What's in a major? Linguistics degree requirements in the United States

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This paper presents a survey of requirements for a bachelor's in linguistics at American institutions in late 2025. Data was drawn from the NCES College Navigator, the ACE Carnegie Classification, and department websites. 125 institutions were found to offer a linguistics major (not including applied linguistics). 50% of these also offer a Master's degree, and 43% a Ph.D.

Most programs require an introduction to linguistics course (88%, n=111) or two (15%), as well as at least one course in phonetics and/or phonology (91%) and syntax and/or semantics/pragmatics (87%). More specifically, 24% require separate phonology and phonetics; 41% a combined course; 22% phonology alone; 3% phonetics alone. Meanwhile, 34% require separate syntax and semantics/pragmatics, 38% syntax alone, 13% a combined course, and 2% require three.

Among other requirements, 34% require sociolinguistics; 21% psycholinguistics/acquisition; 17% a course on the structure of a particular language; 15% historical linguistics, 8% field methods; 8% a research methods course, 4% a careers class, and 2% typology. In addition, 21% require a thesis, and 8% involve another capstone.

Institutions offering linguistics majors disproportionately belonged to elite Carnegie Classifications: 67% were R1 and 13% were "Research Colleges and Universities" (RCU), but these categories make up only 7% and 8%, respectively, of institutions offering at least a bachelor's degree.

Requirements were generally similar across Carnegie classifications. Notable exceptions were that RCU institutions were more likely to require a thesis and sociolinguistics (both 56%, 9/16). TESOL/ESL was included under the curricular umbrella of linguistics in 26% of all; the proportion was similar across R1s and non-ranked institutions, but was not present at any RCUs.

Short Abstract: We surveyed the major requirements of the 125 institutions offering a major in Linguistics in the US, and compared them to their Carnegie Classification. While R1s and selective colleges were disproportionately likely to offer linguistics, the requirements were generally similar across institutions. The vast majority require an introductory course; phonology or phonology&phonetics; and either syntax or syntax and semantics. 34% require sociolinguistics, and 26% include TESOL within linguistics.