"In practice, the analysis of phonological universals turns out to be a rather simple-minded and blunt enterprise."
(Steiner, George. 1975. After Babel. London: Oxford University Press. pg. 96.)

The above quote typifies the viewpoint of someone who is not even marginally aware of generative grammar and current phonological theory. In this class we will challenge this viewpoint and discover that phonological theory is an exciting and dynamic field of study. The search for phonological universals provides us with important insights not just about the human mouth, but also about the human mind.

This course is an introduction to the theoretical study of sound systems. The focus of the class is on the analysis of phonological data within a linguistically principled framework. Students will practice solving phonological problems from a wide variety of languages. We will explore the nature of the knowledge that humans have about their language sound system. We will investigate the optimal way to represent this phonological knowledge and discuss various issues such as the role of phonetics in phonology, the set and structure of distinctive features, phonological rule formalism and rule ordering, stress and rhythm, and optimality theory.

Requirements: weekly homework assignments 50%
final homework assignment 20%
local language assignment 10%
classroom participation 20%

Students will be responsible for all reading assignments and classroom discussion. Weekly homeworks are to be handed in on time. They must be typed. (find the phonetic font set (Doulos IPA) at my website) No late homeworks will be accepted. They will be evaluated according to three parameters: a) explicitness of analysis, b) relative correctness of analysis, and c) originality of analysis. The homeworks are graded numerically: 0= not turned in; 1= lacking in explicitness/correctness; 2= sufficient explicitness/correctness; and 3= shows evidence of extra work in the analysis: in both explicitness and originality. The lowest homework grade will be dropped. (for undergraduates, the 2 lowest grades are dropped) “0” grades cannot be dropped. Students are encouraged to work with other students in the class on the homework assignments, but ultimately your own work is to be handed in.

The local language project will consist of trios of students working together on one of ten foreign languages. The language selections will include major languages spoken in the Washington Metropolitan Area: Korean, Arabic, Vietnamese, Spanish, Chinese, Farsi, and four selections decided in class. Each group will research their selected language's phonological system and produce a simple homework assignment from that research. All supporting documentation must be supplied. Each group will present the assignment to the class.
The final homework assignment is to be done without peer consultation, and will be due at the scheduled final exam time.

**required text:**  

**other reading:**  
(chaper 1)

Last day to drop the class: 29 september

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Please abide by the University Honor Code. A description of the honor code is found at: http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html

### course outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>date</th>
<th>topic</th>
<th>reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 august</td>
<td>introduction: speech sounds</td>
<td>chapter 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 september</td>
<td>assimilation</td>
<td>chapter 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 september</td>
<td>sonorants</td>
<td>chapter 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 september</td>
<td>natural classes and features</td>
<td>chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 september</td>
<td>vowels and vowel processes</td>
<td>chapter 5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 october</td>
<td>the timing tier and the great vowel shift</td>
<td>chapter 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 october</td>
<td>the syllable</td>
<td>chapter 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 october</td>
<td>syllable structure constraints</td>
<td>chapter 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 october</td>
<td>stress</td>
<td>chapter 11-12: §1-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 november</td>
<td>underspecification</td>
<td>chapter 17: § 1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 november</td>
<td>feature geometry</td>
<td>chapter 17:§ 8-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 november</td>
<td>rule ordering</td>
<td>chapter 18:§ 1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 november</td>
<td>no class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
30 November: Optimality Theory chapter 19:§ 1-6; Kager

7 December: Project presentations

14 December: Final homework due (@ 5:00pm in rob a429)

Suggested readings:


[http://mason.gmu.edu/~weinberg](http://mason.gmu.edu/~weinberg)