

Language and Law

IHP Teaching Fund Proposal, submitted Jan. 2024

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Project abstract

LIN 231 *Language and Law* is a new course that asks fundamental questions about what it means to live in a society organized under a legal system that is written, spoken, and analyzed through language. Using linguistic concepts and research methods, students will practice applying linguistic theories to UM-Flint DEI-related policies and practices to better understand how DEI has changed over time. The research will be conducted in small groups and multiple projects may be ongoing throughout the semester. The research will culminate in an event where students will present their findings to the campus and greater community.

Project description

LIN 231 *Language and Law* is a new course on forensic linguistics that will use concepts such as semantics and discourse analysis to unpack the multiple intersections between policy and language. In this course students will learn the fundamental methods for investigating language data including textual analysis and interview procedures (including transcription and analysis). Instruction on research methods will be supplemented by readings and lectures on linguistic concepts and the connections between language, identity, culture, and policies. Through course readings and discussions, students will observe how policies can be used to either support diversity and inclusion or privilege certain groups over others.

In this course, students will conduct original research related to DEI policies and practices at UM-Flint. They will work in groups throughout the semester to answer the research question: *How have institutional policies and practices related to DEI shifted since the founding of the institution?* Each group will choose their semester-long project and benchmarks of progress will be aligned with seminar topics. Local experts will be guest speakers to talk about DEI, archival resources and research, and students will be PEERRS certified for social science research with human subjects.

The research topics may include any of the following, though this is not an exhaustive list of possible topics related to language and policy at the institution:

- **Textual analysis of institutional DEI policies across time.** We will partner with the Thompson Library as they have substantial archives and governing documents pertaining

to the history of the institution. We will seek out relevant policies (e.g. affirmative action or non-discrimination policies) and reports (e.g. compliance and annual reports) to show how DEI policies have shifted over time.

- **Interviews with students and advisors about the history of DEI student organizations.** We will work closely with Latinos UNited for Advancement (LUNA), Black Student Union, and the International Student Organization to identify appropriate interviewees who can share their perspectives on the history of these student groups and provide student researchers with relevant policies for the establishment and mission of these organizations. We will use discourse analysis to analyze the stories and perspectives of our interviewees.
- **Practices of language accessibility and support.** In a city with a large deaf and hard of hearing population, international and immigrant student population, and African-American English (AAE)-speaking population, linguistic accessibility is a key, though often overlooked, issue. We will review policies related to accessibility of languages and connect with multilingual and multi-dialectal students, faculty, and staff about their knowledge and experiences at the institution. We will seek out alumni who were multilingual/multi-dialectal, and learn about their experiences of the language policies/practices on campus.

This research will culminate in a presentation of the findings for the campus and community and include recommendations for increasing DEI impact for justice. This will allow broad dissemination of the knowledge and celebrate the work of these students. As this is a new course, there will be significant curricular materials developed (syllabi and assignments), which can be used for future iterations of the course and keep the momentum of DEI research across semesters.

The course includes general education learning outcomes:

1. demonstrate the ability to think critically
2. investigate the nature of citizenship
3. participate in dialogue that involves respectful and careful listening

Skills development such as:

1. leadership and teamwork
2. research and presentation
3. managing a large project with multiple perspectives

Content knowledge including:

1. discourse analysis and its use in uncovering ideologies
2. semantic analysis using tools such as corpora, grammatical structures, and word relationships in texts
3. principles of DEI as represented through policies and practices

The first iteration of the course is scheduled for Fall 2024. This means that over the spring and summer of 2024 I'll apply for the IRB, write the syllabus and assignments, and organize guest speakers. At the end of the Fall 2024 semester, the students will present their research.

Team members

Emily Feuerherm will be the lead on this project and the teacher of the course. She is Associate Professor of Linguistics in the Department of Language and Communication.

| Inclusive History Project Teaching Fund Budget Template | | |
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| Expense Category | Amount | Brief explanation or justification of expense |
| Stipend for lead instructor | \$2,000 | As a new course, the creation of this course and accompanying projects will be additional effort and time, so compensation will allow me to focus on building the course and projects so that they can continue into future iterations of this course. Additionally, because there is research involved, it will be important to include IRB/CERB applications for the work which goes beyond the typical requirements for teaching a course. |
| Student research assistants | | |
| Supplies | | |
| Equipment | \$500 | |
| Student activities or field trips | \$2,000 | We will host an end-of-semester culminating event to showcase students' research and disseminate the knowledge and recognition they have gained. These funds will be for promotion of the event, hosting, and rental space (if needed) |
| Honoraria for external guest speakers | \$500 | Guest speakers will come to talk about archival research, DEI, and storytelling from multiple perspectives |
| <i>Please specify additional expense categories below:</i> | | |
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| Total Amount Requested | \$5,000 | <i>Not to exceed \$3000 for Course Redesign Grants or \$5000 for Course Development Grants</i> |