships offered by the Graduate School. Since the number of awards is limited, however, prospective students should make every effort to investigate other potential sources of aid, such as the National Science Foundation fellowship program, the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowships of the U.S. Office of Education, and the Social Science Research Council Fellowships. Many graduate students in linguistics support themselves through Teaching Assistantships in linguistics and language courses. These positions provide not only financial support, but also valuable teaching experience. Applicants who feel that they may qualify for a Teaching Assistantship in a commonly-taught language

(Spanish, French, Italian, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, etc.) should indicate this on their application and describe their language background in detail in their application letter.

### **Einaudi Center grants**

<http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu> [Cornell's Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS), Fulbright-Hayes Awards, Fulbright Program, International Research Travel Grants] The Mario Einaudi Center and its associated Programs offer a wide range of support and assistance to graduate students in search of funding for their international research, study, and scholarship.

### **Jacob Javits fellowships**

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/jacobjavits/applicant.html> [Jacob K. Javits] This program provides fellowships to students to undertake study at the doctoral level.

### **Cornell Social Science Research Council fellowships**

<http://www.ssrc.org> [Social Science Research Council] Most support from the Council goes to pre-dissertation, dissertation, and postdoctoral fellowships, offered through annual, peer-reviewed competitions.

### **NSF grants**

<http://www.nsf.gov> [National Science Foundation] The National Science Foundation funds research and education in most fields of science and engineering.

### **Mellon fellowships**

Nearly all students in the Humanities and Humanistic Social Sciences who apply to Cornell's doctoral programs are eligible for Mellon Fellowships which provide a first-year stipend of \$17,500 and tuition. For information on the Mellon Fellowships see [www.woodrow.org/mellon/](http://www.woodrow.org/mellon/).

### **Graduate School Fellowship Database**

<http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/> (Financial Aid)

## **Admissions Procedures**

### **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS:**

- Application form (on-line)
- Statement of purpose
- Transcripts
- Recommendations (3)
- Optional writing sample
- GRE general test
- TOEFL: iBT
- Graduate School minimum scores for admission
  - Writing: 20
  - Listening: 15
  - Reading: 20
  - Speaking: 22

FALL ADMISSION ONLY.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: January 15.

*If material is missing from your application, you will be notified by e-mail (preferred) or a postcard will be sent to your current address.*

Please send all supplemental materials to: (we will not print downloaded papers)  
Linguistics Program  
203 Morrill Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York 14853-4701  
E-mail : lingfield@cornell.edu  
Phone : (607) 255-1105

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What are the strengths of your program?**

A careful exploration of our website will uncover a great deal, but in a nutshell: We have excellent faculty in all the core theoretical areas of Linguistics. We also have strengths at the “interfaces” – phonology/phonetics, syntax/phonology, and syntax/semantics. We have faculty doing fieldwork in a number of language areas, and excellent lab facilities in phonetics and computational linguistics.

### **2. What are the research interests and theoretical orientation of your faculty?**

Take a look at our faculty webpages! Our faculty cover a wide range of interests within the field of linguistics.

### **3. What does the admissions committee look for when reviewing applications?**

Simply stated, we are looking for talented students who are a good match for our program.

### **4. How long does it take to complete the Ph.D. in Linguistics?**

Most students take five years. Finishing in this amount of time is contingent on timely completion of the required coursework and the A-exam.

### **5. Can I study a Masters in Linguistics at Cornell University?**

No. Our program is designed to train students for the Ph.D.

### **6. What financial aid is available?**

Two types of financial support are available through Cornell: merit-based (fellowships, assistantships, and tuition awards) and need-based (loans). Unless you choose otherwise, students are considered for merit-based aid as part of the admissions process-no special application is required. Applicants are typically notified of merit-based awards no later than April 1. You must notify the Graduate School by April 15 if you plan to accept the offer.

### **7. What do my GRE scores have to be?**

We do not set a minimum or maximum GRE score. GRE's are only one consideration in evaluating applications for admission.

### **8. What should I include in my personal statement?**

There is no set answer to this question. Your personal statement should tell us why you wish to pursue graduate study in Linguistics and what you hope to accomplish.

### **9. Can I start the program in the Spring semester?**

No. Our program's coursework is designed to start in the fall semester.

### **10. What kinds of jobs do students who receive the Ph.D. in Linguistics have?**

Our students are quite successful. See our alumni page for information on the placement of our Ph.D graduates.