2006 Assessment Plan
PhD Program in Second Language Acquisition
University of Wisconsin-Madison
College of Letters and Science

Overview

The Doctoral Program in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) prepares students to research and teach in the rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of SLA. SLA investigates language learning, language teaching, and the relationships among language, culture and thought in diverse social contexts. Students come to the program with an M.A. in a foreign language, English, applied linguistics, linguistics, or education. Graduates of the program serve as research scholars, language program directors, curricular consultants, and policy specialists.

The SLA Doctoral Program is an interdisciplinary one, with faculty representation from many Departments within the College of Letters and Science and the School of Education. (See Appendix A.)

The SLA Program accepted its first students in the fall 2002 semester. We are pleased to be celebrating the graduation of our first students this spring.

Learning objectives and assessment protocols

The learning objectives of the SLA Doctoral Program, and the current means of assessing those objectives, are described in the table below.

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<th>Learning Objectives</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<td>1. Students demonstrate an understanding of the principal theories of second language acquisition and demonstrate how these theories relate to second language pedagogy, the relationships between language and culture, and language and thought in diverse social contexts.</td>
<td>Objectives 1-3 are assessed through <strong>seated preliminary examinations</strong>. Students answer questions, written and read by a committee of three SLA faculty, on each of the following topics:</td>
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<td>2. Students demonstrate a basic understanding of both quantitative and</td>
<td>• General SLA Theory</td>
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<td>• Topic related to the student’s area of specialization (one of the four areas listed in objective #3)</td>
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<td>• Qualitative research methods</td>
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<td><strong>Qualitative research methods in second language acquisition.</strong> They are able to distinguish the purposes of the research paradigms and situations for their use. They are able to describe in detail a variety of types of studies that serve as positive examples of quantitative and qualitative research and explain their strengths and weaknesses. Students are able to critique an example of quantitative and an example of qualitative research and point out their strengths and shortcomings relative to the research question/s.</td>
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<td>Students demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the principal theories and research findings in one of the following areas:</td>
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<td>• Second language analysis</td>
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<td>• Second language use</td>
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<td>• Second language processes and learning</td>
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<td>• Second language pedagogical theory and instruction</td>
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<td>Students complete a <strong>special topics exam</strong>, consisting of a proposal and a paper. Students select a three-member committee, prepare a proposal that is reviewed and approved by the committee, and then write a cohesive critical review of the literature pertaining to the special topic. The topic should relate to the eventual dissertation. The paper is evaluated by the same committee members who approve the proposal.</td>
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<td>Students are highly proficient in at least one language other than English. Students must demonstrate Superior Level oral proficiency as described in the Guidelines published by the ACTFL-certified tester in the language. A modified OPI is administered in those</td>
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American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

cases in which a certified OPI tester is not available.

6. Students are able to conduct library research in second language acquisition in two languages in addition to their native language.

Students demonstrate reading knowledge of the language by passing a translation exam from the target language into English. The exam is typically administered by the Department in which the language is taught.

7. Under supervision by members of the SLA faculty, students conduct an original research project in SLA.

The student writes a dissertation which (1) describes the goals of their research and its importance for the field of SLA, (2) reviews previous research in the area, (3) describes and justifies their research methodology, (4) reports their results, and (5) relates the results to their research goals and to the broader field of SLA.

Students provide regular feedback to the faculty on the program itself through representation on SLA governing committees. In addition, students complete a formal questionnaire and participate in an exit interview (if desired) after finishing the doctoral degree. (See Appendix B.)

Program assessment

In May 2006 we will celebrate our first two graduates and the third academic year in which we have administered preliminary examinations. In recognition of the relative novelty of our program and, more generally, the advantages of self-assessment, we are engaged in continuous dialogue with colleagues and students. We aim to assess whether/how (1) our program and assessment measures meet the program’s described objective; (2) the program and assessment measures form a cohesive whole; and (3) the program and its objectives prepare our graduates for their careers. Faculty have frequent contact with each other and in committee meetings discuss the progress of individual students as well as the parameters of assessment in our program. We also regularly solicit feedback from our students, who together discuss their needs and our program’s structure and then communicate concerns and suggestions to the faculty, via the student-elected student representative. Our graduates perhaps are in the best position to reflect on their experiences in and after the completion of our program. We have designed an exit questionnaire (see Appendix B), which we are about to administer to our first graduates. We hope to follow-up with graduates at five-year intervals, after graduation as well.
Appendix A. SLA faculty and students

In 2005-06, 18 students in the SLA program were taking courses, preparing for preliminary exams, or writing dissertations.

Core SLA faculty (those who not only teach courses related to SLA, but also advise and direct dissertations, participate in the administration of the SLA program) are:

**African Languages and Literatures**
Antonia Schleicher

**Curriculum and Instruction**
Charles James
François Tochon

**East Asian Languages & Literature**
Naomi Geyer
Junko Mori

**English**
Richard Young
Jane Zuengler

**French and Italian**
Thomas D. Cravens
Sally Sieloff Magnan (SLA Program Co-Director)
François Tochon

**German**
Monika Chavez (SLA Program Co-Director)
Charles James

**Languages and Cultures of Asia**
Robert J. Bickner

**Linguistics**
Thomas C. Purnell

**Spanish and Portuguese**
Diana Frantzen
Catherine Stafford
Appendix B: Exit interview questionnaire

Dear Graduate,

First, our warmest congratulations on your achievement. It has been a true pleasure to have you as a member of our SLA community. We wish you all the very best for your future and hope we can stay in touch. As you know, we want to maintain the high academic standards of our program so as to prepare our graduates for success in their professions. We also try to make the program an enjoyable and a personally- as well as intellectually- enriching experience. In order to work toward these goals even more effectively in the future, we hope that you would comment on your experiences in our program. We have outlined a number of areas you might wish to address. Please feel free to omit any of them or add others. We would appreciate an honest assessment and any suggestions you may be able to offer.

Please comment on the following areas:

(1) the admission process and the transition from your previous degree program into ours;
(2) the cohesion of the academic program and advising; please also consider the roles of the strand/s and the minor as well as the language requirements;
(3) the rigor and appropriateness of the academic program;
(4) the connection between course work and preliminary exams;
(5) the connection between course work and preliminary exams on the one hand and writing your dissertation on the other;
(6) your dissertation writing experience;
(7) support from faculty throughout your course work and the dissertation;
(8) connections with other students in the program, academically (such as study groups) as well as socially;
(9) professional training and acculturation into the SLA community at large, beyond the university (conferences, presentations, etc.);
(10) the transition from graduation to professional life (if you can comment on it at present).

Please address any other issues you would like to bring to our attention here. Also, please let us know if you would like to participate in a face-to-face interview.

Thank you!

Sincerely,
The faculty of the Ph.D. Program in Second Language Acquisition.