



Evaluating Alternative Research Requirements for the MASLA program

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES, CULTURES, AND RELIGIONS

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Objectives

DESIGN, PILOTING, AND EVALUATION OF A NON-DP OPTION REQUIREMENT

1. Investigate alternative research requirements to accommodate students experiencing hardships and/or challenges associated with traditional research components
2. Pilot an alternative research requirement
3. Collect and revise introspective data on the piloting of alternative solutions to program assessment
4. Develop feasible alternatives to the degree-paper/thesis options, considering fair qualification criteria, high educational standards, and best practices in the field of applied linguistics



Information Discussed

1. Planning
2. Alternative research requirements
3. Pilot phase of a non-DP option
4. Next steps



1. Planning

1.1 CURRENT LCR MASLA RESEARCH REQUIREMENT:

Total of 6 credit-hours that can be achieved in two ways:

Option A

Complete a thesis while enrolled in LCR 799

Option B

- Complete a degree paper (DP) while enrolled in LCR 798, and
- Complete and additional 3h elective course

MASLA Degree Papers

- 25 pages
- Original research
- Student selects the topic
- GPD advising on methodology (feedback on DP/Thesis proposal)
- Possible formats: *empirical study, critical literature review, descriptive or historical linguistics, pedagogical proposal, program evaluation*



1. Planning

1.2 ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH TRADITIONAL RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS IN THE MASLA:

- 10% to 20% of students reach an impasse after completing all the required coursework
- Students who do not complete their degree paper or thesis after one semester, tend to become idle
- 35% of students hold full-time jobs and/or have children, leaving them less time to focus on research
- Low number of LCR graduate faculty to advise students on research projects in applied linguistics

1. Planning

1.3 POSSIBLE BARRIERS TOWARD COMPLETION OF DP/THESIS:

- Student profile (professionally-oriented)
- Personal hardship (financial, health-related, job-related, family-related, intellectual stress, etc.)
- Demands of their current job (most of our working students are full-time in-service teachers)
- Issues related to motivation, time management, stress management





1. Planning

1.4 PROCESS:

- The issue is discussed in a Graduate Committee Meeting
- Initial meeting with language graduate committee members only
- Ad-hoc committee to identify and polish alternatives to DP: Dr. Maimone and Dr. Barffour
- Pilot of a non-DP option in spring of 2024



2. Research Requirement Alternatives

2.1 DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS AND CRITERIA

- Avoid increasing the number of total credit hours
- Avoid creating a disincentive to doing research
- Definition of clear qualifying criteria
- Following best practices in applied linguistics
- Creating an alternative that can accommodate both in-person and online students
- Not reducing program quality and standards
- Purpose of the alternative: to address issues identified after comps



2. Research Requirement Alternatives

2.2 LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO

- Close inspection of portfolio models from a few other disciplines showed they were not a good fit for applied linguistics studies
- Language faculty felt they needed more time to explore this option

2.3 CONTACT HOURS OPTION

- Replace LCR 798 with a synchronous 700-level course
- Students write a final paper in the course, engaging in original research (no summary-based lit. reviews)
- Students write a reflection about their learning progress and use of research in their professional life



Conclusions Reached

BASED ON A 1 STD. CASE STUDY AND 3 STDS. TESTING THE OPTION IN THE SUMMER

- The contact-hours alternative was well received, especially by remote students
- The contact-hours option is more limited for remote students because it requires the advisor to identify a language-related web-conferencing course
- Due to course availability, it may not be a feasible option for all students
- Alternative options should be discussed with students, case by case, if advisors identify barriers to graduation
- Students benefit from the shorter research project when the topic is the same as one of their comprehensive exam questions
- The alternative has administrative support for reducing compensation to graduate faculty serving as DP readers and thesis committee members



Non-DP alternative class - student experience

REASONS: “I DON’T LIKE TO WRITE IT ON MY OWN.”

The (2) classes: I only needed to take (1) as I had already taken all the required classes for completion and to graduate.

- Step by step process : structured in weekly required assignment submissions with feedback in the written and oral formats.
- The class provided an opportunity for instructor’s continual/constant guidance to stay focused and manage time accordingly.
- Class served as a refresher of the writing process and extension on different formats of writing.
- The writing process from the ‘Introduction to the Conclusion’ helped me to stay motivated to keep on writing, as feedback was ongoing throughout class sessions.
- Convenience
- “I feel as though I learn a lot more from taking an actual class than I do from writing a paper, thus helping me to achieve my goal for this program”.



Next Steps

- We still have to define fair qualifying criteria for the non-DP option
- We may require an application form to formalize the process
- We will continue to work on developing a Language Portfolio option, focusing on a model that allows students to complete their research requirement in the summer and not depend on specific course offerings
- We plan to collect and analyze introspective data from students participating on the piloting of alternative and traditional options



*Thank
you*

Questions or Suggestions?

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