Alumni Newsletter

LETTER FROM CHAIR

Dear friends,

I am very pleased that you are receiving this newsletter. I hope it finds you and your family and loved ones well, in the challenging times we continue to live due to the COVID pandemic. With the invaluable help from our staff and faculty, we hope to make this newsletter a somewhat regular event. Our initial goal has been to send some news about the department directly to you. It was hard to select what could be included among the recent news from our faculty and students. This time we are mainly including faculty news regarding recent awards, faculty retirements (by professors Sarah G. Thomason and Nick Ellis), and an in-memoriam note honoring the life of our late colleague professor emeritus Robbins Burling. We are also giving some brief news about recent accomplishments by some of our graduate students. We included short feature interviews done remotely with a few of our alumni who kindly accepted to participate in this issue. Finally, we are highlighting our Linguistics Colloquium, which will continue to be held virtually this academic year, making it possible for you to join our colloquium audience remotely from anywhere in the world. We hope this newsletter will give you a pleasant opportunity to (re-)connect with the department, and to share your own news, comments, or suggestions for our next issues of the newsletter.
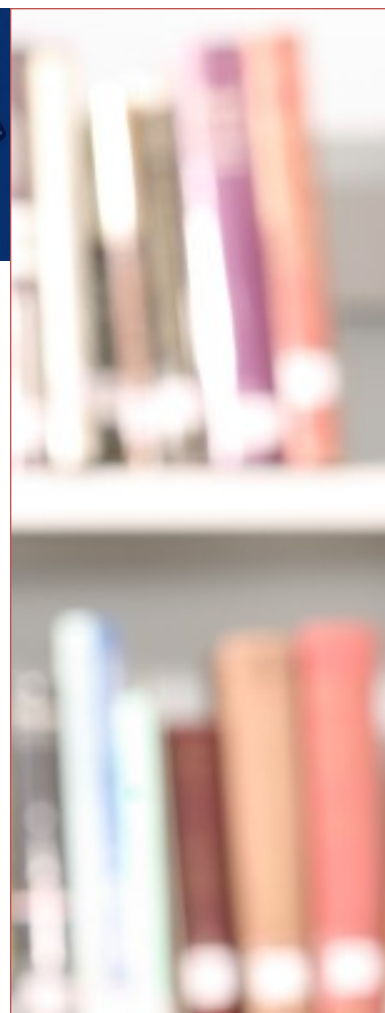
Acrisio Pires Chair, Department of Linguistics

LEADERSHIP ROLES

Professor Acrisio Pires has been appointed Chair of the Department of Linguistics.

Professor Andries Coetzee has taken up the roles of Associate Chair and Director of Graduate Studies.

Professor Robin Queen, who served as Chair of the Linguistics Department during the last seven years, will continue as Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Linguistics, English and German.

LINGUISTICS

Faculty Updates

ANDRIES COETZEE RECEIVES FACULTY RECOGNITION AWARD

Professor Andries Coetzee is among the University of Michigan faculty members who received awards this fall in recognition of their notable contributions in the areas of teaching, mentoring, service and scholarship.

Congratulations, Andries Read more.

SALLY THOMASON—BERNARD BLOCH DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR EMERITA OF LINGUISTICS

Congratulations to Sally Thomason, who retired from U-M on May 31. Thomason is the world's authority on language contact. Her books *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* (1988, with Terrence Kaufman) and *Language Contact: An Introduction* (2001) transformed the field of language contact through their theoretical and methodological rigor and insights. Her field-defining research has turned language contact today into a fertile area of linguistic inquiry. Sally Thomason's contributions also draw on her deep expertise in the Native languages of the United States, especially Séliš-Ql'ispé (Montana Salish), on which she has conducted field work for 40 years.

Read about Sally's many accomplishments and vast contributions to the field of linguistics in her retirement memoir approved by the U-M regents.

Sally will remain actively involved in the department and will continue to lead the historical linguistics discussion group.

NICK ELLIS—PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF PSYCHOLOGY AND LINGUISTICS

Congratulations to Nick Ellis, Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Linguistics, who retired from U-M on May 31.

Professor Ellis led an extremely productive and distinguished career, making seminal contributions to the scientific understanding of language acquisition and helping to establish psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology, and applied linguistics as vibrant contributors to language pedagogy.

Read about Nick's many accomplishments and vast contributions to the field of linguistics in his retirement memoir approved by the U-M regents.

THE LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA'S EARLY CAREER AWARD

Associate Professor [Nicholas Henriksen](#) received the Linguistic Society of America's 2021 Early Career Award for outstanding scholarship in the discipline of Linguistics.

Dr. Henriksen exemplifies the commitment to professional excellence that this award embodies. At this phase of his career, Dr. Henriksen has already proven to be a prolific scholar.

Dr. Henriksen is an advocate for minorities in Linguistics and a member of LSA who embraces core values of the society by conducting community-engaged research, promoting linguistic and cultural awareness, and seeking social justice.

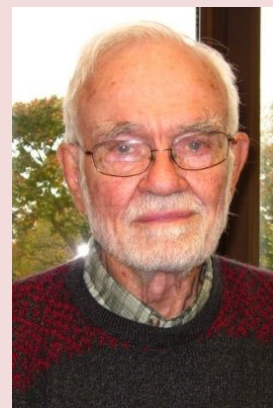## PROFESSOR RICHARD LEWIS NAMED ARTHUR F. THURNAU PROFESSOR

Professor Lewis, who is director of the Weinberg Institute of Cognitive Science, is one of five U-M faculty recipients, approved by the U-M Board of Regents on February 18. Thurnau professors retain the title throughout their careers and receive $20,000 to support activities that further enhance their teaching.
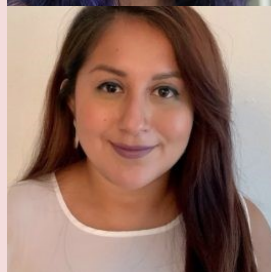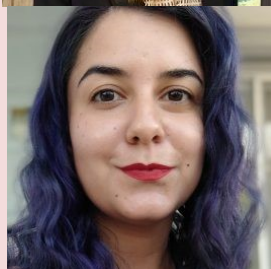

IN MEMORIAM
[Robbins Burling](#)

**Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Linguistics
1926-2021**

Robbins Burling, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Linguistics, passed away peacefully on January 2, 2021, at the age of 94. Robbins received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1958 and joined the University of Michigan in 1964. He began as an associate professor of anthropology, and in 1966 he became a professor of linguistics and anthropology, and associate of the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies. He served as interim director of the (then new) Program in Linguistics in 1985-86. Rob specialized in linguistic anthropology, giving most of his attention to Tibeto-Burman languages, the ethnology of Northeast India, the evolution of the human capacity for language, and several aspects of kinship theory. He retired as Emeritus in 1995. Rob will be missed by the many students that he mentored and colleagues with whom he worked.

GRADUATE STUDENT UPDATES

The Department of Linguistics extends a warm welcome to our new graduate students, Wyatt Barnes, Sophia Eakins, Demet Kayabasi, Cecilia Solis-Barroso, and Csilla Tatar.

DEBORAH KELLER-COHEN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING

Graduate student Wil Gonzales was awarded this year's Deborah Keller-Cohen Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. This $500 award is an early-career teaching award for Linguistics graduate student instructors.

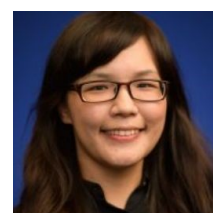# KELLY WRIGHT INDUCTED INTO EDWARD A. BOUCHET GRADUATE HONOR SOCIETY

Kelly E. Wright became inducted into the Edward A. Bouchet Graduate Honor Society. Kelly was one of five people inducted into the Bouchet Honor Society

LUCY CHIANG RECEIVES RACKHAM PREDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP

Lucy Chiang was awarded a Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship for the 2021-2022 academic year.

It is one of the most prestigious awards granted by the Rackham Graduate School. The fellowship supports outstanding doctoral candidates working on dissertations that are unusually creative, ambitious and impactful.

YOURDANIS SEDAROUS RECEIVES PREDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS

Yourdanis Sedarous was awarded the Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship and MIT Diversity Predoctoral Fellowship for the 2021-2022 academic year.

The MIT fellowship enables her to spend the academic year at MIT where she is working with Suzanne Flynn on her dissertation research. The dissertation investigates the extent to which bilingual speakers' cognitive representations of the syntactic structures of their two languages are interconnected.

JOY PELTIER GIVES COLLOQUIUM TALK AT UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

The title of her talk was "Language in Context and in Contact: The Pragmatics of Multifunctional Items in Kwéyòl Donmnik." Kwéyòl Donmnik (KD) is an understudied French- and English-influenced Lesser Antillean Creole.

Joy is a UGA alumna, and she was honored to be invited back to share her research.

GRADUATE STUDENT UPDATES

The Department of Linguistics extends a warm welcome to our new graduate student colleagues, Sovoya Davis , Emma Santelmann , Anna Whitney , Cal Callister , & Jungyun Seo.

CECILIA SOLÍS-BARROSO RECEIVES FLAS FELLOWSHIP

Cecilia Solís-Barroso was awarded a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship to focus on the study of Nahuatl and Spanish in the 2021-22 academic year.

Administered by the U-M International Institute, the FLAS Fellowship provides tuition and stipend to students studying designated foreign languages in combination with area studies or international aspects of professional studies. The priority is to encourage the study of less commonly taught modern languages.

RACHEL WEISSLER RECEIVES OUTSTANDING GSI AWARD

Rachel Elizabeth Weissler has received a 2021 Outstanding Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) Award from Rackham Graduate School. This prestigious and competitive award recognizes GSIs who make a sustained and creative contribution to U-M's undergraduate teaching mission. Rachel's contribution to our undergraduate program, support for students, and commitment to inclusive teaching make a huge difference to our department, to the university community, and to society.

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Linguistics Events

LINGUISITCS COLLOQUIA

The Department of Linguistics' colloquia brings together students, faculty, affiliates, alumni and friends to share, learn, and inspire. The linguistics Department provides a forum for students, faculty and special guests to share their work and address current issues in and research topics related to Linguistics. Colloquia are typically held for Linguistics throughout the academic term.

Friday, Oct. 22

Tracy Conner

(University of California, Santa Barbara)

4 pm (virtual)

Friday, Nov. 5

Emily Bender (University of Washington)

4 pm (virtual)

Friday, December. 10th

The Department of Linguistics Graduate Students

4 pm (virtual)

JESSICA RETT, CLASS OF 2001

Advisors: Sam Epstein, John Lawler, and Marilyn Shatz

Activities you were involved in as a student:
My friend Amy Burke and I started an undergraduate Linguistics Reading Group, and were also (possibly inaugural) co-presidents of the Undergraduate Linguistics Club. I double-majored in Psychology, and worked with Marilyn Shatz and David Meyer on some psycholinguistics experiments for my undergraduate thesis. There was a great group of future linguists who were undergrads there at the time, including Seth Yalcin, Justin Fitzpatrick, and Jon Gajewski. Many of us took graduate syntax classes with Sam Epstein and a special seminar on OT with Mark Hale, who was visiting there at the time.

Since graduating from U-M...
I took a year off after graduating to work in the UofM law library, and then started my PhD in Linguistics at Rutgers University. After graduating from there in 2008, I started in my current job at UCLA.

Career and other highlights that you're most passionate about or proud of:
I study semantics and pragmatics, and spend most of my time trying to convince people that things they think are pragmatic should in fact be represented in the compositional semantic theory (e.g. exclamation intonation, illocutionary mood) and that things they think are semantic should in fact be modeled in their pragmatic theory (e.g. evaluativity, the requirement in positive constructions like "A is tall" that A's height exceeds a salient standard). I'm most excited about my work in semantic typology and my recent efforts to help with semantic issues outside of our field, like in medical ethics and the law.

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?
Immensely. Sam Epstein taught me how to make incredibly sophisticated, theory-internal arguments, and John Lawler taught me why I might not want to be in the business of making incredibly sophisticated, theory-internal arguments. All of the faculty there were really supportive—Christina Tortora, Sally Thomason, Marilyn Shatz, who was chair at the time, and Robin Queen and Patrice Beddor, with a special shout-out to Mark Hale, who was visiting at the time—and taught me the value of being excited about your students being excited about linguistics.

Caption: Pictured at an end-of-semester gathering in 2001 are (clockwise from top left): Avi Derrow, the late Sam Epstein (In Memoriam), Sally Thomason, Mark Hale, Justin Fitzpatrick, Jessica Rett, Sarah Goodman, and Gabriel Williams.

TONY NATOCI, CLASS OF 2013

Advisors: I didn't manage to finish my honor's thesis, unfortunately, but Sam Epstein, Pam Beddor, Marlyse Baptista, Andries Coetzee, and Ioulia Kovelman were there to push me higher than I ever would have gone myself. I'm forever indebted to and in awe of all of them.

Activities you were involved in as a student:
- Linguistics Club
- Presented at 2013 LSA Annual Conference (Boston)
- Volunteered and took classes at the 2013 LSA Summer Institute (Ann Arbor)

Since graduating from U-M...
My first job out of college was, believe it or not, as a linguist (official title: "Speech Data Analyst") as a contractor at Google in the San Francisco Bay Area. I worked on a small team with a few other fellow linguists annotating corpora of English (both spoken and written) to support Google's machine learning efforts. Our job was essentially to teach robots to speak and understand human language, and we had a blast doing it.

Then in 2016 I switched gears from engineering to conversation design. Instead of helping to build the technology that allows humans and robots to talk to each other, I designed products that made use of that technology. I worked for a company called [24]7.ai, a firm that builds IVR applications for huge brands around the world. IVR stands for "interactive voice response" – the technical term for the 1-800 automated phone trees that you interact with when you call your bank, for example.

After two and a half years as a conversation designer there, I jumped over to Uber, where I've been since 2018. At Uber I still design phone trees, but I also build chatbots and other speech applications for the Uber app. Think along the lines of Siri or Alexa – hands-free ways to interact with Uber using just your voice.

Career and other highlights that you're most passionate about or proud of:
To be honest, and I know this is a boring non-answer, I'm really just incredibly proud of the craft and the attention to detail that my team and I bring to every project we work on. I'm proud that we ship products that help people save money, that help keep people safe, that give people more control over their lives. My job is to take things that are really complicated and confusing and scary and make them simple, and when we succeed, the result is extremely satisfying and impactful.

But that being said, even after all these years, presenting a poster (of research that Andries Coetzee and I carried out the year before) at the 2013 LSA Conference still holds up as one of the biggest thrills I've ever had.

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?
My five years as a linguistics student at Michigan gave me everything. Full stop. Every linguistics course I took prepared me for my future career, even if I I didn't know it at the time – the challenge of untangling grammars, of reducing systems of impossible complexity down to just a few simple rules; the responsibility of looking after a lab, of collecting and annotating data, of being there for your research partners; the ability to form an opinion, then stand up in front of others and defend it. I may not use the comparative method or X-bar theory or optimality theory every day (let's be honest, I may never use them again), but the logical underpinnings thereof, the process I was taught to employ to make decisions and to figure out a path forward to a solution – those I'll use for the rest of my life.

But even more important than all of that, the faculty and my fellow classmates within the department gave me the confidence I needed to step out into the world and apply these tools. I learned a lot of linguistics, which I expected, but I never guessed that the department would teach me just as much about the world and about myself. It took a lot of courage for me to go out on my own and launch into a career, and the Linguistics department was there for me every step of the way.

BEATRICE TEODORO OSHIKA

CLASS OF 1963 BA , 1964 MA, 1973 PhD

Dissertation advisor: William Gedney

Activities you were involved in as a student:
I worked on the Michigan Daily, a true high point of my undergrad life, and was active in the civil rights movement. As a graduate student I took full advantage of the broad interdisciplinary choices that were available on campus and that were encouraged by the Linguistics Department, including courses from the Southeast Asian Studies Center and the Communication Sciences Laboratory and Graduate Program.

Since graduating from U-M:
After I left campus I eventually ended up in California working in a research lab founded by Gordon Peterson, former director of the CommSci program (which later evolved into the Computer Science program). When he learned in the mid-1960s that he had just a few years to live, he left U-M and took his research group to California, driving up the coast until establishing a lab in Santa Barbara. I arrived at the lab after his passing, but fortunately the other members

Caption: Beatrice Teodoro Oshika poses at Machu Picchu.

of the research group had good memories of me and hired me. I always use this fact when advising students: at any moment in time, do your best and treat your colleagues with respect, you never know when, and in what role, they may reappear in your professional life. The lab had government grants in speech and signal processing, and while working there I gained experience in speech recognition/synthesis, which formed the basis for the rest of my career. Over 40 years I toggled between academe (U. Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Portland State University) and industry (Burroughs/Unisys, Sparta, MITRE), retiring from MITRE in 2011.

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?
My U-M education was the foundation of my life and my family's life, starting with my mother who came to Ann Arbor in 1933 from the Philippines as a Barbour Scholar. My family earned a dozen Michigan degrees and enjoyed great professional and personal fulfillment because of our academic backgrounds. We have been fortunate to be able to express our gratitude with scholarships and other gifts, and I was especially glad to actually meet a couple of scholarship recipients in 2019. A U-M education is the best investment ever, thank you Michigan!

ARIANA BANCU, CLASS OF 2020

Advisor: Marlyse Baptista

Since graduating from U-M...
Since I graduated from U of M, I moved to Chicago and started a tenure track assistant professor position at Northeastern Illinois University. I teach classes with a focus on sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, and I founded the Trilingualism Lab where we analyze speech data from trilingual speakers to detect cross-linguistic influences.

Career and other highlights that you're most passionate about or proud of:
I am passionate about my work on Transylvanian Saxon (TrSax) for various reasons. I enjoy researching the language and learning more about the history of the Transylvanian Saxon community. I am perhaps most proud of my article on TrSax verb clusters in the journal *Language, and my dissertation*. I gathered a lot of data from the speakers that allows me to document parts of Transylvanian Saxon and how the three languages are spoken in the community. I am also able to work on data analysis with my students, and it brings me a lot of joy to be able to train students and to continue my research.

How has your U-M linguistics degree influenced your career path?
My training at U-M has been fundamental for my current career as an Assistant Professor of Linguistics. My U-M linguistics degree equipped me with the necessary tools to continue my teaching and research successfully. I feel confident taking what I learned to the next level by continuing the research that I started during my dissertation, creating my own classes, and training students in linguistic research methods. I do, however, remain in close contact with my former advisor Marlyse Baptista, other professors in the department, as well as current students and alumni from the U-M linguistics department. Their input is still crucial in my work!

ALUMNI M-PACT DEI CERTIFICATE

The goals of the Alumni M-Pact DEI Certificate program are rooted in the University of Michigan's commitment to strategic diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work by actively engaging alumni toward this mission. This program is designed to move beyond DEI knowledge acquisition and into action that will impact communities and organizations throughout the world. Learn more about the initiative by visiting the Alumni Association's webpage.

WAYS TO GIVE BACK

We strive to support our students and faculty on the front lines of learning and research and to steward our planet, our community, our campus. To do this, the Department of Linguistics needs your support.

If you would like to be featured in our alumni newsletter or volunteer to share your knowledge with current undergraduates, please complete this interest form.

Gifts from friends, alumni and the community enable our Department community to serve society and compete in excellence with other leading public and private universities. Your gifts can make a difference in our capacity to hire and retain leading faculty and scholars, to attract and fund outstanding graduate students from different backgrounds, to support a diverse body of undergraduate students, and to undertake research endeavors that can help many communities and advance knowledge about language.

Give Online

Department of Linguistics

The Department of Linguistics at the University of Michigan is one of the few departments in the United States that captures the inherent breadth of the discipline by exploring the cognitive, interactional, cultural, and developmental aspects of language. Faculty and students explore language structure, history, knowledge, behavior, and use. Faculty research aims to integrate these diverse approaches to language in ways that engender new modes of linguistics inquiry and new research domains.

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