WCU
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY
Council of Trustees Meeting

RESOLUTION

COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

November 19, 2020

BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES OF
WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY
APPROVE THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN LINGUISTICS TO MOVE FORWARD
TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER
EDUCATION FOR FINAL APPROVAL, PENDING APPROVAL BY THE OFFICE
OF THE CHANCELLOR

APPROVED PENDING ACTION BY THE COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES

_____   November 19, 2020
Christopher Fiorentino, Ph.D., President   Date

APPROVED BY VOTE OF THE COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES

_____   November 19, 2020
Robert M. Tomlinson, Chairperson   Date
Council of Trustees

The BA in linguistics is proposed based on the success of the already-existing linguistics minor. The official enrollment numbers show a dramatic increase in students over the years, almost doubling from 37 in 2016 to 68 minors in 2019. The enrollment in the linguistics minor is higher than that of some of our existing major programs. It's current appeal and relevance to students combined with its positive employment prospects, make a strong case for linguistics at WCU to become a major program.

This program is unique in the State System as there are no other PASSHE universities currently offering a BA in Linguistics nor have any of them identified their intention to develop such a program in their Action Plans. Three PASSHE universities currently offer minors in linguistics: Bloomsburg, Millersville, and West Chester. However, no university in the system offers the students of the Commonwealth the opportunity to obtain a degree in linguistics. Students seeking to graduate with a degree in linguistics must resort to private or state-related universities (e.g., University of Pennsylvania, Haverford College, University of Pittsburgh) or to public universities in other states (Maryland, New Jersey, New York). Therefore, the proposed major satisfies an important need for the Commonwealth by allowing students interested in the field to have access to an affordable and high-quality program at a state-owned university.

Graduates with degrees in linguistics may pursue a variety of occupations in government, business, and academia. The Linguistic Society of America (LSA), the leading professional association of linguistics in the US, states that linguists work in language education, in the computer industry as computational linguists, in language research and documentation, and, with additional training, in translation and interpretation. Because of the flexibility that the degree allows, degree completions have increased in the years between 2010-2014. The completed Hanover report shows growth trends in degree completions in the Mideast area and Pennsylvania. Annual conferrals in the region increased by 7.7% per year between 2010 and 2014. More specifically, the Mideast region reports the third-highest compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for linguistics degrees, an encouraging sign for a new program in the region. Pennsylvania linguistics programs have also grown on pace with national averages. The conferrals in the state grew at an annualized rate of 7.1% over the past five years, faster than most states in the region.

The long-term employment projections show that interpreters and translators can expect to see impressive employment growth at 34%. The same is expected for occupations with specialization in computer science, including computational linguistics. The sources used in the market report by Hanover indicate that demand in the region is high for individuals trained to teach English Language Learner students (many of them captured in the adult basic and secondary education category). This fact suggests that graduates of a linguistics program seeking positions as secondary school teachers are likely to face a better job market than indicated by general projections for that sector.

The proposed linguistics program at WCU prepares students for this employment market through a combination of descriptive and applied linguistics courses. The 12-credit core introduces students to the discipline of linguistics and provides the groundwork for successful progress through the major. Core courses include Introduction to Linguistics (LIN 230), Structure of Modern English (ENG 331), Phonology of English (ENG 330), and Semantics and Pragmatics (to be developed). Students take 12 credits in intermediate-level electives that cover the following areas: historical linguistics, dialect variation, sociolinguistics, stylistics, linguistic anthropology, bilingualism, and discourse analysis. Courses in discourse analysis, computational linguistics, cognition and language, and language change are in development. The capstone experience includes nine credits of advanced language and linguistics seminars in specialized topics such as second language acquisition, gesture and the body, interactional linguistics, and figurative language.

In addition to enrollments from existing linguistics minors declaring the major, the BA in linguistics appeals to students in many other disciplines. Results of a 2018 student survey to the 65-70 linguistics minors at the time, indicated that 86.8% of respondents were interested in declaring a major in linguistics if it were offered, with

significant interest in adding it as a second major. We anticipate that we will elicit student interest in the major through linguistics courses that are part of the general education program, e.g., Teaching English Language Learners; Speaking Spanish in the US; Language Communities in the US and Canada; Language, Gender, and Sexuality; Language and the Human Experience; The World's Languages; and Language, Power and Ideology. Exposure in general education courses can spark students' interest and imagination in an area of study that they may not have considered or known about before. Our current minors are majoring in English, communication sciences and disorders, languages and cultures, education, anthropology and sociology, and computer science. In addition, fields like psychology, communication studies, and women's and gender studies share complementary features with linguistics as the scientific study of language. We imagine that students may want to double major in linguistics, or they may find a good fit in linguistics to support interests in the study of language and society, language and cognition, language and gender, etc.