I

Kara

Kara is a rising sophomore at Wake Forest. She came to my office to discuss possible majors and career paths, and told me she loved languages but did not feel comfortable majoring in the humanities. In the course of our conversation, her phone beeped several times. Her parents knew of the meeting and did not want her to be inveigled. “[Humanities majors] r [sic] unemployed, unemployable and bound to menial jobs” they texted. She apologized. Her parents valued a liberal arts education, but worried tuition money would go to waste and about the grueling effort it would take to pay back student loans if she opted for a humanities major. The way she saw it, she wanted “to do good and do well, to make use of her languages, make a difference and contribute to change the world, but she also needed to make a good living out of it.”

Kara was born in the 1990s to a white, protestant, urban, upper middle class family. She was part of the Millennial generation, and as such she considered her parents amongst her best friends. She grew up with an always busy schedule, and felt stressed that her generation was likely not going to achieve the levels of comfort that her parents and grandparents had. Kara was risk-averse. She was willing to work and get busy, but needed assurances of success. In her eyes the tension between collective solidarity and individual comfort was a matter of smart choices, not of self-sacrifice towards abstract greater goods or of Quixotic undertakings.

Although not using those words, Kara and her parents were framing the problem in terms of the Crisis of the Humanities and the appositeness of
liberal arts education. They wanted to know if language studies was part of the problem or of the solution and how so.

**A field in quest of its tradition**

Languages in or for the Professions, Languages in Specific Settings or Contexts, the discipline has many names, which is another way of saying it has not yet conquered its tradition. Michael Doyle (2012) made the case for the superiority of “Business Language Studies,” and others have followed suit and used Law and Literature Studies, Medical Language Studies, or Language Studies (LS) for short. For the purposes of this article, Language Studies or LS stand for the study of language, linguistics, discourse and critical analysis as opposed to language studies/study, not capitalized, which refers to the study of language in a narrower and more restrictive sense. Language studies are carried out with a varying perception of kinship, in departments of communication, linguistics, humanities, history, within area studies, in professional schools or in interdisciplinary centers. Tenure-line and contingent-track faculty coexist with professors of the practice, and the field is sometimes referred to also as “languages of the practice.” The use of one term or another signals a preference for one of the various loci where the discipline can operate, the weights people associate to teaching, research, and practice, and particular views of the intellectual tradition and disciplinary ascription of the field.

In the U.S. today, 50 percent of all colleges and universities offer some form of LS course, at the undergraduate, graduate or continuing education levels. Five master programs on interpreting and translation concentrate on military intelligence, medical, legal, or diplomatic settings, and certificates exist at graduate, undergraduate and professional levels. The number of subbaccalaureate language certificates registered in the Department of Education, although small compared to professional ones, doubled from 1,017 to 1,921 in 2000-2010, and hybrid certificates with a language component in the liberal arts, or in interdisciplinary studies have octupled in 2000-2010 from 2,409 to 16,403 and from 380 to 2,312 respectively.1

The European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes, its chapters, annual congress, its Alcaraz prize and devoted journal *Ibérica*, the US-based Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERs) conferences, Biennial Symposium of Language for Specific Purposes and a hefty number of ear-marked grants and funds attest to the vitality of the field. Still, the specialized literature ponders why its institutionalization has not kept pace with similar fields, why advanced language studies seminars are problematic, and why does basic research lag behind.2
Conversations and discourses

Four principal conversations are taking place in LS today: (1) one ponders the specificity of the practice and the taxonomy, location, object of study, methodology and institutionalization of the field; (2) another reflects on its pedagogy and best practices; (3) a third evolves around the issue of the “unsuspecting faculty” who finds him or herself in charge of developing new programs in a complex and opaque environment, with no specialized background for the task; and (4) a fourth focuses on identifying audiences, their needs and how to address them.

Four major discourses inhabit and frame these four conversations. These discourses become active alternatively, depending on the position the speaker assumes for the field: (1) the first sees Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) or Language in Specific Settings (LSS) as a theoretical subfield of applied linguistics stemming from English for Special Purposes (ESP) and Second Language Acquisition; (2) the second imagines Language Studies (LS) as another iteration of Cultural Studies (CS); (3) the third envisions a binomial opposition between language departments and professional language, similar to the one that opposes liberal arts to professional schools: Economics/Business, Political Science/Public Policy, Biochemistry/Medicine, etc.; and (4) the fourth conceives LS as a cross-disciplinary field drawing from linguistics, communication, negotiation, language theory and criticism in order to build bridges to and from non-neighboring disciplines.

Language Studies are also at the center of a recent debate on education where a prevalent view amongst historians and philosophers of education is that four opposing frameworks collide. On the one side, education is conceived as a tool for productivism charged with preparing the nation’s workforce; on another, education is seen as a state institution that helps construct collective identity, solidarity and citizenship practice; a third student-centered view imagines education as a nurturing environment aimed at empowering individuals to thrive in all aspects of their lives; finally, a fourth view sees in education a chief tool for social change. A stereotype of language studies often boxes the field in only one of those views, while in fact there are aspects of the discipline that contribute to each and all of these four objectives.

This essay reports on theoretical research and an experiment conducted in 2013-2014 that targeted language studies stock- and stakeholders broadly. Research consisted of a theoretical inquiry, a series of structured and semi-structured interviews, and a pilot certificate program. Results evidenced different perceptions of what LS is, its locus operandi, audiences and intellectual specificity. By reframing and rephrasing respondent’s answers in interviews, it became apparent that cognitive dissonances and involuntary
associations led to miscommunication and guarded mistrust, which undermined basic research appreciation and enshrouded urgent investigative paths in the field. It is thus possible that pervasive misrepresentations may have trammeled the field’s institutionalization and masked strong evidence of both institutional and market failures.

**Language Studies in practice**

As a discipline, LS shows signs of both maturity and infancy. It has been an active scholarly endeavor for half a century, but its institutionalization has not kept pace with kindred fields homed in academic units less affected by the Crisis of the Humanities. Language departments with which LS is frequently associated, are traditionally divided into literature and linguistics tracks. Their faculty is separated by linguistic specialty or according to temporal and geographic foci: Second-Language Acquisition, Pragmatics, Peninsular Golden Age, Nineteenth Century Mexico, etc. Languages other than English devote lower-level courses to the acquisition of language and catch up with English in upper-level seminars where critical inquiry, language theory, and critical thinking take precedent. LS tends to constitute a third or fourth track in language departments, depending on whether one counts cultural studies and literature as distinct and simultaneously valid.

Language Studies operate midway between schoolwork and professional practice, focuses on language and context, and is cross- and multidisciplinary. Language Studies professionals apply their expertise at interpersonal, corporate, institutional, national or multinational levels. They interpret, mediate, manage and negotiate across cultures and disciplines. They are valuable members of diverse workgroups serving diverse constituencies. Their work is instrumental in negotiating competitive identities and alterity, deciphering practical impacts of representation, constructing or resisting consensus, awakening solidarity and forging community. Language Studies research can take the form of a study seeking to identify best pedagogical practices and resources; a critical inquiry delving into more theoretical aspects of positive, normative and imaginative systems; or a research of the practice striving to meticulously document and link theory and method to practical applications.

The fact that LS operates between schoolwork and professional practice reflects on its expected deliverables. In a school setting, students exercise and produce drafts directed primarily at their instructor. It is assumed that what students do is not at the same level of expertise as what they read, and that their work will not be distributed or put into circulation. In a school setting, students produce private communications. Professional practitioners are pushed to finish products and to put them in circulation to be potentially scrutinized by larger audiences. In a professional practice, communications
are public. They have consequences and entail larger ethical responsibilities. Assignments in an upper-level LS seminar may include not only papers and reports, but collective work, wikis that students have to upload to the Web in several languages, supervised research for external clients, or workshops that students organize at local companies or institutions. Also, internships, externships and laboratories of supervised research are highly valued and opportunities to work abroad are the hallmark of successful programs.

Language Studies are not a contemplative discipline because of its applicability, and it is not an apprenticeship either, because of its level of appreciation, critical thinking and theorization. Language Studies accompany undergraduates in their transition from education to career practice, and if it is true that the bridge LS builds makes the humanities vulnerable to an intrusion of the practical, it is also true that it gives humanists privileged means for incursion into the professional world. Language studies constitute a most fortunate advocate of the liberal arts in the workplace and of the humanities in the disciplines of the applied.

Language Studies focus on context. The most frequent contexts are medical, legal, business, diplomatic and technical, but there are others such as service contexts (police, restaurant, tourism), politics (public speech, government, international affairs), writing (journalism, script and creative writing), or professional academic contexts where the skills to craft scholarly communications, submissions for peer review or grant applications are emphasized.

Language Studies focus on language, but some of the most significant LS research transcends national languages and political borders. It focuses on verbal and non-verbal communication, persuasion and argumentation, rhetoric and discourse analysis. For instance, recent avenues of research investigate the narrativity of collective digital writing and of databases, or inquire about the discursive interpretation of big data generated by prosumers, or write-readers in the post-media era. From the lenses of language studies, literature is highly appreciated but not excessively privileged. Engaging it from an LS perspective still demands criticism, but also involves a systematic inquiry and practice aimed at mastering the techniques of creative and aesthetic expression. Language Studies draw from the insights of cultural studies, but through a principle of “bound skepticism” aimed at determining the brackets of validity within which knowledge systems are truthful and agency can be practiced.

In the classroom, the benefits of working in a different language extend beyond linguistic competence. Students develop skills that are transferable to other languages and settings. The work of John Grandin, director of the International Engineering Program at the University of Rhode Island, is exemplary of how an engineer can double-major in Engineering and Spanish
or German, and then go on to work in an Indian, Chinese or Brazilian setting, and become conversant in another language he or she did not encounter in college, benefiting greatly from the flexibility, cultural intelligence and risk management skills learned through and in the languages of his or her major.

Language Studies are cross- and multidisciplinary because on the one hand it works in the field to examine the discursive practices of other disciplines, and on the other it allows sociological, physiological, psychological, communicational, economic, legal or political methods to inform its explorations. All Language Studies professionals are intercultural interpreters and mediators who work across languages and disciplines, at interpersonal, corporate, institutional, diplomatic and mass-media levels. Thinking with Caes Hamelink (1983), “cultural synchronization” can be either homologizing and reductionist or analogizing, algorithmic and enriching, which then could take the form of “attunement.” The difference depends on how successful professionals can be in sustaining and promoting cultural awareness, and appreciation of cultural subtlety and complexity.

MLA reports as well as empirical research on LS faculty profiles such as Grosse & Voght (1990, 2012) or Long & Uscinski (2012) confirm that lecturers hired on a contingent basis are carrying out most LS instruction. Tenure lines are few and cannot be filled with PhDs in LS because the emerging discipline still lacks specialized doctoral programs. Junior LS faculty are driven, innovative and creative but not necessarily in the field they are hired to spearhead, a task which in addition to teaching and scholarship requires leadership that only the clout and experience of a senior faculty is likely to achieve. The administrative duties, high profile, and controversial decisions required in those positions often puts junior faculty in a precarious position when tenure review is conducted.

As both Grosse & Voght (2012) and Long & Uscinski (2012) point out, the first motivation for departments to implement LS programs is to respond to student demand and attract new majors. However, once implemented, the biggest challenge and first reason to discontinue those programs is precisely lack of student enrollment. This apparent paradox, the leadership trap described earlier, and too little tolerance for necessary false steps in the road to success of pilot programs, may be inadvertently setting up for failure some LS positions unintentionally burdened with unfair or unrealistic expectations. Some academic institutions address the issue through flexible positions. Professorships of the practice are offered to candidates with outstanding experience outside academia who can organize intern- and externships, as well as productive alliances with other industries and institutions. Their positions are often hybrid, combining research, teaching and administrative duties.

As Long & Uscinski (2012) point out, large public universities with professional schools are more likely to offer LS programs. Joint appointments
in such environments are another way of enabling faculty to implement LS programs from an interdisciplinary unit or center, with one foot, for example, in a communication or language department and another in a professional school, a structure that research universities may find convenient because of the flexibility and dynamism they allow, and the access they open to extramural research resources and corporate partnerships.

II

Optimization and productivism of Language Studies

Language Studies were born in a time of conflict, within a framework of process optimization and productivism, imagined in parallel by minds only partially aware of each other.

In diplomacy, recognizing inefficiencies of US diplomats working with allies between 1946 and 1956, the US Foreign Service Institute and the Department of State hired some of the best linguists and anthropologists to train members of the Foreign Service in linguistic and communicative skills. Rather than traditional broad topics taught to college students, the task was to focus on small elements of culture, and on the role of non-verbal communication in social interaction. As research progressed, it became apparent that the magic recipe for cross-cultural communication the Institute was expecting was unrealistic. The program was discontinued in 1956, but some of the research conducted under its sponsorship and published by Edward Hall in *The Silent Language* (1959) helped to initiate the field of intercultural communication.

In trade, in 1946 business language courses became part of a tripartite, integrated curriculum including business, language, and regional/cultural studies at the American Institute of Foreign Trade, presently the Thunderbird School of Global Management (Branan, 1988, cited in Doyle, 2012, 105). Curriculum development in language in specific settings was identified as a priority and earmarked federal funds percolated through the Departments of Commerce, Labor, Justice, Health, Education, State and, more recently, Homeland Security. Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965 guaranteed Congress appropriations for international and foreign language education. Those appropriations help fund studies, reports and, with the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act of 1988, they also funded thirty four Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERs) across the US in 2014.4

In the UK, government funds sponsored research seeking to find ways in which to streamline language acquisition and communication, but instead of different national languages this type of research focused on English competence for adequate job performance in the UK and throughout the
Commonwealth. In 1964, Halliday, Macintosh and Strevens’ *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* called for linguists to carry out research based on samples of language in specific contexts to develop appropriate pedagogical materials and translation tools, which opened the path to the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Half a century later, numerous glossaries and textbooks unveiling field-specific idiosyncrasies have been developed in response to its call, and computer-assisted translation tools (CATs) have transformed technical translation and localization, as well as streamlined edition processes and publishing workflows that are critical to the circulation of information in the Web.

Mass-media communication prompted serious academic inquiry since the spread of broadcasting in the 1920s. The alignment of social opinion was key in all world wars, often under the form of propaganda. The U.S. effectiveness in aligning its military complex and foreign diplomacy with trade interests and large media conglomerates has produced, for instance, a powerful structure of worldwide dissemination of U.S. values and interests. Carlos Scolari (2009) distinguishes three paradigms in mass-media research: the critical, based on the Frankfurt School; the empirical of the American School; and the interpretative/cultural which focuses on mediation, consumption, and negotiation practices, and whose most iconic thinkers are in Latin America and Great Britain.

Language Studies has inquired in fields that include entertainment and cultural industries, government, media, and authorship & copyright studies. Different national cultures, distinct co-cultures within nations, or specific disciplinary discourses have been the focus of these critical investigations. For instance, the works of D. McCloskey and Martha Woodmansee are credited with initiating the field of New Economic Criticism; George Lakoff’s *Metaphors We Live By* (2003) illustrates some of the research being carried out today in government contexts; and William Gartner’s entrepreneurial narrative theory (2009, 2010) is exemplary of research in business and entrepreneurship contexts.

With the end of the Cold War, the drive for optimization as key to establishing preeminence in the globalized world order ceded its place to the discourse of “the end of history” or the unchallenged supremacy of capitalism and the market. Under these new circumstances, a capitalist perspective became paramount and the vision and mission of liberal arts education, the humanities and international language programs found themselves off mark and urged to overhaul their education model.

The “Crisis of the Humanities” is a complex multivariate phenomenon. For our purposes it will be circumscribed to the drop in humanities majors between 1970 and 1984 in US education, and to the Culture Wars of 1965-1995.
Languages in crisis

Between 1960 and 1980 the relative proportion of language majors in the United States dropped significantly and has not recovered since. In absolute terms, the number of majors has increased but at a much slower pace than the growth in college enrollment. The number of undergraduates registering for language classes tripled between 1960-2009 from 608,749 to 1,629,326, but these figures mask strong evidence of more substantive decline. Of the students described above, only 22 percent were enrolled in advanced courses in a foreign language. In relative terms, the proportion of baccalaureate majors in language-based disciplines, compared to other majors, dropped dramatically between 1970 and 1984. In English, it was halved from 7.64 to 3.74 percent and in other languages, excluding Spanish, by almost two-thirds from 2.8 to 1.05 percent (1966-2004). Spanish alone has seen an increase in graduating majors, and now represents 40 percent of foreign language bachelor of arts degrees.

While the number of males majoring in a language dropped fifty percent between 1966-2004 (from 1.49 to 0.7 percent), the proportion of females fell by three-quarters (from 5.1 to 1.3 percent). The historical over-representation of women in language-based disciplines has largely disappeared as young women have increasingly chosen to abandon the humanities for majors in business, economics, government, and the medical and natural sciences. In response, the MLA has coordinated two reports (2007 and 2009) that eloquently summarized the situation by saying that “the two-tiered configuration [literature, linguistics] ha[d] outlived its usefulness and need[d] to evolve” (MLA 2007, 237 and 2009, 21 Geisler Kramsch McGinnis Patrikis Pratt Ryding & Saussy 234-245).

III

Wake Forest University

Wake Forest has responded to the perceived disconnection between liberal arts education and the immediate job market with a top down strategy. In 2009, President Nathan Hatch envisioned an undergraduate experience in which students would gain “both an academic and also a career education” by utilizing all four years to help students learn about themselves and their options in the world of work. The strategy of investing in accompanying students in their transition from college to their professional life and making results visible quickly paid off. In terms of first job placement, by 2013 Wake Forest proudly publicized that 95 percent of the class of 2012 was either employed full-time or attending graduate school within six months after
graduation, a number expected to reach 99 percent by 2014 (Chan 2013). These numbers stand in sharp contrast with the 50 percent of Liberal Arts majors in research-intensive public universities who report still struggling to find a job eighteen months after graduation.

Parallel to President Hatch imagining and championing this new campus culture, the Piedmont Triad Partnership (PTP) awarded a $500,000.00 grant to Wake Forest to develop a medical interpreter program “aimed at training community college faculty, and at establishing an associate or master degree in Spanish Language Medical Interpreting.” As with other similar programs, the PTP grant had been itself funded through a U.S. Department of Labor’s Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant, under its Health Care Innovation Grant program, and the School-to-Work Act of 1994.

After a one-year pilot, it was decided that the program would offer a master’s degree with possible tracks in translation and localization, interpreting, and non-language specific health-services. Parallel to the master’s, Wake Forest was interested in offering three Business Language certificates in French, German and Spanish, and one more in Spanish for Health Services. The following pages report on the interviews and pilot that were conducted to assess the optimal structure for the Spanish certificates.

In marketing, a common strategy distinguishes between internal and external clients. M.F. Tebano-Basaluzzo (2004), for instance, follows that framework to understand the needs and wants of students (external) and departments (internal). This approach makes a better understanding of these constituencies possible and allows us to see the limitations of task-oriented communicative approaches in developing advanced and superior language competence. However, this approach is of no avail to uncloak other equally important audiences such as parents, alumni, potential employers, academic units different from departments, and social constituencies at state, national and global levels. Building on the internal/external binomial, potential employers could be thought of as a quasi-external audience, alumni and parents as quasi-internal, and a third type of social and quasi-social audiences could complete the triad as well.

**External audiences**

Students interviewed attended either a conventional language-oriented class, a pilot in the form of a standard disciplinary class of an economic subject in Spanish, or a class in an ad hoc tailored curriculum that included intercultural and interdisciplinary communication, conflict management and negotiation, discourse analysis, intercultural entrepreneurship, and cultural intelligence (leadership) theory and practice.
As predicted by recent empirical data, most LS students were women, but there were fewer relative to men, 6 to 4, compared to the master’s where the ratio was as high as 15 to 1. There are not many international students from Spanish-speaking countries at Wake Forest University, but many of them showed interest in and/or registered for LS classes. One in three students in the class was a heritage speaker. Most were from white Anglo-Saxon Protestant and affluent backgrounds (classic Millennials); 10 percent were African-American, and 10 percent also were first-generation in college for whom typical Millennial characteristics often do not apply (Bonner 2011). Because of the very peculiar composition of the Hispanic migrants in the state of North Carolina, in the pilot class there were Mexican nationals of African descent which defied color-of-the-skin stereotyping. Academic interests varied. Most students were double-majoring in Spanish and business, law, health studies, international relations or area studies.

Results showed that students do not know what they are going to get until they get it. Similar to going to a theater to watch a movie, students have to buy a ticket before they know if they are going to like the show or not. Of course moviegoers have trailers, but they often will not see them when they feel they know what the movie is about. Language Studies are mostly an experience that is good. Students discover their preferences as they engage with the material, not before, and behave as Bayesian actors in that they discover their needs and wants through practice, in a hands-on process of trial and error, similar to scientific experimentation, a pedagogy that Michel Serres calls procedural and algorithmic (2012, 69-71).

Before taking the course, 90 percent reported they wanted to continue to use their Spanish language skills. 75 percent were returning from a semester abroad or were about to leave for one. Less than two in ten, 18 percent, reported that they disliked literature. 85 percent expressed that they were seeking more variety from the department offerings. 10 percent said they would take more classes based on aesthetics rather than on social aspects of culture or mere language, had the department offered them. And the vast majority, 95 percent, said they wanted to learn how to apply their linguistic and cultural skills outside of the classroom. Overall, 95 percent linked language classes positively to their goals of studying, living, or doing intern- and externships abroad, and to increasing their chances of finding a better job.

Students started the semester expecting high levels of structure, detailed instructions and prompts. They had very little tolerance for ambiguity and did not see failure as necessary to their learning experience. The most difficult challenge students reported was working professionally both because they were not used to exposing their work to a level of public scrutiny, and because the way non-native speakers had acquired their linguistic skills was not
serving them well to reach the advanced and superior levels of competence that professional practice required.

In retrospect, students who took traditional language-based courses felt they were easy. Focusing on language the way they did, seemed to them to correspond to intermediate language classes, or conversation courses which did not require the same level of attention to detail that upper-level seminars did. When instructors in those classes attempted to present substantive content, students felt they knew more than the instructor, or questioned the speed at which the contents of their textbooks became outdated.

Students who took the substantive content class in Spanish worked more with journal articles and case studies. Native English speakers were anxious about their grade since they felt that they had to go through a double layer of difficulty. Foreign-born Spanish natives welcomed the opportunity of following one class in their specialty without the added difficulty of English. They reported that the experience opened a fruitful conversation and made them more attuned to the perspective of foreign classmates. Heritage speakers felt they had found a niche in which they had a comparative advantage on which they could build a career.

Students who took the tailored curricula were the most satisfied. Most reported that they learned skills they did not expect, which they found extremely useful afterwards. They mentioned that they not only learned about the material but about themselves, how to better negotiate their professional identity, be flexible, and take risks. Another aspect that was mentioned often was a surprise at realizing how much the humanities were interconnected and could enrich other disciplines. Alumni who took LS classes were pursuing graduate work, or working in finance, health, government, law, entertainment, and business in general. In spite of the enormous shortage of language teachers in K-16 (Abbot 2014), only 10 percent reported being interested in exploring a career in education because of the low pay. Not surprisingly, most of the people who showed an interest in LS courses were graduate students.

There are no doctoral programs in the United States that specialize in LS, the growing demand has not been met, while PhDs in conventional language tracks are minted at a higher pace than the academic job market can absorb. As more large research universities join in and more LS doctoral programs are implemented, students, practitioners and society will all be better served.

Quasi-external audiences

Students at Wake Forest have access to a series of tools to help them in their job search, and the university’s career center keeps track of alumni effectively in order to foster a professional network. Typing Spanish, full-time job, and a salary between $20,000 and $120,000 as search terms in one of Wake’s search engines, brings back over 50 thousand valid postings
nationwide. The data shows that potential jobs for language majors and minors are located in the private, government and social sectors, and while they vary widely by type of industry (see for example Two Roads Diverged in a Wood 2014), they seem to cluster in three nodes: (1) 49 percent are entry-level positions that pay $55,000 or less, mostly in services and general management in a large variety of fields including social services and health, law and law enforcement, tourism and restaurant, sales, marketing and customer service; (2) 24 percent are in education with salaries averaging $50,000 for elementary and middle school, and $63,000 for postsecondary teachers; and (3) 19 percent are high-paying jobs of more than $80,000 in law, public policy, and upper-managerial positions that can eventually reach salaries in the tens of millions for senior corporate managers.

Considering potential employers is important not only to better align curriculum to their needs and ensure that what a given program offers is beneficial for all, but also because they are partners in corporate research, outreach, intern, and externships. They eventually become patrons of the program supporting its endowment, supporting chairs, facilities, or study-abroad components. As with students, potential employers do not always know what they need until they hire it. Their strategic alliance with research universities guarantees they are going to have access to highly qualified recruits and be at the forefront of innovation and the conversations that matter in their field. It is a university responsibility to inform potential employers and corporate partners, and make them aware of the value of a sound, broad, deep, and flexible education.

Consistent with the findings of the Hart Report to the AAC&U on Employers Priorities for College Learning and Student Success (2013), our sample confirmed that “two out of three employers believe most college graduates have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in entry-level positions; [but] feel fewer graduates have what it takes to advance.” Thirty percent of the firms interviewed mentioned that candidates needed to have solid and broad foundations, a general education, and general language skills that they were not going to have time to learn at work. They felt specialized know-how could be acquired on site or through technical workshops.

Textual, audiovisual, and graphic reading/writing were mentioned often as highly desired skills. For example, in the job description for a “Bilingual or Trilingual International Business Risk and Control Manager,” the hiring officer expected that the applicant “be able to identify and interpret relevant intercultural information to mitigate risk, and communicate it effectively verbally and through written documents and relevant visuals and graphs.” When deciding which candidate to interview, familiarity with the university and references seemed to play an important role, followed by qualifications, résumé and internships. Out of sixteen choices, employers overwhelmingly
selected six, although not in the same order, as the most valuable elements they were looking for:

- **Analytical skills**, the ability to separate valuable information from noise, and understand, describe, make sense, evaluate and synthesize that information;
- **Ethics and integrity**, the capacity to demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity in line with their workplace, society and field of specialization;
- **Innovation and creativity**, understood as the intellectual and interpersonal skills and flexibility that help contribute to innovation and creativity in the workplace;
- **Intercultural communication and negotiation competence**, the faculty to identify when cultural elements might be influencing communication, and know how to address, manage or resolve those issues;
- **Linguistic competence**, the ability to perform their expertise in a language-other-than-English environment; understand, communicate orally and in writing, and work effectively with multilingual populations in the United States or abroad; and
- **A portfolio or internship** that demonstrates the candidate’s analytical skills, research ability, real-world experience and teamwork.

Smaller or newer firms were less sensitized to the value of culture, the liberal arts and the humanities, and tended to focus more on practical toolsets to solve urgent problems. Larger organizations with a greater number of high-level executive positions and international managers tended to appreciate those benefits more, perhaps because they had more jobs that required those skills.

Consistent with the results of the report of the AAC&U on how Majors Fare in Employment, higher paying jobs that mention language competence also mention additional experience and education beyond college. During free-form follow-up interviews potential employers seemed to distinguish between two types of jobs: “self-effacement” and leadership positions. Professionals in interpreting, translation and localization, for example, were expected to produce work that was supposed to be as invisible as possible. Whether interpreting in a courtroom or in a medical setting, or translating materials directed at culturally diverse constituencies, work was supposed to be transparent and attract the least possible attention to the worker. On the other hand, engaging with people in corporate training, designing marketing campaigns, providing services to culturally diverse clients, or managing international and multicultural groups required leadership skills and high visibility.
The humanities go to the market

Language Studies is an inter discipline with components that draw from the humanities, the social sciences, and the disciplines of the practice. A recent report to the Association for American Colleges and Universities (AACU 2014) presents a positive picture of how the liberal arts fare in the job market, showing that humanities majors are both employable and employed, and that they do well in the job market when compared to the early specialization of professional and pre-professional tracks.

The report shows that humanities and social science majors initially earn less than their counterparts in professional and STEM tracks, but catch up by mid-career and earn more thereafter than those who specialized early and opted for a professional track only. Two contributing factors as to why people in the humanities and the social sciences earn less in the 21-30 age group are first, that they tend to stay in school longer and to start their first job much later; and second, they also tend to continue their education further. Forty percent of people with a bachelor’s in humanities or the social sciences earn an advanced degree, as compared to 30 percent of their peers in professional tracks. Their graduate school earnings bump is also significantly higher which accounts for most of the gains in the differential median income. The AAC&U report shows that people with bachelor degrees in the humanities and social sciences are over-represented in the social services sector, and that a fair amount of them cluster also in high paid jobs in law, government, business, and health. Further research needs to be conducted to explore how a combination of majors and graduate field of specialization affect those results. However, one can still conclude that presenting LS as a track of early specialization is not only misleading but also doing the discipline a disservice. It is misleading because students and colleagues may get the wrong impression that LS competence is easier and simpler than others. It is a disservice because, as the AACU 2014 report points out, early specializers in professional tracks find their first job faster, but end up earning less than their counterparts, are less likely to pursue graduate degrees, and when they do, those degrees tend to signify little in terms of salary jump for their careers.

Internal audiences

Over a four-month period, 65 structured and unstructured interviews of incumbent faculty and staff were conducted. Most participants were aware of the growing importance of the LS field, but how they felt about it varied.

Administration was enthusiastic and supportive, but also unaware of the difficulties proper to the field. They showed surprise, for example, and wondered “why a textbook is not chosen amongst the many that surely must exist, and classes and programs are designed accordingly.” When presented
with five alternatives describing the possible institutional shapes LS could take, they overwhelmingly chose the last, more conventional option:

- mixing professional and community practitioners with regular full-time students in evening classes;
- language across the curriculum (LAC) which entails language units structured in parallel to other disciplinary courses taught in English;
- multilevel courses welcoming in the same classroom graduate and undergraduates;
- establishment of an alliance with other professional schools, or academic departments in pre-existing interdisciplinary programs or center, or constitution of a new one; or combining modules on medical, business, and legal settings in one class and then aiming at growing the program into a certificate, a minor, or a major.

After being presented with information that showed the difficulty of implementing LS in a conventional environment, administrators turned to regulations, worried about resources and eventually deferred to the leadership of senior faculty to start the ball rolling.

Faculty, on the other hand, were also aware and recognized the growing importance of LS, but when probed further, two out of three voiced moderate concerns about its implementation and 14.6 percent strong opposition or serious skepticism about the place of “language for the professions” in a college education. Faculty comments varied depending on seniority and fields of specialization. Some assumed they would have to teach those classes, while others that such courses would cannibalize enrollment of their own classes. Lecturers who provided most language instruction, voiced apprehension about teaching material they felt unprepared for and about having to address quantitative or economic models they were unfamiliar with. Junior untenured faculty appeared to be the most receptive and supportive, although they were very aware that they had no vote in the matter. Senior professors where next in voicing their support, and recently tenured faculty were the most skeptical and resistant. In an anonymous poll, support and skepticism had an even number of supporters and detractors, which suggests that what people say in person may not be a good predictor of how they would actually vote in a secret ballot.

Regarding field of specialization, literature and cultural studies faculty alike voiced concerns about the difficulty level of the classes that they assumed were unchallenging. Three respondents recalled how struggling English students in middle and high schools in the public education system had been redirected to simplified programs euphemistically called “Business English” or directed to vocational schools. Four respondents voiced strong skepticism as of whether those seminars covered “more than a glossary of
terms, intermediate grammar and readings beyond functional comprehension of the basic facts of a text.” This group showed the most anxiety about possible repercussions for language departments and faculty job security. Three resented the term “professional” arguing that by implication humanistic academic activity was deemed “unprofessional,” while 50 percent of this subgroup associated Language Studies to general threats to “liberal arts education,” “aesthetic appreciation,” “more rigorous cultural studies” or to “the humanities.” Three out of four considered LS would have little to no impact in recruiting majors, which was “a fundamental goal of all classes in language departments,” and two wondered if LS was not better suited as a curricular offering within a Business or Law school. Both general linguists and faculty in professional or applied areas acknowledged “the growing market” for medical and business Spanish, and mentioned diplomatic, public policy, legal, and general service settings. Three of them noted the ambiguity of the terms “professional” at an undergraduate level and questioned whether undergraduate instruction could equate with professional certifications that were designed to test professionals in their field “with years of experience and practice hours, and with often more advanced linguistic competence.”

Social audiences

The importance of the humanities in preparing students to live a more full, enjoyable and meaningful life, and in being better citizens of our new globally interconnected society, are more evident from perspectives that see education as a means to empower individuals, foster solidarity, and advance social change. These qualities are less apparent from a productivist perspective that imagines that education prepares a workforce to meet the demands of economic growth. However, even from that perspective, one can note that a fundamental source of revenue for an academic discipline—on which its institutionalization, endowment, and future permanence are based—, comes from grants and donations of social institutions. Wake Forest’s Interpreting and Translation Studies master’s program initial grant is not exceptional in that sense.

The reasons why public and private funds are available for LS programming is not because of mere altruism. It is because the field helps those constituencies achieve their social/economic mission and goals. Language Studies graduates are multilingual, culturally-aware, communication, and negotiation savvy individuals that our global society needs and wants. Even people who have not taken LS classes are better off because those classes exist, in the same way any group benefits from the vaccines each individual is inoculated with. The funds that social constituencies bring are accompanied by a commitment of accountability and external checks and balances which
constitute one of the main tools a leader spearheading the discipline’s institutionalization can count on to overcome resistance of interest groups concerned with losing part of their turf and also of administrators worried about budgets.

Conclusions

From a review of the literature, this article has schematized the different conversations and discourses of the field broadly called Language Studies. It has identified how different frameworks are related to how the field is conceived and to which disciplines LS is thought to be ascribed in its methodologies. The traditional notion of dividing audiences following a biome internal/external, was extended to include social audiences and quasi categories between them.

By noting that while the field has a least six major stake- and stockholders but that most decision-making was handled by just one, where most skepticism and resistance to change resides, we suggested the institutionalization of the field lagged in part because of that institutional and strategic failure. Promoting awareness, flexible joint or hybrid positions, extramural funds, and the involvement of private and public constituencies were identified to be the best tools a progressive and decisive senior faculty leadership could use to overcome that failure.

Language Studies, as probably other disciplines in the humanities and the liberal arts, presented both public and experience good characteristics: on the one hand, there were indications of a strong social and economic demand for LS professionals, which the system undersupplies (public good); on the other, students and potential employers did not act as rational actors seeking to maximize their needs and wants, but discovered what their needs and preferences were only after finding out what the field is and how much they stood to benefit from it. Rather than choosing rationally, both students and employers seemed to be following a Bayesian practice through which they were discovering information about themselves and their preferences (experience good).

Language Studies were also shown to be housed in a panoply of departments, interdisciplinary units or centers, with loose awareness of kinship. This fact both reaffirmed the need for leadership in the field, and the problem of institutional failure described by Mancur Olson in his theory of social groups.

Finally, the LS discipline was seen to be partially defined by the fact that it was born in a context of optimization and productivism, and had later been associated with a productivist view of education as the means to prepare the nation’s workforce. However, this essay argued that the best
examples of language studies go beyond that functionalist view and draw heavily on imaginative, critical thinking, discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and negotiations skills that the discipline takes from its ascription to the humanities and the liberal arts.

Coming back to Kara’s initial question, yes, LS is part of the solution, and, no, it is not a replacement or simplification of what language departments and the humanities do traditionally, but a complement and an ally towards a new reinvigorated form of humanism.
WORKS CITED


*It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success*. Association of American Colleges and Universities. April, 2013. Print. AAC&U’s National Surveys of Employers.


NOTES

1 With data from NCES WebCASPAR


4 A full list of CIBERs can be found at http://ciberweb.msu.edu/institutions/