

## Department of Linguistics and Philosophy

The Department of Linguistics and Philosophy is divided into two sections consisting of 28 faculty members, 74 graduate students, two dozen or so visiting scientists and scholars, an administrative officer, an academic administrator, a systems administrator, a lab manager, and four 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

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 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 [Language Acquisition Lab](#), the [Experimental Syntax and Semantics Lab](#), and the Phonetics Lab. Experimental and computational research is also conducted in collaboration with colleagues from Brain and Cognitive Science (BCS) and Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS), especially the Speech Group and other colleagues focusing on language acquisition, variation, and change.

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 Dinka (Nilotic, Sudan), Tlingit (Na-Dené, Alaska), Chol and Tseltal (Mayan, Chiapas), Quechua (Bolivia) and Zulu (Bantu, South Africa). In addition, the [MIT Indigenous Languages Initiative](#), a master's of science degree program launched in fall 2004, has graduated several students from communities attempting to revive indigenous languages.

## Diversity Workshop

In 2015, in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts-Boston Philosophy Department, a group of philosophy graduate students organized [Philosophy in an Inclusive Key Summer Institute \(PIKSI-Boston\)](#), a summer institute for members of underrepresented groups. PIKSI brings to campus for one week 20 students, five diverse faculty members from the region, and four teaching assistants. They attend classes and panels on graduate school and professional life and participate in fun activities. Students are paired with mentors who provide guidance and help them with their writing and, eventually, graduate school applications. Some of the 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 Pennsylvania State University to submit a proposal to the Mellon Foundation for funds to support efforts to promote diversity in philosophy. Philosophy is arguably the least racially diverse of all disciplines in the academy, including science and engineering. Mellon awarded the APA \$600K for a wide range of efforts, among them PIKSI-Boston. Former Dean Deborah Fitzgerald was a key support for PIKSI-Boston and the Mellon grant, offering \$15K for three years; the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy committed \$5,000 for three years, plus staff support. In 2017, the APA and Mellon Foundation renewed the funding for three years, as did Dean Melissa Nobles and the department. Summer 2018 was another success and two years of funding remain.

During AY19, the PIKSI-Boston board will work to create a consortium of schools in the Boston area to sustain PIKSI-Boston for the foreseeable future with three-year commitments to funding. Each year, they invite philosophers and administrators from around Boston to a final party to encourage participation in the PIKSI-Boston consortium.

## Publications

Faculty on both sides of the department participated in numerous colloquia and acted as keynote speakers at conferences and workshops throughout the US 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 the last academic year included books by Professor Alex Byrne (*Transparency and Self-Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, and the second edition of *The Norton Introduction to Philosophy*), and Professor Kieran Setiya (*Midlife: A Philosophical Guide*, Princeton University Press, a trade book that begins with the cultural history and social science of midlife, then applies the tools of philosophy to the midlife crisis).

## Honors and Awards

Professor Donca Steriade was elected an honorary professor in the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, Romania. Professor Sally Haslanger was selected by the University of California at Berkeley faculty for the “New Corp” Prize, University of California at Berkeley; she was also the GAOS Professor, National Autonomous University of Mexico; and the UNESCO Visiting Professor, Pontificia Universidad

Católica del Perú. Professor [Michel DeGraff](#) was the winner of the Diaspora Challenge Initiative, organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Haitian Professionals in collaboration with USAid and Pan American Development Funds. Professor Caspar Hare was named a MacVicar Faculty Fellow. Associate Professor Miriam Schoenfield won the Young Epistemology Prize (Rutgers University) and also the Sanders Prize in Epistemology.

### **Leaves of Absence**

Professor Donca Steriade was on sabbatical leave for AY2018. Professors Vann McGee and Adam Albright were on a sabbatical leave for the spring semester. Assistant Professor Justin Khoo was on an Old Dominion Leave for the spring semester.

### **Personnel**

Professor Irene Heim and Professor Shigeru Miyagawa retired from the department as of July 1, 2018.

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

The philosophy section ran a Junior Faculty search which resulted in the hiring of Assistant Professor Edwin Green starting July 1, 2017. The section also hired an associate professor without tenure, Miriam Schoenfield, who started on July 1, 2017. The Linguistics Section ran a search for a junior faculty member, hiring Athulya Aravind as an assistant professor beginning July 1, 2019.

**David Pesetsky**

**Head**

**Ferrari P. Ward Professor of Modern Languages and Linguistics**