Daniel Dixon
Graduate Student Spotlight

Dan Dixon, one of our MA students, won the prestigious Fulbright Scholarship for the 2014-2015 academic year. Dan will serve as an English teaching Assistant in Brazil at the Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso in Cuiabá.

Dan was born in Long Island, New York and then moved to Nashville, Tennessee at three years-old. In 2004, he graduated with his undergraduate degree in Communications with an emphasis on Electronic Media at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. After graduation Dan taught English for a year in the Czech Republic and later worked as a photojournalist at WATE Channel 6 News in Knoxville. Dan made the move to Utah when he accepted a job to work at KUTV Channel 2 in 2006. After five years of working full-time as a photojournalist, Dan realized his desire was to teach abroad and decided to go back to school for a Masters in Linguistics. Dan has had no regrets about his career change and still works for KUTV part-time on the weekends.

Dan began graduate school in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Utah in 2011. He completed the TESOL certificate requirements and recently defended his thesis in December. The title of his thesis is *Leveling up Language Proficiency through Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games: Opportunities for English Learners to Receive Input, Modify Output, Negotiate Meaning, and Employ Language-Learning Strategies*. He is examining second language acquisition and technology, focusing on the benefits of non-native English speaking students who play online video games in English.
Dan was accepted into the Fulbright Scholarship Program this spring. This program was created in 1946 by Senator J. William Fulbright to promote “mutual understandings between the people of the United States and the people of other countries of the world.” Participants are chosen for their academic merit and leadership potential with the opportunity to study, teach and conduct research. Approximately 8,000 grants are awarded annually, but only about 1,600 U.S. students receive this award. Currently, the Fulbright Program is operating in over 155 countries.

The Fulbright Scholarship is a very competitive program and Dan began working on his application in 2011. First he had to decide where to go. Dan had completed a study abroad program in Fortaleza, Brazil, that left him longing to return so he chose Brazil. The remainder of the application process included: letters of recommendation, essays, and statements of purpose about why and how he could promote cultural exchanges. Dan will be assigned to work with a professor whose students want to become English teachers.

Dan received assistance during the application process from several past Fulbrighters, such as, Todd McKay, recent MA graduate, Dr. MaryAnn Christison, and Dr. Johanna Watzinger-Tharp. Initially, Dan was not accepted. However, several months later Dan was informed that several positions had become available. He was accepted to Mato Grosso, Brazil which is located at the exact center of South America. He will be leaving in February and returning in November 2014.

While in Brazil, Dan will be teaching 20-25 hours a week. He will also be working on a side project during his spare time which focuses on cultural exchange. Dan has decided to use his skills as a photojournalist to make a documentary of his time in Brazil. His documentary topic will be how the World Cup in 2014 and the upcoming Olympics in 2016 affects English demand in Brazil. When it is complete, Dan hopes to submit the documentary to film festivals. Be on the lookout for that!

Dan encourages all students who are interested to apply for the Fulbright. “I think the only reason I was able to get the Fulbright is because of the help I received from the professors here and the community in general and all the people I had look at my application and all the revision and edits and advise people gave me. Everyone’s help is what has really made this possible.” Dan is more than willing to help out anyone who is interested in applying. For more information about the Fulbright Student Program see http://us.fulbrightonline.org/.

Congratulations Dan! We look forward to hearing about your experience and wish you all the best in Brazil.

Remember when you were a starving student?

Our students are in constant need of funding for opportunities to grow, learn, & research.

Your contribution will help budding Linguists take advantage of academic opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach.

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Jesús Muñoz
Undergraduate Student Spotlight

Jesús Muñoz, a fourth year student, is majoring in Linguistics and minoring in French. He was born and raised in West Valley, Utah; however, his parents are from Guanajuato, Mexico and immigrated to Utah in 1989.

Jesús is the project manager for the Language Freedom Project, which was inspired by a family friend who is a native Spanish speaker and needed to renew her driver’s license. After requesting to take the drivers exam in Spanish she was told that was not an option. Unfortunately, she did not pass the exam when she took it in English. This was frustrating for her because she had been driving in Utah for over 15 years. She felt the reason she did not pass was due to the language. It was difficult for her to understand the terminology used on the exam; which would not have been a problem if the test would have been in Spanish.

This experience led Jesús to look into the reason why Utah does not offer the driver’s exam in Spanish. He discovered that Utah is one of the few states who offer the drivers exam only in English. This is due to the English Only Initiative, which says that all official documents are to be provided only in English. Jesús felt the need to do something about the English Only Initiative; this led to the creation of the Language Freedom Project. The goals of the project is to repeal the English Only Initiative and to bridge the cultural gaps in Utah by focusing on developing community awareness about the language policy and how it effects marginalized populations.

The Language Freedom Project held their first event this past summer to increase community awareness. A group of students held a small protest where they walked from City Creek to Capitol Hill, wearing t-shirts displaying the “Language Freedom Project” and the English Initiative policy number.

Jesús plans to continue increasing community awareness by attending public events where he can gain a better understanding on how the English Only Initiative is effecting the public and their access to government processes in Utah. While increasing the community awareness, the Language Freedom Project will be working to build a team of translators who are willing to donate their time to translate official state documents. They will begin translating the official documents that have been requested at community events and the documents will be made available online at http://linguistics.utah.edu/LanguageFreedomProject.php

The website contains a link to the English Only Initiative and a presentation covering what linguistic oppression has historically looked like in the United States along with the impact of the English Only Initiative.

Jesús plans to be the project manager until he graduates in spring 2015. After graduation he plans to attend graduate school. If you would like to learn more about the Language Freedom Project please check out the website or you can e-mail them at thelanguagefreedomproject@outlook.com.
Dr. Aniko Csirmaz  
Faculty Spotlight

We are pleased to spotlight Aniko Csirmaz, an Assistant Professor. Some of the courses she teaches are Language and Nature, Intermediate Syntax, Child Language Acquisition and Graduate Syntax. She lives in South Salt Lake with her husband, 10 month old son, and her eight year old dog Yoda who still learning new tricks.

Aniko was born and raised in Budapest, Hungary during Communist rule. During her childhood, Budapest did not have many luxuries. For example, Aniko remembers when bananas were considered an ‘exotic food’ and people would wait in long lines to buy them. When buying meat, there were not a lot of options to buy different cuts of beef, chicken, or pork. People could only buy what was available that day.

When Aniko was about five years old the system began to change and western commodities, like Coca-Cola and blue jeans, became more freely available. At this time, the government realized their citizens could not speak many of the western languages so they created bilingual high schools to teach these languages to students. Aniko attended a high school that taught Spanish.

In high school, Aniko also took some courses at the local university where she discovered her love for linguistics while studying Africanistics, the study of African anthropology, languages, culture and literature. After high school she attended Eötvös Loránd University where she majored in English and Hungarian. Later she graduated with an MA in English Language and Literature and Theoretical Linguistics. She continued her education at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and received a PhD in Linguistics.

Upon receiving her PhD, Aniko taught for two years at Carleton College in Minnesota. We were lucky to have Aniko join our department as a visiting professor in 2007. A year later she was hired as a tenured track Assistant Professor.

Currently, Aniko is doing research on the properties of lexical elements (mostly verbs and nouns) and on the properties of larger units built on top of them. Some of this research looks at time adverbials and their relation to the event in question. She is interested in whether the relation between time adverbs and events is accidental or whether it is principled and thus follows from some basic properties. For example, one would say [He arrived in five minutes], but one would not say [He walked in five minutes]. What is it about [in five minutes] that is responsible for this restriction? How does the event of walking differ from the event of arriving? Aniko is also interested in why one can combine numbers and related words with some nouns but not others. For example, one does not usually say [two waters], but it is natural to say [two books]. This all ties into not just what the words mean, but also to the structure of the sentence and how this structure interacts with interpretation.

When Aniko is not teaching or doing research, she enjoys baking, cooking, taking pictures, hiking, traveling, listening to music, playing musical instruments, working in the garden, and being with her family and friends.

Share your experience!

Our Alumni Spotlights focus on people just like you, diligent go-getters who have worked, found, and sometimes stumbled their way into jobs they love.

Whether you ended up in a Linguistics career or built a different road for yourself, we would love to hear and share your story.

Send us your experience at linguistics@linguistics.utah.edu.

If you have questions, please call 801-581-8047.
Upcoming Department Events

Faculty Research Presentations:
9:30-10:30 am LNCO 2945

- Shannon Barrios
  Wed, January 29, 2014
- Ben Slade
  Wed, February 5, 2014
- Sarah Hargus Ferguson
  Wed, April 2, 2014
- Aniko Csirmaz
  Wed, April 23, 2014

University of Utah Student Conference in Linguistics
April 11th 8:00 am - 6:00 pm
LNCO 2110

Linguistics Student Awards Luncheon
April 16th 12:30-2:30
LNCO 2110

University of Utah Commencement Ceremony
Thursday, May 1, 2014 6:30pm
Jon M. Huntsman Center

College of Humanities Convocation
Friday, May 2, 2014 2pm
Jon M. Huntsman Center

Annual Linguistics BBQ
September 5th 3:00-6:00
Sugarhouse Park
Summer 2013 Graduates
Undergraduates

Patrick Alba
Jeffrey Douglas Green
Mercedes Loli
Savannah Manwill

PhD Dissertation Titles
Principal Aspects of Xinaliq Phonology and Morphosyntax
Tamrika Khvitsiaashvili

When Variability Matters in Second Language Word Learning: Talker Variability and Task Type Effects
Asmaa Shehata

Fall 2013 Graduates
Undergraduates

Edward Bunker
Jenifer Burk
Christian Cabalbag
Andrew Gibson
Scott Ostendorf
Mason Pratt

PhD Dissertation Titles
Expanding and Explaining Classifier Typologies
Scott Duede

Exploring the spaces of culturally relevant pedagogy: The discursive (trans)formation of the pedagogical practices of two teachers of English language learners
Heeok “Jade” Jeong