

Department of Linguistics and Philosophy

The Department of Linguistics and Philosophy divides into two sections consisting of 27 faculty members (three of them jointly appointed), 79 graduate students, two dozen or so visiting scientists and scholars, an administrative officer, a student administrator, a network administrator, and five support staff members. Although each section operates independently, there is a significant overlap of intellectual interests in education and research spanning the faculty, graduate students, and visitors. In the most recent reputational surveys of graduate programs in the United States, Linguistics and Philosophy were ranked first and seventh, respectively.

Research: Linguistics

The linguists continue to develop a cognitive account of natural language in terms of principles of computation and representation. Major research initiatives, including the minimalist program for linguistic theory, the theory of logical form, formal pragmatics, optimality theory, and distributed morphology, provide a rich variety of approaches for such accounts. Proposals are explored, developed, and challenged by students, faculty, and visitors to the department pursuing research on syntax, semantics, pragmatics, morphology, phonology, phonetics, and the interfaces among these systems of natural language.

The department has also continued to provide students and faculty with support for experimental research and computational modeling in language acquisition and language processing. This research is partly in collaboration with colleagues from the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences (BCS) and the Speech Communication Group in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) and takes place in our phonetics and magnetoencephalography labs and in various BCS and EECS labs.

Fieldwork on less studied and endangered languages is an important research emphasis for many students and visitors. An experimental SM program, begun in the fall of 2004, has already graduated several students from communities attempting to revive indigenous languages.

Research: Philosophy

Research in philosophy is not as neatly programmatic as in linguistics. Among the topics currently pursued by philosophers at MIT are consciousness and the mind-body problem; language and communication; self-knowledge and self-understanding; mathematical logic, including formal theories of truth; “possible worlds” semantics for modal and conditional logic; the nature of race and gender; the role of mathematics in science; and the analysis of free agency and free choice.

Publications

As in the past, faculty on both sides of the department participated in a large number of colloquia and acted as keynote speakers at conferences and workshops in various parts of the United States and the world. In addition, a number of our faculty served as editors and/or members of editorial boards for numerous journals both in the United States and abroad. Faculty members also published a large number of journal articles, book chapters, and reviews. Books published in 2006–2007 included Professor Judith Thomson and Professor Alexander Byrne's *Content and Modality: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Stalnaker* (Oxford University Press) and associate professor Agustin Rayo's *Absolute Generality* (edited with Gabriel Uzquiano; Oxford University Press).

Honors and Awards

Professor Donca Steriade was awarded the Class of 1941 professorship. Professor Rayo was awarded the Ford career development professorship.

Leaves of Absence

Professor Byrne was on sabbatical leave for the fall term. Ferrari P. Ward professor of modern languages and linguistics David Pesetsky was on sabbatical leave for the spring term. Kenan Sahin distinguished professor of linguistics Alec Marantz and Leon and Anne Goldberg professor of the humanities Joshua Cohen were on leaves without pay for the academic year. Associate professor Norvin Richards was on sabbatical leave for the fall term and on leave without pay for the spring term. Professor Rayo was on a junior faculty research leave for the spring term. Assistant professor Adam Albright was on a junior faculty research leave for the fall term. Assistant professor Caspar Hare was on half-time parental leave for the fall term.

Personnel

Edward Flemming was hired as an associate professor of linguistics without tenure. Bradford Skow was hired as an assistant professor of philosophy without tenure. Both appointments will be effective July 1, 2007.

Joshua Cohen resigned as professor of philosophy effective June 30, 2007; he took a joint position in philosophy, law, and political science at Stanford University. Alec Marantz resigned his position as professor of linguistics effective June 30, 2007; he took a position in linguistics and psychology at New York University.

The department currently has two minority and six women faculty members. Our efforts to recruit qualified women and minority candidates will continue.

Stephen Yablo
Department Head
Professor of Philosophy

More information about the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/philos/www/> or <http://web.mit.edu/linguistics/www/>.