The report states, “This is a relatively small graduate program (9 MA, 11 PhD students) that has traditionally focused on a strong MA program in teaching of ESL education.” While our MA program is strong, we have not focused exclusively on our MA program. Additionally, the MA program is mischaracterized: we do not have an MA in “teaching of ESL education.” Our MA is in Linguistics; one possible focus area is TESL. External reviews consistently point out that our Department is unique in the country in successfully integrating TESL with linguistics at both the MA and PhD levels. We have been praised for recognizing the fact that successful language instruction requires in-depth knowledge of linguistics, something that most ESL education programs do not do.

The report states that “the expansion into doctoral studies has been somewhat problematic given the relatively few faculty (6.5 FTE)”, but provides no examples of problems. This has never been raised with the Department in the past. When asked about this, Dean Keller suggested that possibly the Task Force assumed we have had problems making the minimum required enrollments in our classes. We have had no such problems. In addition to our own graduate students, students from a variety of other departments and programs consistently take our graduate-level courses (and even our undergraduate courses) in linguistics, including students from Anthropology, ASLL, Computer Science (CS), FLARE, German, and Spanish and Portuguese.

The report states that the “program attracts a strong international student cohort,” but neglects to mention that it also attracts a strong cohort of domestic students (roughly 50%), and goes on to note that “it attracts few domestic minorities”. This latter criticism could be leveled at virtually all graduate programs at UI. Moreover, we have graduated minorities in the past and the number of “domestic minorities” in our department mirrors the numbers in linguistics programs nationally.

The report states “that selectivity is good, and financial support appears to be acceptable, which has led to recently improving, but historically weak completion and TTD (40%, 9.0 years calculated for the 2 PhD graduates of the 5 who entered the program in 1996-01.)” Our selectivity and financial support have always been very strong, and actually have nothing to do with recent developments. The numbers are different depending on what years are considered: Our completion rate is 75% for students who were admitted to our PhD program from 1993 to 1999 (6 of 8), 80% of the students admitted 2000 to 2003 (4 of 5), or 77% of the students between 1993 and 2003 (10 of 13). Because students usually enter our program with little or no background in linguistics, we require every student to take our MA coursework. Official admission to our PhD program depends on performance on the MA comprehensive exam and submission of a research paper (and students are made aware of this before they enter the program). Sometimes students who have declared their degree objective as PhD are not admitted after taking the MA comprehensive exam. But this indicates our selectivity, rather than a problem with completion rate. Only one student was ever offered admission and declined; she transferred to the PhD program in Speech Pathology but left after 3 years, after completing only an MA.

The nine-year TTD also does not give an accurate picture of the Program. It was calculated for only 2 students, one of whom had two children during this time. The 10 most recent PhDs, entering between 1993 and 2003, have a TTD of 6 years. We request that this more accurate figure be noted in our assessment. Another consideration, which is highly significant, is that our students do not usually enter with either BA or MA degrees in linguistics. Other programs in linguistics that admit only students with MA degrees in linguistics allow 5 years post MA. These include Harvard, and the Universities of Connecticut and Massachusetts, among others. Programs here at Iowa that admit students with MA degrees also allow 5 years post MA (indicated by the fact that they offer 5 years of support beyond the MA). Our TTD post MA is 4 years.

The report goes on to say that 3 students who earned their MA degrees in Linguistics during the period 1996-2001 transferred to the SLA PhD program. We do not see the relevance of this point. It is stated as if it is a negative for linguistics, but none of these students was admitted to our PhD program (some never applied, some were not admitted). Thus this is both an indication of our selectivity and of the distinct foci of the two programs.

The report states that no PhD students graduated between fall 2007 and spring 2009. But a slight change in the window considered changes this picture dramatically. By including the summer and fall after spring 2009 and the summer before fall 2007, the number changes to 6. There were 2 in summer 2007, 3 in summer 2009 and 1 in fall 2009, or a total of 6 between summer 07 and fall 09.

The report states that the “program has had a number of recent doctoral graduates (3 in summer ’09 and 1 in fall ’09) who show an improved TTD. It remains to be seen how the careers of these graduates unfold.” We fail to see why this question is raised. This appears to cast a positive development in as negative a light as possible. In fact, all these students are employed in academia, with 2 in tenure track positions. Are recent graduates of other programs equally well placed?

The report states that there “appears to be some overlap with Second Language Acquisition”. There is: They require many of our undergraduate or MA level courses for some tracks in their PhD. However, none of the FLARE courses count toward our PhD.

The report goes on to say that there appears to be some overlap with “other language programs”. We are not a language program. Students in the linguistics tracks in some language departments do take our courses, however.

The report states that the Department would “like to expand into computational linguistics (they had one faculty member in this area who departed after several years), but resources will likely prevent this.” Since the departure of the faculty member who was 50% in Linguistics and 50% in SLIS, a faculty member, appointed in CS and Psychology, has been teaching Computational Linguistics, but will retire in 2011. We are working on a proposal with faculty from CS, Psychology, and Communication Sciences and Disorders, all of whom support the hiring of a computational linguist because this hire would be beneficial to all four departments.

The report states that “a merger of the MA program and the research foci of the faculty into a division of languages should be seriously considered.” We do not understand this comment. Is the suggestion that we change the focus of our research? None of us teach languages, literature or culture, which are the foci of that division.