"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 60%
- final homework assignment 20%
- local language assignment 10%
- classroom participation 10%

Students will be responsible for all reading assignments and classroom discussion. Weekly homeworks are expected to be handed in on time. 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 lowest homework grade will 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 groups of graduate students working together on one of five local foreign languages: Korean, Arabic, Vietnamese, Spanish, and a Selection decided in class. Each group will research their language’s phonological system and produce a simple homework assignment from that research. All supporting documentation must be supplied. The 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 readings:

course outline

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<td>8 september</td>
<td>segments: obstruents and assimilation</td>
<td>chapter 1-2</td>
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<td>vowels and vowel processes</td>
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<td>the timing tier and the great vowel shift</td>
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<td>3 november</td>
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<td>chapter 19: § 1-6</td>
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<td>1 december</td>
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<td>8 december</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 december</td>
<td>final homework due (@ 5:00pm)</td>
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suggested readings:


http://mason.gmu.edu/~weinberg