

LINGUISTICS, B.A.

Seven Penn State campuses are scheduled for closure after Spring 2027: DuBois, Fayette, New Kensington, Mont Alto, Shenango, Wilkes-Barre, and York. New students are not being admitted at these campuses.

Begin Campus: Any Penn State Campus

End Campus: University Park

Program Description

This major would allow students to receive a BA degree in Linguistics. Linguistics, which is the study of language as a structural, cognitive, historical, and cultural phenomenon, intersects with many different academic disciplines and career paths. Linguists study how people acquire their knowledge of a language (or multiple languages), how this knowledge interacts with other cognitive processes, and how best to model this knowledge. They study how to represent the structure of the various aspects of language (such as sounds or meaning), how to account for different linguistic patterns theoretically, and how the different components of language interact with each other. Since every language is spoken across multiple communities of practice, linguists also study variation in language based on region, ethnicity, gender, or any number of other social factors. In order to learn about as many of the world's 7000 languages as possible, many linguists do fieldwork. This means that they work with speakers of little-studied languages to discover grammatical patterns and/or to document the language. Other linguists search databases (or corpora) of spoken and written language to find patterns there. Yet others run carefully-designed experiments with children and adults in schools, in the field, and in university labs. Linguistics is the scientific study of language in all its complexity.

What is Linguistics?

Linguistics is the scientific study of language: how it is structured, how it is acquired, how it is used to convey information, and how it changes over time. While many linguists do speak more than one language—or at least know how to approach the study of other languages—linguistics is much more than this. Through courses and a wide variety of research opportunities, our students explore how languages are structured (sentence structure, sound patterns, meaning and more), and how those structures are processed by the human brain. Since language is integral to all societies, linguists are interested in how language affects culture, and how social factors (place of birth, social class, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) impact language use. We approach language from a global perspective, investigating commonalities and differences across languages in order to increase our understanding of what makes human communication unique.

You Might Like This Program If...

- You enjoy studying languages, particularly finding and applying linguistic patterns.
- You are interested in communication, and learning more about the function of language(s) in society.
- You like to think about how the human brain functions, and want to know more about language and cognition.
- You like logic, computer programming, and/or abstract puzzles.