

## *The Integrative Exercise in the Linguistics Program* *Carleton College*

The Integrative Exercise (“comps”) is meant to provide students with the opportunity to do some extended research into a topic central in linguistic theory, and to articulate the results of that research in both written and oral form at a level at least approaching professional competence. Here is a small sample of some of the papers that have been submitted to the program for this exercise:

The Universality of Motherese  
An Exploration in Diachronic Morphology  
Inflection and Derivation in Dinka Morphophonology  
Acquisition of Accent in Japanese for Native English Speakers

Here is the basic process:

Students should begin thinking about their paper topic in the fall of their senior year. Of course it is possible to begin focusing on it earlier, but this is not necessary. By the end of the fall term, the following items should be in place:

- A fairly specific topic should be chosen, and a preliminary plan made for doing the research, for example, bibliography, experimental design, etc.
- The primary reader should be agreed upon by the student, the reader, and the chair of the Linguistics program. The primary reader can be any faculty member at the College. The primary reader should meet with the student on a regular basis, say, once every two weeks or so, during the writing of the paper.
- Similarly, secondary reader should be agreed upon. The secondary reader need not meet with the student regularly, but will be asked to read final or penultimate drafts of the paper and help decide if the paper is satisfactory. (For a list of cooperating faculty in other departments, see our webpages. It is not necessary that either reader be drawn from this list.)

The winter term is when most of the research and the writing of the paper is done. Again, during this time the student should meet regularly with the primary reader.

As the student comes to the final stages of the process, which should be during the winter term, he or she should begin thinking about the defense. What follows is a description of the defense and how it is arranged.

- The defense is a public presentation of the results of the research. It is quite formal. The student is introduced by the chair of the Linguistics Program. He or she speaks for no longer than thirty minutes. Then the first reader may ask questions. Then the second reader. Then anyone in attendance may ask questions. During this time, questions may

also be posed to the student from people not present, subject to the discretion of the chair. Anyone on earth may submit a question via the chair. So, it is possible for example, that Noam Chomsky might submit a pointed question. (This has not yet happened, but one never knows.) The objective is that the student must defend the proposal against all reputable observers. The question period ends no more than one hour after beginning of the defense.

- All students who defend pass. No exceptions. This means a number of things. First, the key step in the process is getting permission to defend from the primary reader and the chair of the Linguistics Program. *No defense may be officially scheduled without this permission.* So permission to defend amounts to a declaration that the paper is ready to defend, and therefore will pass.

- It also means that the defense is in part celebratory. Parents, sweethearts, friends, teammates are all welcome to attend. Refreshments following the event may be arranged, if the student wishes.

After the defense, the student is asked to give a clean copy of the final version of the paper to the Linguistics Program. It will be catalogued and placed in the program's library. The student may wish to make emendations to the paper after the defense. Such emendations are welcome, so long as the program gets the final paper before the last day of class, spring term.

Students successfully completing comps in Linguistics are to be (virtually) enshrined on the Program's webpages, with a title of their paper, and, perhaps, a photograph.

(This document was written in the winter of 2004, by Michael Flynn, chair of the Linguistics Program.)