

**Instructor**

Nicholas LaCara

Email: [nlacara@linguist.umass.edu](mailto:nlacara@linguist.umass.edu)

Office: South College 303

Hours: Tuesday, Time TBA

**Location & Time**

Room: Dickinson 110

Day: Monday, Wednesday, &amp; Friday

Time: 11:15 AM – 12:05 PM

Website: [moodle.umass.edu](http://moodle.umass.edu)**1 Overview**

This course introduces the essential building blocks of language and explores the guidelines that govern them. We examine the sound systems through which language is expressed and discover how these bits of sound are structured into word-like and sentence-like units. Students are introduced to a wide variety of natural language phenomena drawn from languages not only closely resembling English but also many which appear to be quite different, such as those native to the Americas, Africa, Australia and the South Pacific. Special emphasis is placed on phonology (how sounds are arranged into words), morphology (how prefixes and suffixes attach to words), syntax (how words are arranged into sentences), and semantics (how meaning is derived from sentences).

**1.1 Goals**

This class aims to do several things. One goal of this course is to provide an introduction to the basic methodology and results of modern linguistics. This means that it will provide you with a beginning understanding of how human language works and a basic knowledge of the properties that languages share. We'll focus on developing, evaluating, and improving hypotheses about the language user's unconscious linguistic knowledge. This class should prepare you for further coursework in linguistics.

**1.2 General Education Requirements**

This course fulfills the Analytic Reasoning (R2) requirement of the General Education curriculum. A large part of what you'll be doing in this course involves finding patterns in natural language data, making generalizations about that data, and constructing a sound logical argument. Skills such as working through complex data and forming abstract generalizations are applicable far beyond linguistics, and one of the goals in this class is to help develop these skills.

**2 Textbook**

There is no assigned textbook for this course! Readings and other resources will be available from the website. Both reading and homework assignments will be drawn primarily from the following texts:

- *Language Files*, Various Editions. Ohio State University Press
- Fromkin, Victoria, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams. 2007. *An Introduction to Language*. Boston: Wadsworth Publishing.
- O'Grady, William, John Archibald, Mark Aronoff, and Janie Rees-Miller. 2010. *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction*, Sixth Edition. Boston: Bedford St. Martins.

Interested students should feel free to find these books if they are curious about the material, but be forewarned: The content of these books *will* deviate from (or even contradict) what we do in class!

### 3 Sections

There are no sections for this course.

### 4 Course Requirements

#### 4.1 Homework

Your grade in this course will be based primarily on homework assignments. Homework will generally be assigned weekly. These assignments will not usually be lengthy. They are assigned in order to help both you and me assess your progress in the course.

Homework will normally be assigned on Friday and will be due the following Wednesday. I will try to return it by the following Friday. You must hand your work in to me, on paper, in class. I do not accept homework by email unless you have arranged it with me beforehand.

Here are the things I'll be looking for in written work. A written assignment should be:

NEAT   CLEAR   CAREFUL   THOROUGH

Neatness should be self-explanatory. Clarity is mainly about the quality of your writing but, in this course, will also concern the relation between what you write and certain formal representations which we will adopt, as well as argument and reasoning. In the next few weeks we will point out things that you need to be careful and thorough about.

##### 4.1.1 Grading

Each homework will receive a letter grade. Grades will be assigned on the following scale.

- A grade of **A** represents truly outstanding work that thoroughly meets or exceeds all expectations for an assignment.
- A grade of **B** represents work that thoughtfully addresses all of the requirements of the assignment, though perhaps imperfectly.
- A grade of **C** represents work that might have some problems or imperfections, or is not entirely complete.
- A grade of **D** represents passing work that barely addresses the requirements of an assignment.
- A grade of **F** is poor and does not satisfy the basic requirements of the assignment.
- A grade of **o** is for assignments that are not turned in or are of such poor quality to be considered negligible.

Final grades will be calculated by averaging over these grades (along with exam grades—see §4.2). A student with an average less than **D** should expect a failing grade in the course.

In addition to the letter grades, assignments will be returned with written comments to tell you where you did well, where you need improvement, and to explain the final grade. You are expected to read these comments.

#### 4.1.2 Collaboration & Working Together

In this course, you are encouraged to work together on assignments. Since it is completely new, students often find the material difficult when they attempt to do it on their own. Many report that they understand the material better when they talk to other students about it. Therefore, you should work with others as you engage with the material and the assignments.

That said, the work you turn in must be your own. You may take your own notes while you work on an assignment with others, but you may not, under any circumstances, have somebody else's work in front of you when you write up your assignment! Doing so is considered cheating and will be dealt with as a case of academic dishonesty ([see below](#)).

It is easy to avoid this:

- Do not write your assignment while working with others; instead take notes and write it up separately.
- Do not reference other students' work when you write up your assignment.
- Write your assignments in your own words.
- Do not let other students see your work when they write up their assignments.
- Clearly indicate on your assignment who you collaborated with.

Remember that something as simple as discussing your notes with another student counts as collaboration.

A word of advice: Do not depend too heavily on those you work with. You must learn how to deal with the material yourself, as you will not be able to work with others during exams.

#### 4.1.3 Late work

You may turn in any assignment late, without notice, on the class meeting after it is due. However, the highest grade it will be able to receive is a **C**. If it is not turned in by that time, the assignment will automatically be a **D**.

Exceptions to this policy will be made for medical and personal emergencies, as well as for sports travel and games, for religious observances, and any other extenuating circumstance recognized by the university. You should be able to provide documentation for any medical excuses. If you know ahead of time that you will not be able to get an assignment in on time, you should let me know as soon as you can so we can work out arrangements beforehand.

#### 4.2 Exams

There will be two exams in this course. The purpose of the exams is to ensure that you are learning the material and can recall and apply concepts introduced in this class without outside help.

Each exam will be divided into three parts, and each part will be equivalent to one homework assignment. Thus, each exam will be worth three homework assignments. There will be an array of question types on the exams: multiple choice, short answers, and problem sets. The second exam will not be cumulative.

You will not be able to refer to your notes or other course materials during the exams, nor will you be able to confer or collaborate with other students. If you [cheat](#) during an exam, you will receive a grade of **D**.

As with turning in late homework assignments, please make arrangements with me if you are unable to take exams on the scheduled dates. You will need to let me know at least one week in advance.

#### 4.3 Reading

You will be asked to do occasional reading assignments to supplement class lectures. Reading assignments will be made available on the website.

#### 4.4 Attendance & Participation

You are responsible for your attendance. Attendance and participation in this class do not count directly toward your grade. However, since there is no textbook and since lectures and material distributed in class will form the basis for homework and exams, you will find it very difficult (if not impossible) to pass this class if you do not attend regularly.

I will expect you to participate in class discussions, to answer questions in class, and to ask questions yourself. You should do this—it is a chance to seek clarification and to test new ideas before you are responsible for them on an assignment or an exam.

#### 4.5 Extra Credit

There will be chances for extra credit in this course. The Department of Linguistics runs a number of experiments throughout the semester, and participation in these experiments will earn you extra credit points. To sign up for an experiment, go to:

<http://webcgi.oit.umass.edu/~linguist/esdb/>

The person running the experiment will usually give you a slip saying that you participated in an experiment. You will need to bring that to me to receive credit. Sometimes, the experimenter will send me an email instead. Each half-hour of experiment counts as one third of an assignment, and you may participate in up to an hour and a half of experiments for extra credit. This means that, in principle, you can convert one **o** into an **A** by doing extra credit.

This is the only way to earn extra credit in this course. If you ask for extra credit, I will tell you to participate in an experiment.

Be aware that the labs get very busy at the end of the semester, and it is not always possible to guarantee that you will be able to participate in an experiment during the last few weeks of semester. This means you should sign up for experiments as early as possible.

### 5 Communicating with Me

There are several ways to get a hold of me. You can drop by my office hours (posted above) without notice, or, if you need, you can set up an appointment with me for some other time. If you can't make it to my office, feel free to email me at any time ([nlacara@linguist.umass.edu](mailto:nlacara@linguist.umass.edu)).

#### 5.1 Getting Help

I want all of my students to do well in this course. If you find you are having trouble or you think you are falling behind, get in touch with me. And don't put it off! The longer you wait, the harder it will be to get back on track.

## 6 Academic Honesty

I take cheating very seriously. Cases of suspected cheating or plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the University's policy on academic honesty, which can be found at:

[http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)

For a first-time offense, students caught cheating on an exam or an assignment (*and any collaborators*) may receive a zero grade on that assignment and will be reported to Academic Honesty Office. A similar policy applies to exams. Repeat offenders will fail the course.

## 7 Calendar

This is a preliminary outline of the course, subject to change as necessary!

Week	Dates	Topics & Notes
1	January 23, 25	Fields of Linguistics; Linguistic Descriptivism
2	Jan 28, 30; Feb 1	Phonetics
3	February 4, 6, 8	Phonetics
4	February 11, 13, 15	Phonetics & Phonology
5	Feb 19 (Tues), 20, 22	Phonology; Monday is a Holiday, Tuesday is a UMass Monday.
6	Feb 25, 27; Mar 1	Phonology
7	March 4, 6, 8	Morphology & Phonology
8	March 11, 17, 15	Exam 1 on March 11th; TBA (Nick in Germany)
SB	March 16 – 24	Spring Break!
9	March 25, 27, 29	Morphology of English
10	April 1, 3, 5	Syntax
11	April 8, 10, 12	Syntax
12	April 17, 19	Syntax, Semantics; Monday is a holiday, Wednesday is a UMass monday.
13	April 22, 24, 26	Semantics
14	April 29; May 1	Semantics

**Exam 2** will be scheduled during finals week, in accordance with the university policy on exams. It will **not** be a cumulative final. The date and time will be announced at <http://www.umass.edu/registrar/students/registration/final-exams> as well as on [SPIRE](#).