

Department of Linguistics and Philosophy

The Department of [Linguistics](#) and [Philosophy](#) is divided into two sections consisting of 26 faculty members, 74 graduate students, approximately two dozen visiting scientists and scholars, an administrative officer, an academic administrator, a systems administrator, a laboratory manager, and four support staff members. Although each section operates independently, there is significant overlap of intellectual interests in education and research spanning members of the faculty, graduate students, and visitors.

Research: Linguistics

Research by MIT's linguists continues to develop and test accounts 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 language's 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. Facilities within the department include the [Language Acquisition Lab](#), and the [Experimental Syntax and Semantics Lab](#). Experimental and computational research is also conducted in collaboration with colleagues from the Departments of Brain and Cognitive Sciences (BCS) and Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, especially with members of the Speech Group and other colleagues whose research focuses on language acquisition, variation, and change.

Fieldwork on less-studied and endangered languages is an important research focus 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 Dinka (Nilotic, Sudan), Tlingit (Na-Dené, Alaska), Chol and Tzeltal (Mayan, Chiapas), Quechua (Bolivia) and Zulu (Bantu, South Africa). In addition, a master's of science degree program, begun in fall 2004, has graduated several students from communities attempting to revive indigenous languages.

Research: Philosophy

Philosophy at MIT studies a diverse range of central topics and is characterized by a rigorous analytic approach. Among the topics currently pursued are consciousness and the mind-body problem; language and communication; self-knowledge; ethics and practical rationality; the nature of race and gender; mathematical logic, including formal theories of truth; "possible worlds" semantics for modal and conditional logic; perceptual knowledge; the nature of time; and the role of mathematics in science.

Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute Diversity Workshop

In 2015, in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts-Boston Philosophy Department, a group of philosophy graduate students organized a summer institute for members of underrepresented groups: [Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute \(PIKSI-Boston\)](#). PIKSI brings 20 students, five diverse faculty from the region, and four teaching assistants to campus for a week. Participants attend classes, listen to panel discussions on graduate school and professional life, and participate in recreational activities. Students are paired with mentors who provide guidance and support with writing and, if desired, graduate school applications. Some of the summer sessions have been recorded so that informational panel discussions can be made available to a wider public.

In the initial effort, Professor Sally Haslanger worked with the American Philosophical Association (APA) and the board of an existing PIKSI at Penn State University to submit a proposal to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for funds to support efforts to promote diversity in philosophy. Philosophy is arguably the least racially diverse of all disciplines at the Institute, including science and engineering. The Mellon Foundation awarded the APA \$600,000 for a wide range of efforts, among them PIKSI-Boston. Deborah Fitzgerald, dean of the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, was a key supporter of PIKSI-Boston and the Mellon grant, offering an additional \$15,000 over three years. The Department of Linguistics and Philosophy committed \$5,000 for three years, as well as staff support. In 2017, the APA and the Mellon Foundation renewed their funding for three years, as did Dean Nobles and the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy. This will provide the bulk of the funding for the next three years. The PIKSI-Boston board is working on a model to enable PIKSI-Boston to be self-sustaining beyond these three years.

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 Linguistics and Philosophy faculty served as editors and/or members of editorial boards for numerous journals both in the US and abroad. They also published journal articles, book chapters, and reviews. Publications during academic year 2017 included books by Professor Michael Kenstowicz, *Japanese/Korean Linguistics, Volume 23* (edited with Theodore Levin and Ryo Masuda), Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford, CA; Professor Shigeru Miyagawa, *Agreement Beyond Phi*, Linguistics Inquiry Monograph, MIT Press; Professor Kieran Setiya, *Practical Knowledge: Selected Essays*, Oxford University Press; and Associate Professor Bradford Skow, *Reasons Why*, Oxford University Press.

Honors and Awards

Professor Donca Steriade received the James A. and Ruth Levitan Teaching Award at MIT. Professor Kai von Fintel was inducted as a fellow of the Linguistics Society of America. Professor Sally Haslanger was named the Miegunyah Visiting Professor at the University of Melbourne. Professor Vann McGee was named a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Professor Stephen Yablo was named the Gave Whitehead Lecturer and the Dyson Lecturer in Australia, and he presented at the Australasian Association of Philosophy Conference. A one-day workshop was held on Professor Stephen Yablo's book *Aboutness* at the University of Melbourne.

Leaves of Absence

In FY2017, Professor Martin Hackl was on sabbatical leave for the academic year. Professors Alex Byrne and Sabine Iatridou were on sabbatical leave during the fall semester. Associate Professor Bradford Skow was on parental leave in the fall. Assistant Professor John Spencer was on an Old Dominion Leave for the spring semester.

Personnel

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

The philosophy section ran a Junior Faculty search in FY2016 that resulted in the hiring of Assistant Professor Edwin Green, whose appointment commenced on July 1, 2017. The section also hired an associate professor without tenure, Miriam Schoenfield, whose appointment also began on July 1, 2017.

David Pesetsky

Head, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy

Professor of Linguistics