

Language Science IGERT Advisory Board

2010 Report and Recommendations

[This is based upon a spoken report presented by the advisory board at the end of the meeting on 5/13/10. The text is only lightly edited from remarks presented to the group by Mabel Rice.]

There are many things to say about how impressive the day has been, and about all of the information that we have received. The team should be congratulated on having an IGERT award, as these are not easily won. This speaks to the substantial planning and foresight that went into preparing the project. It especially recognizes the leadership work of the Linguistics Department. A great deal of energy and talent from multiple directions was involved in bringing this to fruition. We should note that we represent a unique cluster of interests, spanning different areas of language science. Our hearts and minds and weekends are devoted to language science. So we are delighted to see that NSF is supporting this kind of work, among the many national priorities that are being supported via IGERT awards.

The program brings together an impressive array of faculty and student talent. It is also impressive for the mature level of development that we can see in a cross-disciplinary program that has been in existence for only two years. Much of the discussion that we have had revolves around the fact that it is not easy to do this, certainly not as easy as talking about it. It is difficult to bring this to the level of collaboration that has already been achieved.

We have a number of suggestions about things to consider as you move forward, in order to bring the enterprise to its full potential. Our recommendations cover structural organization, faculty participation, and student participation.

Structural Organization

1. Reconsider the hub-and-spokes arrangement [*centered on Linguistics*] that has served well but that has also raised concerns. Instead put *Language Science* on the hub, and put all of the participating units on the spokes. Now that Linguistics has succeeded in selling a particular vision across the university, it should try to step aside as a department, and put the program more in the middle.
2. Revisit the course load requirements. Consider how to equalize feasibility across departmental requirements. Put the program within range of all participants.
3. Build awareness of what is a successful product, what a student will achieve by participating in the program. Students should recognize the benefits of participation. Similar awareness should also be built at the faculty and institutional level. Lay out more explicitly what are the short-term and the long-term objectives.

Student Participation

4. Formalize some of the emerging leadership, with designated roles and titles, and build this into the maturation of students through the program. Expose beginning students to cross-disciplinary student leadership, and create a greater role for more advanced students, including responsibility for Winter Storm, lunch talks, etc. Recognize that there will be on-campus graduates from the 2-years of funding who can contribute as teachers or mentors to beginning students, and who can show beginning students that it is possible to find coherence across fields.
5. Encourage a more programmatic approach to student development, with students progressing from novice, to seasoned, to mentor roles.

Faculty Participation

6. Pursue ways to enhance and document faculty participation across departments. Participation may be uneven, but there is also a lot going on that is silent and unacknowledged. A number of faculty are participating in terms of teaching, committees, etc., and there should be broader awareness of this.
7. Increase the visibility of co-sponsored research projects. This is not yet as fully developed as it could be. When projects are co-sponsored across departments, not only the IGERT program but the participating departments should also come to know about this.

We have one more suggestion about the organization of our visit. We enjoyed talking with students about their work, but it was unfortunate that we did not get to learn about more of the projects. Perhaps next year there could be a 2-minute preview format that allows everybody to learn something about all of the student posters.

These are our suggestions in terms of enhancing what you are already doing. There is amazing potential with what you already have in place, in terms of commitments from talented faculty and students. We are delighted to have been able to learn about it while we have been here with you today.

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