

Linguistics

UC Santa Cruz

2013 Undergraduate Alumni Spotlight

Micah Smith, a Language Studies alum, studies Speech Pathology at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston

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Alumni --
Where are they now?

New Faculty Members Hired!

Two talented young faculty members joined our ranks recently and their presence has re-connected the department with an important aspect of its history. Both do cutting-edge theoretical research on Native American languages and both are committed to the communities who speak those languages. Amy Rose Deal's work spans the syntax-semantics interface and the interface between syntax and word-building. Much of her research focuses on the Nez Perce language and is grounded in the fieldwork that she carries out with the Nez Perce community in Idaho. Maziar Toosarvandani also works both in syntax and in semantics. Much of his research draws on his fieldwork on Northern Paiute, an endangered language of eastern California. He has been documenting the Mono Lake dialect of Northern Paiute, in collaboration with the Mono Lake community. These appointments represent a re-commitment by the department to Native American languages and to the legacy of the late William Shipley, a founding faculty member and a distinguished scholar of the languages of California.

Yale University	Ryan Bennett
Brown University	Scott AnderBois
Stanford University	Vera Gribanova
Wayne State Univ.	Robert Henderson
William & Mary	Anya Lunden
Univ. of Calif.- Berkeley	Line Mikkelsen
University of Georgia	Vera Lee-Schoenfeld
Swarthmore	Nathan Sanders
Boston University	Peter Alrenga
Georgetown University	Ruth Kramer
Johns Hopkins University	Kyle Rawlins
University of Utah	Abby Kaplan Aaron Kaplan



Alumni Spotlight: An interview with Micah Smith

Micah Smith graduated with the BA in Language Studies in Spring 2008. She is now pursuing a graduate qualification in Speech Pathology at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. We talked to Micah about what she was doing and what her advice would be for students who wanted to follow a similar path.

Ling Dept: Micah, could you tell us what your current academic situation is? What program are you engaged in? How far along are you?

Micah: I currently attend the Massachusetts General Hospital Institute of Health Professions (MGH Institute) in Boston, MA. I am in my second year of a two year Master's program in Communication Sciences and Disorders or (CSD), A.K.A. Speech-Language Pathology (SLP).

Ling: What are your current projects?

Micah: In addition to taking classes one day a week (Voice Disorders; Physiology, Acoustics and Perception of Speech), I have a clinical placement in the Autism Language Program at Boston Children's Hospital, where I am learning how to evaluate the communication of mostly minimally verbal children with autism.

Ling: Are there projects you're engaged in which go beyond the core requirements for your degree?

Micah: Yes, I am doing an Autism concentration, which involves working on a thesis about acoustic correlates of varying degrees of emotion in prosody. I also work part time with a professor who is working on an electromyographically controlled electrolarynx (EMG-EL) for laryngectomy patients.

Ling: What do you like most about what you're doing at present? What's most exciting?

Micah: I really love that I get to apply my love of language and communication to a service-based profession, and that I get to work with children. I also really love that I am gaining the scientific tools and skills to analyze speech at the level of the acoustic signal. My clinical supervisors, academic professors, and thesis advisor (Dr. Margaret Kjelgaard of MIT) have been amazing resources for information and insight, and overall very inspiring minds to work with. The privilege of being part of current research in the field is very exciting.

Ling: What are the biggest sources of stress?

Micah: Definitely balancing all of these projects I am involved in. Also, this field qualifies us to work with so many different client populations, including people with: dysphagia (swallowing problems), voice disorders, acquired neurogenic disorders (e.g., aphasia post-stroke), ALS, Parkinson's disease, traumatic brain injury, developmental disorders, reading disorders (e.g., dyslexia), autism, language delay, hearing impairment, cleft lip and palate, apraxia (motor planning disorder), and the list goes on. It's been difficult to hone in on a few areas to focus on, since everything is so fascinating! One benefit to this field, though, is that you can always change your focus later on in your career, and take continuing education classes to stay informed.

Ling: What are your hopes or plans for the future?

Micah: I plan to move back to California, and work in the public schools for several years to get experience working with a broad spectrum of children with various speech and language deficits, and then eventually I am interested in pediatric private practice, early intervention (birth to 3), and possibly research.

Ling: This all sounds very exciting. If you were talking to a student here at UCSC who was considering a career-trajectory similar to yours, what advice would you give them? What should they be thinking about?

Micah: First of all, I would like to say that coming from a background in linguistics and foreign language (French and Spanish) in my undergraduate years at UCSC really gave me a great foundation to understand the structure of language, but at the same time, half of my classmates at MGH Institute came from backgrounds other than speech and language, so really any background will give you a unique perspective to bring to the program. When I was at UCSC I knew I loved language and children, but wasn't aware of the field of speech and language pathology. I would encourage interested students to contact speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in their area and try to shadow them to see what different SLP settings are like. It is helpful to find an SLP mentor to aid in the path towards graduate school and to provide a letter of recommendation. Coming from a non-CSD background, I had to take some prerequisites before starting my Master's program, so I would definitely recommend looking around to compare prices for these classes. The best resource for information about the profession is the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) I'd be glad to talk to students via email and give whatever pointers or advice I can.

Undergraduate Research Opportunities in the LRC Labs:

One of the most important developments in the Department over the last five years has been the establishment of the Linguistics Research Center Labs in Stevenson College. The Labs are fully integrated with one another and with our existing research infrastructure in theoretical linguistics. They provide us with the means to ask new kinds of questions about the nature of language and language ability. They also let us reframe old questions in exciting new ways. The Labs provide a home for our externally-funded research projects (Matt Wagers' and Sandy Chung's psycholinguistic research on the Chamorro language, for example: <http://linguistics.ucsc.edu/news-events/news/wagers-chung-nsf.html>). And they have opened up exciting new research possibilities for undergraduates. The intense, day-to-day involvement in collaborative research that the Labs have made possible now plays a vital role in preparing undergraduates for futures in academia and in the private sector.

A Message from Chair Sandy Chung

As I'm sure you're aware, we are now emerging from a very difficult period for the University of California, the greatest public university in the world. UCSC's Department of Linguistics has worked hard through these times to maintain our traditional strengths in teaching and research. Though it has not been easy, we have preserved our commitment to first-class teaching, and opened up some exciting new areas of research. The University's financial situation is now improving and we believe the Department is on the cusp of doing really great things. A contribution from you could really make a difference as we move forward.

If you're interested in making a donation to one of our linguistics department funds, please visit our website:

<http://linguistics.ucsc.edu/about/giving/index.html>