

Department of Linguistics and Philosophy

The Department of Linguistics and Philosophy is divided into two sections, consisting of 29 faculty members (three of whom are jointly appointed), 66 graduate students, approximately two dozen visiting scientists and scholars, an administrative officer, an academic administrator, a systems administrator, and five support staff members. Each section operates independently, yet between them there is a significant overlap of intellectual interests in education and research spanning the faculty, graduate students, and visitors.

Research: Linguistics

MIT's linguists continue to develop a cognitive account of the representational and computational properties of the languages of the world. The department's overarching research goal is to understand the human capacity for language. Important questions include: Which of its properties are uniform across the human species? Which of its properties play out differently in the languages of the world, and how? What does the interplay of uniformity and diversity in language structure teach us about language acquisition and learning? How do these properties of language interact with other cognitive systems? Specific, testable proposals are explored, developed, and challenged by students, faculty, and visitors who are pursuing research on syntax, semantics, pragmatics, morphology, phonology, phonetics, and the interfaces among these systems.

The department also provides students and faculty with support for experimental research and computational modeling in language acquisition and phonetic, syntactic, and semantic processing. Research on semantic processing is a particularly notable new initiative of the section. Facilities within the department include the [Experimental Syntax and Semantics Lab](#) and the Phonetics Lab. Experimental research is also conducted in collaboration with colleagues from the Department of Brain and Cognitive Science, and the speech group in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science.

Fieldwork on less-studied and endangered languages is an increasingly important research emphasis for many students and visitors. A feature of this research is a simultaneous emphasis on documentation and specific scientific questions of linguistic interest. Recent dissertations reflecting these twin goals have reported findings on languages as diverse as Tlingit (Na-Dené, Alaska), Chol (Mayan, Chiapas), Quechua (Colombia) and Zulu (Bantu, South Africa). In addition, an [experimental master's of science degree program](#), begun in fall 2004, has already graduated several students from communities attempting to revive indigenous languages.

Research: Philosophy

Although research in [philosophy](#) is not as neatly programmatic as in linguistics, the department is characterized by a rigorous analytic approach. Among the topics currently pursued are consciousness and the mind/body problem; language and communication; self-knowledge and self-understanding; the analysis of free agency and free choice; the nature of race and gender; mathematical logic, including formal theories of truth; “possible worlds” semantics for modal and conditional logic; and the role of mathematics in science.

Publications

Faculty on both sides of the department participated in numerous colloquia and acted as keynote speakers at conferences and workshops throughout the United States and the world. A number of faculty served as editors and/or members of editorial boards for numerous journals, both in the US and abroad. They also published a large number of journal articles, book chapters, and reviews. Publications in academic year 2012 included professor Sally Haslanger’s book *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford University Press).

Honors and Awards

Professor Haslanger was invited to give the Ryle Lectures at Trent University and the Carus Lectures for the American Philosophical Association, and was elected vice president (president-elect) of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division. She also received the 2011 YWCA Cambridge Tribute to Outstanding Women Award, which recognizes women who stand for the organization’s mission to eliminate racism and empower women.

Professor Rae Langton was invited to give the John Locke Lectures at Oxford University, as well as to be a visiting fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. She was also awarded a visiting fellowship from the Princeton University Council of the Humanities and a senior research fellowship at Peterhouse College, Cambridge University.

Professor Stephen Yablo was selected to give the Kant Lectures at Stanford University.

Associate professor Bradford Skow was awarded a Charles A. Ryskamp Research Fellowship, from the American Council for Learned Societies.

Leaves of Absence

Professors Kai von Fintel and Adam Albright were on sabbatical leave during the fall, and professors Irene Heim, Richard Holton, and Rae Langton were on sabbatical leave in the spring. Professor Daniel Fox was on a leave without pay for the fall and spring semesters.

Personnel

Martin Hackl was promoted to associate professor with tenure.

Currently, there are two minority and seven female faculty members in the department; efforts to recruit qualified women and minority candidates will continue.

Alex Byrne
Acting Department Head
Professor of Philosophy