

What can I do with a major in...

Linguistics

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The field of linguistics is at a unique crossroads of the major divisions of study: the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical sciences. Linguistics provides the opportunity to test proposed theoretical assumptions through data. That involves the creation of working hypotheses that need to be verified through the patterns of data observed. Since language is all around us, students have easy access to an abundant supply of data that they can collect for analysis and research. Such data can include one's own intuitions about grammar, measurements of individual speech sounds, observations of child language acquisition, language in narratives and in conversation, and more.

Training in linguistics is helpful for those specializing in any field in which attention is paid explicitly to language, such as communications, communication disorders, speech and reading therapy, pre-school and elementary education, foreign language teaching, teaching English, computer science, law, philosophy, and psychology (Steele 1995). Notions from linguistics have been influential in a number of fields. For example, linguistics has exerted a profound influence on anthropology and sociology (e.g. Lévi-Strauss), as well as literary theory (e.g. Barthes, Kristeva, Lacan).

More recently, linguistics is playing a large role in cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and computation. Practical applications have included pioneering methods of foreign language teaching (especially during World War II), assisting in breaking secret codes, and leading efforts in machine translation. In addition, linguistics is making valuable contributions to computer speech synthesis and recognition. In addition, linguistics has contributed to areas involving written and oral communication, such as developing ways for bureaucracies like the Social Security Administration and insurance companies to write clearly, for doctors to communicate more effectively with their patients, etc.

POTENTIAL JOB INFORMATION

A very valuable website for students interested in careers in speech-language-hearing pathology, communication sciences/disorders, audiology, and so on is the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) – www.asha.org. This site is worth exploring thoroughly. The website also has a special section for students.

Business, Government, Industry, and More

About 25% of PhDs end up in non-academic careers (compared to 8% English PhDs), in part due to a tight academic job market, and in part due to more lucrative possibilities outside higher education. Knowledge of linguistics can be helpful in many fields. Here is a sampling:

- *Computational Linguistics*: Machine translation, natural language processing, text-to-speech synthesis and speech recognition, information retrieval, knowledge engineering, and artificial intelligence.
- *Advertising*: Inventing and testing new product names and slogans.
- *Counseling*: Linguistic notions of how conversation works are crucial in all forms of counseling and social work.
- *Criminal investigation and forensics*: Linguists have contributed to capturing the Unabomber, identifying or ruling out suspects, and have testified in court as expert witnesses. The FBI occasionally advertises for linguists.
- *Educational Testing Services (ETS)* and other testing agencies need linguists to design tests.
- *Entertainment*: Actors who are good at accents can be helped by a knowledge of linguistics; another possible career is as a dialect coach, who helps actors sound authentic for their roles.
- Accent reduction for non-native speakers or speakers of stigmatized dialects who wish to advance.

- *Military Intelligence*: Foreign language teaching, translation, and cryptography. The CIA and the National Security Administration occasionally recruit linguists.
- *Missionary*: Bible translators rely heavily on linguistic fieldwork for their missionary work.

WHERE DO UMW LINGUISTICS MAJORS GO?

EMPLOYERS/INTERNSHIP SITES

- The Learning Key and The Early Autism Project (Greenville, SC), Education Director and Line Therapist (Linguistics)
- ASET International, Commercial Translation Project Manager (Linguistics and Spanish Language)
- Battlefield Elementary/Spotsylvania Schools
- Smith Station Elementary, Spotsylvania Schools
- Fredericksburg Academy Resource Center
- Rappahannock Area Regional Adult Education
- Rural Infant Services Program

GRADUATE SCHOOLS

- James Madison University, Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology
- University of Virginia, Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

1. American Association for Applied Linguistics: www.aaal.org
2. Linguistic Assn. of Canada and the United States: www.lacus.org
3. Linguistic Society of America: www.lsadc.org

**The Office of Career Services also maintains a resource library with a variety of books and other printed material where students can access additional information about their major or field of interest. Visit us in Lee Hall, Room 308 to learn more.*