



Title of Report: Macquarie University Postgraduate Programs in Applied Linguistics

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1. Identify and describe the Professional Development Opportunity (PDO).

Macquarie University's Postgraduate Programs in Applied Linguistics are offered by the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. The programs began in the late 1980s and were first offered by distance in 1994. All programs are offered by distance, on-campus, and in mixed mode (meaning that students can swap between and combine on-campus and distance study, although they must enroll in each individual course either by distance or on-campus). The following qualifications are offered:

- Doctor of Philosophy [by thesis];
- Master of Applied Linguistics;
- Master of Applied Linguistics (TESOL-Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages);
- Master of Applied Linguistics (LSP - Language for Specific Purposes);
- Postgraduate Diploma of Applied Linguistics;
- Postgraduate Diploma of Applied Linguistics (TESOL);
- Postgraduate Diploma of Applied Linguistics (LSP);
- Postgraduate Certificate of Applied Linguistics;
- Postgraduate Certificate of Applied Linguistics (LSP); and
- Postgraduate Certificate of TESOL.

The Postgraduate Certificate of TESOL is a teaching qualification that includes a practicum, and allows graduates to teach in the Australian English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students and the Adult Migrant English Programs systems in line with the requirements of the National English Accreditation System; and allows graduates who are qualified school teachers to teach ESL in the Australian state school systems.

The remaining coursework qualifications are post-experience programs and require applicants to have one year (for Certificate and Diploma) or two years (for Master) of relevant professional experience prior to enrolment. These programs are not designed to teach students how to practice, but to engage experienced professionals with the relevant literature, having them explore theory and research findings in the field and reflect on how these findings can inform their practice.

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is a research degree, and as is typical in Australian and UK universities, there is no coursework requirement for this degree. Our PhD students are able to audit any of the courses in the coursework programs as recommended or required

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by their supervisor, so there is a significant coursework resource available for both PhD student and supervisor.

The distance students and graduates represent nationalities from every continent, and at any given time we have students located on (almost) every continent. Many, but not all of these students are Australians working overseas. We have a high proportion of Australian students, but the most striking feature of our cohort is the national, linguistic, and professional diversity of the students.

There are seven full-time applied linguistics academic staff teaching the core courses of these programs, and several additional applied linguists and academic staff from other areas of the Linguistics Department (e.g., sociolinguistics; phonetics and phonology; sign-language linguistics; psycholinguistics; and translation and interpreting) who teach elective courses. There are 2.5 full-time administrative staff supporting the programs, and a range of other administrative staff at Department, College, and University levels who are involved in the administration of the programs.

2. Describe the target audience for the PDO.

Our programs are large. Currently, we have over 100 students enrolled in all applied linguistics coursework programs (incorporating both on-campus and distance modes). The proportions vary, but the typical proportion between on-campus and distance students is roughly 50%. We currently have approximately 20 distance students writing their PhDs in the area of applied linguistics, almost all of whom live outside Australia.

Students in the Postgraduate Certificate of TESOL program come from a variety of backgrounds, as is typical of professionals in language teaching. Some are career changers, some are qualified and practicing school teachers seeking ESL accreditation, some are recent graduates, and some are practicing language teachers in other countries looking for professional qualifications for their own benefit or to meet the demands of employers or other agencies.

Students in our other coursework programs have a similar range of backgrounds and aims. However, because the other coursework programs require relevant work experience (see Section 1 above), there is a greater proportion of experienced and practicing language teachers in those other programs, and many of these teachers have substantial teaching experience (over ten years and in many cases over 20 years). In addition, the Master of Applied Linguistics attracts small numbers of professionals from backgrounds outside language teaching, including subject matter teachers (state school and university) interested in understanding how language works in their classrooms, speech pathologists, audiologists, psychologists, and other business professionals.

The diversity in student backgrounds and aims means that the ages of our students vary widely, from young people in their twenties beginning their journey in Applied Linguistics to retirees.

Students typically choose to study by distance because of their professional situation. In other words, they have employment that makes on-campus attendance difficult or



impossible, and wish to keep their current position, income, and life situation while studying and gaining a qualification.

3. Describe how you recruit students for your PDO.

Program promotion has been through the Department website, print advertising, and exhibition stands at major Applied Linguistics and TESOL conferences, where we have posters and brochures. Our emphasis is on program flexibility, academic rigor, and quality control. We have found that these are the issues of greatest concern to potential students. Recommendations from existing or previous students continue to be the most effective recruitment mechanisms, and there are strong alumni networks in some countries.

4. Describe the curriculum choices made.

In the early 1990s, the Department took the decision to provide distance offerings of the on-campus postgraduate programs in applied linguistics. At the time, there were few such distance programs offered internationally, and by developing a distance offering the Department was looking to take the lead in international distance provision of applied linguistics programs. The initial distance program was based on the on-campus offerings, and the first distance courses were developed by Chris Candlin (Head and Chair), David Hall (Convenor of Distance Programs), Geoff Brindley, Anne Burns, David Butt, Linda Cupples, Sandra Gollin, Steven Ross, Gillian Wigglesworth, Ken Willing, and Colin Yallop.

Since the initial development of the distance programs, scores of distance courses have been written and taught by academics across the Linguistics Department, and one of the defining features of the programs for a long time was the breadth of options available to students.

In 2000, a major redevelopment of the core of the curriculum was undertaken by Anne Burns, Chris Candlin, and David Hall in conjunction with the Open University in the UK, taking into account developments in the field, such as the increasing focus on World Englishes and sociocultural theory.

In 2012, in response to a new institutional environment, a completely new curriculum structure was introduced by John Knox and Stephen Moore, which took account of recent developments in the field, such as an increasing focus on professional discourse and multimodality.

5. Explain the PDO's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The over-arching goals of the programs are to contribute in a positive way to society by giving language professionals access to evidence-based knowledge and an informed and critical understanding of relevant research and theory, and of the methods by which such research and theory are developed and conducted. Specific objectives are set out for each course.

Listed below are the specific learning objectives for the three core courses (i.e., Communicative Grammar; Genre, Discourse, and Multimodality; and Research Methods in Language Study) shared across the three coursework master's degree specializations (i.e.,



Master of Applied Linguistics, Master of Applied Linguistics [TESOL], Master of Applied Linguistics [LSP]).

Communicative Grammar

Students will:

- (1) gain a solid understanding of the two most commonly used grammars in applied linguistics: traditional and systemic functional;
- (2) develop an appropriate vocabulary for labeling parts of speech, in both traditional and functional terms;
- (3) be able to analyze texts across a variety of genres using both approaches to grammar;
- (4) be able to explain the strengths and weaknesses of each approach to grammar in both abstract theoretical and practical terms;
- (5) be able to demonstrate the relationship between form and function in language, as perceived by both types of grammar; and
- (6) gain a suitable foundation for pursuing further studies in systemic functional grammar, namely LING900 and LING907.

Genre, Discourse, and Multimodality

Students will be able to:

- (1) identify the three major schools of genre in applied linguistics, their underlying philosophies, analytical approaches, and typical applications;
- (2) recognize textual patterns associated with a number of commonly occurring genres in educational and other contexts;
- (3) identify systematic relationships between social context and discourse;
- (4) identify patterns of meaning across different semiotic systems (e.g., language, image, and gesture) in specific communicative contexts;
- (5) analyze the semiotic systems involved in specific acts of communication; and
- (6) explain the relations between specific acts of communication and the contexts in which they occur.

Research Methods in Language Study

By completing this course, students will be able to:

- (1) identify a research topic or area of interest;
- (2) state a problem within the area of interest and explain its significance;
- (3) critically review literature (published papers) related to the topic of their research and write up a literature review with the goal of showing gaps;
- (4) pose specific research questions;
- (5) propose a study with appropriate methodology for the specific research questions with an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative methods;
- (6) analyze quantitative and qualitative data and interpret the results;
- (7) analyze ethical issues related to the proposed research; and
- (8) write up research including a research proposal.



Each of the three specializations has another three dedicated core courses. The specific learning objectives for these courses and for the elective courses are freely available in the public versions of course outlines, which are published on the Department's website.

6. Describe the teaching and learning activities used in the PDO and what online applications are used to support these activities.

Individual courses in the programs are developed by the academic staff responsible for them, so there are variations that reflect individual teaching styles and also the content of each course. In general, the post-experience nature of the programs and the theory-research-practice nexus that underpins them mean that there is a great deal of commonality in the approach taken across the programs. Learners are acknowledged as experienced professionals, expert in the practice of their own context. On the teaching side, our contribution is to present relevant and challenging reading material, to make this material accessible to learners coming from a variety of professional, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, and to engage the learners in tasks where they explore the relevance and applicability of the readings to their own professional and personal contexts.

Tasks include reading the literature, reading course notes, completing self-assessed tasks where learners reflect on aspects of the reading, and/or their context, and/or other discourses (e.g., from the mass media or from policy) around a given topic, and/or examine case studies.

With the ubiquity of video and increasingly widespread access to internet bandwidth, online video materials are becoming more common, and we are moving away from the use of CD-ROMS for the distribution of audio and video material. We have used a number of learning management systems (LMSs); at the time of writing we use a Moodle-based LMS. Online discussions are a common feature across our programs. Synchronous platforms are rarely used in coursework programs due in part to the international nature of our cohort and the problem of time zones. Voice over internet protocol telephony (including video telephony) is commonly used in distance research supervision.

7. Describe how the PDO helps students understand the local contexts in which they are studying so that they can work together with others in the global context of your online PDO.

Online discussion forums are used in all programs. Set tasks in online discussions often require students to reflect on an aspect of the curriculum currently being studied, and to discuss this with specific reference to their own professional contexts and/or personal experiences. Due to the diversity of our students in terms of their geographical and cultural locations, their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and their professional experience, a wide variety of personal viewpoints and professional and cultural perspectives is the norm in these discussions. Students often say that they learn as much from one another as they do from course materials. Assignments often require a focus on the immediate local context of the student analyzed in relation to the global context and existing literature. Materials, especially in areas such as Curriculum Development, Language for Specific Purposes, and Management, make use of case examples from a wide variety of different contexts worldwide.



Some courses cover areas such as World Englishes and Intercultural Communication explicitly. However, the notion that languages and cultures are pluralistic; that individual identities are socially constructed and dynamic; and that human communication is an ongoing, dynamic, and co-constructed process by which cultures and identities are negotiated is axiomatic to all courses in the programs.

The technology for access to discussion forums and library resources is developing constantly and we do not currently have any evidence of access constraints, even from remote or disadvantaged geographical areas.

8. Describe how the PDO helps prepare students for the local contexts in which they will work.

Virtually all students studying online are in full-time or part-time teaching work, which creates an effective cycle of investigation and practice. Some students are working in the environment in which they grew up and were educated, but the majority are expatriates, in a wide variety of different educational, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic contexts around the world. It is not uncommon for students to change jobs and countries several times during a program. The diversity is a significant feature of the program, as students learn from each other what can and cannot be done, what works and does not work, and what people have tried in different contexts. Attitudes towards language, language learning, language planning, the hegemony of English, and motivations for learning language feature strongly throughout the program.

9. Explain the characteristics of the teacher educator(s) working in the PDO.

The academic staff who are teaching in the program normally have doctoral-level or equivalent qualifications and are required to conduct research, publish, and supervise doctoral student research in addition to their teaching. It is expected that teaching materials reflect current research in the field. Technology training is provided for anyone who needs it, and is provided on a regular basis and whenever new capabilities or tools are added to the online systems. Normally, all academic staff teach face-to-face (ftf) sessions for on-campus students for the same courses they teach online. Modules are sometimes jointly developed and taught by two or more instructors. Casual tutors are not normally used.

10. Describe the non-teaching support staff in the PDO.

There are 2.5 administrative staff members specifically dedicated to the ftf and online programs at postgraduate level. Many more administrative staff members are involved as part of their more wide-ranging University employment responsibilities, for example in central University student information systems, central record-keeping, enrolments and application, IT support, graduation processing, and many other areas.

11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDO.

Assessment is done by assignments, not by examinations. Assessment tasks vary and include critical reviews of readings, essay-type assignments, linguistic analyses with commentary, and reports requiring an element of primary research. Brief descriptions of the assessment tasks for each course are provided in the publicly available course outlines (see



Section 5). Regardless of the task type, learners are typically required to display a critical understanding of the relevant literature and to relate theory and research findings to a specific context.

12. Explain the mechanisms used to evaluate the PDO.

Individual courses in the programs are typically evaluated by the learners every semester they are taught. A number of external reviews have been commissioned over the years (both specific reviews of the programs and reviews of the whole Department and the place of the programs in them). Evaluations of the curriculum structure have been undertaken by the coordinators of the programs in conjunction with the teaching staff at the time of each major restructure (see Section 4 above).

13. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this PDO online.

Technological challenges are constantly evolving. Frequent changes in the University choice of LMSs can be frustrating for both teachers and students, although in general terms accessibility and ease of use have improved over the years. Access to electronic library resources, journals, and book chapters (through the library's online access systems that are accessible to all enrolled students) is remarkably good. All discussions are conducted asynchronously, because the widely spread time zones make synchronous participation impractical.

14. Describe the successes of the PDO and explain how they are documented.

Individual teaching courses are evaluated by students using the University course evaluation survey instruments. More general full-course evaluations are conducted from time to time. At the doctoral level, student satisfaction surveys are conducted at University and national levels, both during candidature and following graduation.

The tracking of students following graduation is done through the University's alumni office. This includes awards received and professional positions. Outstanding graduates may be invited to University alumni events. Teachers and administrators in these programs have received national awards for teaching and student support, and have also received internal University awards. There are many examples of students who have published articles and given presentations at international conferences based on their assignments and experiences. We also notice students taking prominent roles in local language teaching and applied linguistics associations, and taking senior and mentoring roles in their workplaces.

John Knox and David Hall in particular have conducted further research into distance learning and teaching, working in close collaboration with colleagues at Aston University, UK, and Shenandoah University, US. The recent volume *Online Language Teacher Education* edited by Liz England (Routledge 2012), contains two chapters by Hall and Knox, one by England and Hall, and two others co-authored by Macquarie teaching staff and students (Legg and Knox; Contijoch-Escontria, Burns, and Candlin).