



## Contents

Welcome.....	4
Communication.....	4
Advising.....	4
Registering for Classes.....	5
Monitoring Your Progress.....	5
The Road towards Your M.A. Degree.....	6
Conditional Admission and Classification.....	6
The Foreign Language Component.....	6
The Upper Division Writing Proficiency Exam (UDWPE).....	7
Applying for Classification.....	7
Applying for Graduation.....	7
The Culminating Experience.....	8
TESL Certificate Students.....	8
Additional Requirements, Policies and Paperwork.....	8
Maintaining Good Standing.....	8
Retaking Classes.....	9
Requesting an Incomplete or Dropping a Class.....	9
Requesting Course Substitutions.....	9
Academic Conduct.....	10
Plagiarism and other forms of Academic Dishonesty.....	10
What if you disagree with a faculty member’s decision?.....	10
Looking Beyond the M.A.....	10
Aim for a “Diploma Plus”.....	10
Letters of Recommendation.....	10
Writing Samples and/or Teaching Materials.....	11
FAQs.....	12
Can I pursue both M.A. degrees?.....	12
Can I get an M.A. in Linguistics as well as a TESL Certificate?.....	12
What if I change my mind: TESL Certificate to M.A.-TESL?.....	12
What if I change my mind: M.A.-TESL to TESL Certificate?.....	12
What if I want to leave and come back at a later time?.....	13



## Welcome

You have been admitted to our department as a graduate student pursuing an M.A. in TESL or Linguistics, or as a graduate student pursuing a TESL-Certificate. This handbook is intended to provide you with key information to navigate your way through the program from start to finish. To prevent information overload, we have limited ourselves to what we believe is most important. Please keep in mind that, while we have done our best to only include only current policies and regulations, there is always a chance that there have been changes since the writing of this handbook. Partially for those reasons, you will find many links in this handbook to other sites that provide additional and official versions of policies or procedures that are described here. As far as administrative requirements and university policies are concerned, much of what you will find here is based on information from the [University Catalog](#) and the [Graduate Student Handbook](#) prepared by the [Office of Research and Graduate Studies](#). We hope that you will use this handbook as a reference throughout your academic career in the Linguistics/TESL Department at CSUN.

## Communication

The **department office** can be found in Sierra Tower (ST) 805 and is open during office hours. (See “ST” on the [campus map](#).) The staff is available to answer your questions or refer you to the person who will be able to do so. All faculty members have mailboxes in the department office where you may leave materials if requested by the faculty member.

The department maintains a **listserv** to keep you informed about job opportunities, events on campus, course availability and the like. **Make sure to check your campus email inbox regularly so that you do not miss out on important information!**

Faculty may also contact you through campus email about their course requirements. CSUN uses [Canvas](#) as its online course platform and most faculty members will in addition (or primarily) use the Canvas course websites to post course materials and have their students engage with the learning materials through various online assignments and other activities. Once you are enrolled in a particular course, you will be able to access the corresponding course website from your Canvas home page.

All faculty maintain regular **office hours** that are listed on their syllabi and next to their offices. Do not hesitate to contact the instructor if you have questions about course content, run into personal problems that prevent you from meeting certain deadlines, or seek mentorship about career and study strategies.

## Advising

The Graduate Advisor is there to help you make good choices when selecting the courses to take towards your degree or certificate. The Graduate Advisor is also the one who processes certain paper

work, approves course substitutions, determines completion of the foreign language requirement, and can problem solve with you about a range of issues relating to academic and career goals. Before registering for classes for your first semester, you must make an appointment with the Graduate Advisor. There is no mandatory advising after that, but we do strongly recommend that you check in with the Graduate Advisor on a regular basis. Reaching out by [email](#) for an appointment is generally preferable, unless you have a quick question that can be handled during office hours.

Although the Graduate Advisor will help you with the intricacies of university and departmental requirements, you should also actively monitor your own progress. To that end, the following sections in this handbook address important information:

## Registering for Classes

The first question one usually has when starting in the program is: “Which classes should I register for?” As mentioned above, you should seek the Graduate Advisor’s help before you sign up for classes in your first semester and continue to check in regularly with the advisor in subsequent semesters. When mapping out your course work towards the fulfillment of the degree, take into consideration the department’s [course rotation](#): Since the department cannot offer every course every semester, you will need to look beyond one semester when deciding which classes to enroll in. Another important consideration is the preferred sequencing of classes, which is best discussed with the Graduate Advisor.

Note that certain classes will require a permission number in order to enroll. For those classes, the Graduate Advisor will assign seats (and permission numbers) based on relative need. The Graduate Advisor will reach out to students through the listserv in the preceding semester in order to gauge the need for these courses.

The university assigns each student an enrollment appointment, which is the earliest date that the student may register for classes. For detailed information about the registration process, check out CSUN’s [registration guide](#).

## Monitoring Your Progress

The Degree Progress Report (DPR) tracks your progress towards completion of your degree or certificate. The courses that you take are automatically categorized in the DPR as satisfying a core requirement of your program, an elective, or neither. You can (and should) access your DPR from time to time to check whether any changes (for example, course substitutions) need to be filed manually. The [Degree Progress Report Tutorial](#) describes step-by-step how to access your DPR and the information that it contains. Contact the Graduate Advisor if you notice any discrepancies.

# The Road towards Your M.A. Degree<sup>1</sup>



## Conditional Admission and Classification

M.A. students: Most of you have been admitted as a “conditionally classified” student. That means that the university considers you a viable candidate for receiving an M.A. in either Linguistics or TESL once you have met certain requirements. You will be able to take the necessary classes to progress towards completion of your degree while you are conditionally classified, but the university expects students to qualify for classification before they take more than 12 units of course work.

To petition for classification, you must have met the following requirements:

1. You must have satisfied **the Foreign Language Requirement** (See below for the difference between the Foreign Language Requirement for Linguistics and TESL)
2. You must have passed **the Upper Division Writing Proficiency Exam** that the university administers. This requires a minimal score of 8 on the exam.

## The Foreign Language Component

Both the M.A. in TESL and the M.A. in Linguistics include a foreign language requirement, but they do so for different reasons and the conditions for satisfying the foreign language requirement are also somewhat different. Students do not need to take the required foreign language classes at CSUN but may choose a local community college or other accredited institution instead. The Graduate Advisor verifies that students have met the Foreign Language Requirement. Double check with the Graduate Advisor, if you are not sure whether a particular foreign language class will “count” and deliver official transcripts of classes taken outside CSUN to her upon completion of this requirement.

For the **M.A. TESL** you must demonstrate recent experience acquiring a new language in a classroom setting. You meet this requirement if you have taken 6 semester units in a language previously unknown to you within 2 years of admission, or once you are admitted. The foreign language requirement applies to all graduate students in TESL irrespective of whether they are native speakers of English and irrespective of the number of languages they have studied or learned outside of the two-year window of admission. Students must receive minimally a B in the classes they take towards satisfaction of this requirement. All 6 units must be in the same language and course work must start at the novice level.

For the **M.A. in Linguistics**, students must demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English. They can do so in any one of four ways:

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<sup>1</sup> This section does not apply to students seeking a TESL Certificate. As opposed to M.A. students, you do not need to apply for classification; the certificate also does not involve a culminating experience and to receive your certificate, you do not apply for graduation.

- By successfully completing 6 semester units in a foreign language. All 6 units must be in the same language and students must minimally receive a B in each course.
- With a B.A. in a foreign language.
- By taking a language proficiency test that is offered by the Department of Modern and Classical Languages. See the Graduate Advisor for more information if you are considering this option.
- As a non-native speaker of English, evidence of which can take the form of having graduated from a non-English speaking university.

### **The Upper Division Writing Proficiency Exam (UDWPE)**

This is a (mostly writing) proficiency test that students at CSUN (or any other California State University) must take in order to receive a degree (both graduate as well as undergraduate). A few of you may be exempt from this rule. See [here](#) for info about what qualifies as an exemption. The UDWPE is offered multiple times every semester. For more information about this test and in order to sign up, see [here](#).

### **Applying for Classification**

In order to become classified, you must contact the Graduate Advisor so that she can file a **Request for Classification** with the office of Graduate Studies. Contact the Graduate Advisor as soon as you have met the conditions for classification to initiate the paperwork. The university requires that graduate students become classified before they take more than 12 units of course work. Conditionally classified students who attempt to register for classes once they have completed 12 units will receive a hold on their registration. Since the Linguistics/TESL Department requires a minimum of 6 semester units of a foreign language, that condition can be difficult to satisfy. The Graduate Advisor can ask to have the hold on the student's registration removed on a case-by-case and semester-by-semester basis, thereby extending the time that you may take classes as a conditionally classified student. **It is nevertheless imperative that you complete the requirements for classification as early as possible during your time as a graduate student in the department.** Discuss with the Graduate Advisor a plan to satisfy the Foreign Language requirement (and any other requirements for classification) as early as possible and contact her when you expect to need a hold removed on registration.

You must be classified in order to:

- Enroll in the Culminating Experience (see below)
- Be eligible for certain funding from Graduate Studies, for example for [Graduate Project Support](#).

### **Applying for Graduation**

You must apply for graduation in the semester **preceding** the one in which you expect to graduate:

<b>Semester in which you expect to graduate</b>	<b>When to apply for graduation</b>
Spring or Summer	By the first Friday in October in the preceding semester
Fall	By the first Friday in March in the preceding semester

By applying for graduation, you request that the Evaluators at Graduate Studies review your DPR to verify that everything is in order and you will be able to graduate as planned. The application form can be downloaded [here](#).

## **The Culminating Experience**

In order to receive an M.A. degree at CSUN, students must successfully complete a “culminating experience”. For students pursuing an M.A. in TESL or in Linguistics, this requires the submission of a portfolio. For additional information, be sure to attend the orientation meeting for incoming students that is held at the beginning of the fall semester. We expect that you will work towards this portfolio during your entire time in our department, so it is important to be aware of the expectations from the start. You will complete your portfolio and submit it to the Department for review during your last semester. This requires enrollment in LING 698D: Graduate Project.

Please note that students who fail the culminating experience during their first try may retake 698D **only once**, as per university rules. A second failure means no degree.

## **TESL Certificate Students**

The department only admits TESL Certificate students in the fall, in order to make sure that students will be able to take the classes towards the Certificate in the desired order. The Graduate Advisor will help you plan your course work accordingly. Inform the Graduate Advisor during the semester that you are expected to complete your course work that you are in your final semester. She will file an application for the certificate with Graduate Studies to make sure you receive your certificate once you have successfully completed your coursework.

## **Additional Requirements, Policies and Paperwork<sup>2</sup>**

This section briefly describes some additional requirements and policies of the university. It is not complete and policies are of course subject to change. For a complete and up-to-date description, please consult the [university catalog](#) and the [graduate policies](#) website maintained by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

## **Maintaining Good Standing**

All graduate students must maintain minimally a 3.0 GPA at all times. If your GPA dips below 3.0, you will receive a notice from Graduate Studies that you are on probation, usually before the start of the following semester. Students have one semester to bring their GPA back up to the 3.0 minimum or above. If not, they will be disqualified from the program. See [here](#) for more details about these university rules. No grade lower than B- can be counted towards your degree. Courses taken towards satisfying the foreign language requirement must be passed with minimally a B and so does any course that is up for consideration as a substitute for another course in the program.

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<sup>2</sup> This section also applies to TESL Certificate students

## **Retaking Classes**

No grade below a B- can count towards your degree or certificate. You may retake a class for which you received a B- or lower with permission from the Graduate Advisor or Chair, but the university does not allow you to repeat more than 6 units overall. That means that you won't be able to repeat more than two courses in our program. When retaking the class, you must submit a **course repeat form** to Graduate Studies **after** you have re-enrolled in the class. When you retake a class, the second grade will replace the first grade, even if it is lower.

## **Requesting an Incomplete or Dropping a Class**

You may simply drop a class online within the first three weeks of classes. After that, you will need approval from your instructor, the Chair of the department and, depending on how late in the semester you request this, additional approval from the Associate Dean. Prolonged illness or other unforeseeable factors outside your control can at times make it impossible to do well in a class and you may have to change plans. In those cases, you will generally be able to receive approval to drop a class, provided that you have been performing at a passing level up to that point. However, simply being overwhelmed is not a sufficient reason for a late drop. So, be realistic when planning your semester and do not take on more work than you can handle. When it looks like you won't be able to complete a particular course because of unforeseeable circumstances beyond your control, contact your instructor right away. The longer you wait, the more difficult it becomes to change course. See [here](#) for more information about dropping classes and the relevant forms and signatures required.

Rather than dropping a class, in some circumstances you may instead petition for an incomplete. An incomplete allows you to complete requirements for a particular course by a later date. As in the case of dropping a class, you cannot qualify for an incomplete because you have taken on more than you are able to handle. Unforeseen circumstances beyond your control that make it difficult to finish up the semester by meeting the due dates of **a limited set** of assignments can be a reason for an incomplete. The instructor of the class determines whether you qualify for an incomplete and will determine which assignment(s) you must turn in when. This is reflected on the [Request for a Grade of Incomplete](#) which you must fill out with your instructor.

## **Requesting Course Substitutions**

Depending on a student's academic background, some requirements of the curriculum may be replaced by another course. These course substitutions must be approved by the Graduate Advisor. The Graduate Advisor will file a course substitution with Graduate Studies in that case so that the modification will be reflected in your DPR. If you notice a discrepancy on your DPR where a particular course substitution has not been reflected (yet), let the Graduate Advisor know.

The department can also count a limited number of courses taken at another university, as long as they fit the curriculum and have not been used to satisfy another degree. The Graduate Advisor determines whether a particular class can be counted towards your degree or certificate.

## **Academic Conduct**

Students and faculty can thrive only in an environment of mutual caring and respect. All members of the CSUN community are expected to behave ethically at all times and CSUN embraces the diversity of opinions and backgrounds of its students and faculty. CSUN has several policies in place to safeguard this environment. Many of these can be found on the website maintained by the [Division of Student Affairs](#).

### **Plagiarism and other forms of Academic Dishonesty**

Please note that the university has a strict policy on plagiarism that is described [here](#). Please familiarize yourself thoroughly with what constitutes plagiarism. Do not hesitate to ask if you are not clear on how to avoid plagiarizing any of your work.

### **What if you disagree with a faculty member's decision?**

Generally speaking, much can be prevented by talking with your instructor whenever you are unclear about a particular course requirement, and much can be resolved by talking things over with your instructor when you have a concern. If you have tried this and still believe that you were treated unfairly, bring your concerns to the Chair of the Department. You have the right to file a grievance or grade appeal with the university, if need be. The [Division of Student Affairs](#) describes the policies for filing a formal complaint [here](#).

## **Looking Beyond the M.A.**

An M.A. in Linguistics or TESL can prepare you for career opportunities, but this diploma becomes exponentially more relevant when you seek learning and experiential opportunities beyond those that the course work offers while you are in the program. Without turning this into another document altogether about career planning, here are a few suggestions to consider:

### **Aim for a “Diploma Plus”**

We strongly recommend that you seek opportunities to gain expertise beyond what our programs offer. Aim for a “diploma plus”. The “plus” can take the form of volunteer work that relates to your field of study, tutoring, or other work opportunities on campus or off-campus, volunteering for, attending or presenting at conferences, etc.

### **Letters of Recommendation**

At some point most of you will want to approach a faculty member about a letter of recommendation. It is important to keep this in mind while you are a student in the program: What do you expect that the faculty member will be able to say about you? This is not primarily about likeability, but about evidence of academic potential, pedagogical expertise, etc. Imagine that you are writing the letter on the faculty member's behalf: what could (s)he say about you that demonstrates (not just claims) that you are a desirable candidate for the position? This can inform how you present yourself as a student and what you contribute during your courses.

There are certain do's and don'ts when it comes to asking for letters of recommendation:

- Ask your recommenders whether they are willing to write a letter on your behalf. Do not assume and just use their names in your application.
- Letters of recommendation are a time consuming task and you should make sure that the recommenders have ample time to write the letter. A lead time of minimally three weeks is best.
- Provide the recommenders, once they agree, with all the information that is needed to write an effective letter, and submit all your supporting materials on time. The following could be helpful:
  - If you are applying to a number of Ph.D. programs or several employers, provide a list of all the addressees with their full name, title and address; add the deadline for each letter of recommendation and the mode of submission (paper, scanned and emailed, or electronic submission through a link provided by the addressee?)
  - Send your recommenders your CV or resume, Professional Statement (i.e. a Teaching Philosophy or Statement of Purpose), and/or a summary of any accomplishments that might be worth mentioning. These could be writing samples, examples of lesson plans, etc.
  - Make sure that the faculty members know what the qualities are that the employer/grant provider/graduate department is looking for in an applicant. Make sure that this information is easily accessible and does not require that the recommenders hunt through several websites to find the relevant information. Providing a link is not always enough.
  - For college or grant applications, there is usually a box that you can mark to indicate that you waive the right to read the letter of recommendation. We recommend that you check that box. The recipients tend to consider letters of recommendation more trustworthy if they know that the recommender was not concerned that the applicant might read their letter.

### **Writing Samples and/or Teaching Materials**

Departments that offer Ph.D. programs require a strong writing sample from their applicants, but they are generally not interested in reading an entire M.A. thesis. It is therefore preferable to develop one or more substantial papers that can serve as writing samples when applying to doctoral programs. When applying for positions in TESL, samples of lesson plans and a statement of teaching philosophy are often required. The culminating experience for the Masters in Linguistics and TESL has been designed with that in mind. The portfolio must include a substantial paper for both Masters. By working towards a strong portfolio during your entire time in the program, you are thereby also preparing your application materials for a career or further education beyond CSUN.

## FAQs

### **Can I pursue both M.A. degrees?**

Although there is some overlap between the M.A. in Linguistics and the M.A. in TESL, there is no shortcut towards getting both Masters since one cannot double-count a course. For example, LING 510 is a required course for the M.A. in TESL as well as for the M.A. in Linguistics. However, the course cannot be counted for both degrees. If – say - an M.A.-TESL student were to also pursue an M.A. in Linguistics, the LING 510 requirement for the M.A. in Linguistics would have to be satisfied by taking a substitute course. Pursuing more than one M.A. degree typically means that one completes one degree and then starts the other, with little overlap in time between the two.

### **Can I get an M.A. in Linguistics as well as a TESL Certificate?**

Yes, you can do both. If you have an undergraduate background in linguistics, you may be able to pursue the certificate without taking any additional classes by dedicating elective courses and core courses for which you qualify for course substitutions to the TESL Certificate. If you do not have a background in linguistics, you should be able to meet the requirements for the certificate by taking two additional courses.

If you are interested in an M.A. in Linguistics with a TESL Certificate, be sure to let the Graduate Advisor know and submit a [Graduate Certificate Enrollment Request](#) to Graduate Studies.

#### **Note: Timing matters!**

You must be enrolled as a graduate student in order to receive a TESL Certificate. In order for the university to process your request for a TESL Certificate, you must initiate the request by March at the latest if you intend to complete the certificate in the Spring Semester and by October if you intend to finish your degree in the Fall Semester. It is best to do the paperwork as soon as you commit to pursuing the TESL Certificate.

### **What if I change my mind: TESL Certificate to M.A.-TESL?**

That is most certainly possible. In that case, check with the Graduate Advisor to determine what the consequences are. In most (but not all) cases, coursework towards the certificate can be applied towards the M.A. To change your status you will need to fill out a [Change of Objective for Currently Enrolled Students](#).

### **What if I change my mind: M.A.-TESL to TESL Certificate?**

That is also possible. Again, discuss the consequences with the Graduate Advisor. Here as well, you must submit a [Graduate Certificate Enrollment Request](#) to Graduate Studies.

#### **Note: Timing matters!**

You must be enrolled as a graduate student in order to receive a TESL Certificate. In order for the university to process your request for a TESL Certificate, you must initiate the request by

March at the latest if you intend to complete the certificate in the Spring Semester and by October if you intend to finish your degree in the Fall Semester. It is best to do the paperwork as soon as you commit to pursuing the TESL Certificate.

### **What if I want to leave and come back at a later time?**

You can take a break from your M.A. or Certificate program at any time for up to two semesters without reapplying to the university ([leave of absence policy](#)). In that case, let the Graduate Advisor know that you are planning a leave of absence and contact her when you return. No paperwork needs to be filed. If you leave for more than two semesters, you must reapply to the program. If you are readmitted, the course work you took **before you left can still count towards your degree as long as the course work was taken within a certain time frame:** All course work towards an M.A. degree must be taken within a seven-year period. (See [time limit for completion](#).) All coursework towards the TESL Certificate (with the exception of the prerequisite introduction to linguistics) must be taken within a five-year period.