May 3, 2011

To Professor Betsy Beise
The Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs

From Kira Gor
Director, Ph.D. in Second Language Acquisition

Dear Dr. Beise:

On behalf of the faculty in the Ph.D. Program in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), I would like to express our gratitude to the APAC committee and you personally for providing very thoughtful and constructive feedback on the M.A. in SLA proposal. This letter will respond to the concerns that were raised by the APAC in the Spring of 2010 summarized in your letter to Dean Harris of April 5, 2010, and that we discussed in our meeting with you in December 2011.

The main concern was that the proposal mixed two separate cohorts: students who would go on to pursue the Ph.D. degree at UMD, and professionals in the field who would need limited and focused high-quality training in SLA. The market demand for the latter cohort was more obvious. The SLA faculty is proposing a new solution that addresses the APAC’s concern and, in our opinion, will be highly successful. As part of our revisions, we have developed a proposal for a one-year 18-credit Graduate Certificate in SLA that, together with the M.A. in SLA, will create a flexible and efficient program adaptable to the needs of individual learners from various sectors. Instead of adopting a restrictive approach to the graduate program and targeting only a narrow group of Ph.D. applicants, we will broaden the applicant pool by adding a two-year M.A. program plus one-year Graduate Certificate option to the existing Ph.D.

By proposing to add an M.A. and a Graduate Certificate in SLA to the existing Ph.D. we have reconceptualized the components of the graduate program, and have developed an integrated approach to advanced graduate SLA training. It reflects the needs of the national and international market and will help us build a strong graduate SLA community, contribute to the Language Science community on campus fostered by the NSF-funded Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) Program, and meet the demand of professionals working in different sectors including the U.S. government. The study of the current job market indicates that
there is a large contingent of students seeking advanced graduate training in SLA who will come with outside funding and thus will not reduce resources available to the Ph.D. applicants. At the same time, we have the faculty and the expertise in place to offer an additional set of 600-level courses without requiring any new resources, such as faculty lines, space, equipment or book purchases.

The M.A. in SLA proposal now includes a chart illustrating the national need in professionals with degrees in SLA represented as a major discrepancy between the large number of jobs and a small number of degrees awarded in applied linguistics (mostly referring to SLA). Those national data, the letters of support from the Center for Advanced Study of Language, the IGERT Program, and the National Foreign Language Center, as well as examples of email requests from externally funded international applicants, are consistent with our projections that the number of potential M.A. applicants will be very considerable.

Finally, we would like to emphasize one important point: The existing Ph.D. and the proposed M.A. and Graduate Certificate will accommodate distinct but overlapping populations without compromising the highest academic standards. This will be possible because the students in each program will be admitted on a highly competitive basis and many of them will have advanced degrees in adjacent fields, such as linguistics, psychology, and educational psychology. Our optimism is based on the strength and success of the newly created Ph.D. program, as gauged by the following criteria:

- We admit between five and ten percent of the applicants.
- Among the Fall 2011 applicants, eight had an 800 score on the analytical part of the GRE, many more close to 800.
- Out of seven students admitted for the Fall 2011, six come with outside funding (two from CASL, one from the Arabic Flagship, three from foreign governments). All of them were recommended for admission strictly based on merit.
- Our Ph.D. students have received fellowships and awards from the Graduate School (Ann G. Wylie Dissertation Fellowship, Mabel S. Spencer Award for Excellence in Graduate Achievement, Graduate Student Summer Research Fellowship), the IGERT Program, and the NSF (Doctoral Dissertation Research).

The revised M.A. proposal addresses all the other questions raised by the APAC and shows that there is no overlap between the proposed M.A. and the M.A.s offered locally in the area. We have also eliminated the foreign language requirement from the MA proposal, as recommended by APAC.

The proposal for the Graduate Certificate in SLA has received unanimous support from the SLLC PCC committee on April 25, 2011, and will be considered by the ARHU PCC at the May 12, 2011 meeting.

Kira Gor, Ph.D.
Director, Ph.D. in SLA Program
MEMORANDUM

TO: James Harris
Dean, College of Arts & Humanities

FROM: Elizabeth Beise
Interim Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs

SUBJECT: Proposal to add a Master’s Degree in Second Language Acquisition

April 5, 2010

The Provost’s Academic Planning Advisory Committee (APAC) reviewed the proposal to offer an M.A. in Second Language Acquisition (PCC proposal #09065) and recommended to the Provost that the proposal not move forward for review by the campus Senate as it currently stands. The Provost concurred. Below is a summary of the discussion and possible approaches for the future.

The proposal indicates two potential cohorts of students for the program:

a) Students who would, at completion, have the necessary background to apply to the UMD Ph.D. program; and
b) Students or professionals who desire more training or credentials in the study of second language acquisition.

APAC members raised concerns about the mixing of these two cohorts, given that their curricular goals are likely to be different.

The desire for a feeder M.A. program for the existing doctoral program has intellectual merit, particularly given the fact that there is no longer a language feeder program as a result of the discontinuation of the M.A. in Second Language Acquisition and Application (SLAA). However, questions were raised about whether there is a sufficient national market to attract high quality students specifically for this route. There were also concerns as to whether this program would, in the longer term, diminish the Ph.D. program by drawing on resources. APAC would like to have seen more discussion in the proposal on comparison with peer institutions, national interest in this particular degree, and an indication of how such an M.A. degree would further support and promote the quality of the Ph.D. program.

APAC had more enthusiasm for a program tailored to cohort (b), the market demand being more obvious. However, for this cohort, the more appropriate route would be to develop a Graduate Certificate of Professional Studies in Second Language Acquisition, which might evolve into a Master of Professional Studies program if the Certificate program indicates a market need. Such
a program would also be consistent with the goals of the Strategic Plan to enhance opportunities for professional degrees at this level.

One specific technical issue was raised regarding expectations for outside funding and requirements for the degree. The proposal indicates that only students with outside funding would be admitted, and that by the end of the M.A. degree, students will have demonstrated three types of experience: Language Learning, Language Teaching, and Language Use. It is understood that these skills are required for entry into the Ph.D. program. The question is how students would be able to acquire the Language Teaching skill. The University is prohibited from having students carry out instructional duties, for example, as a regular Teaching Assistant, if they are fully supported through external funding. More clarification is thus needed as to how externally funded students would acquire the Language Teaching skill without access to classroom teaching here at UMD. One solution might be to provide partial Graduate Assistantships, but then there would need to be a more detailed accounting of resource requirements for the program and its interaction with other programs within the SLLC.

cc: Elizabeth Loizeaux, College of Arts & Humanities
    Carol Mossman, Director, School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (SLLC)
    Gabriele Strauch, Associate Director for Academic Affairs, SLLC