

LING 325 - Semantics

Rutgers University Department of Linguistics | Spring 2024
(01:615:325:01)

INFO

Schedule: Tuesdays & Fridays, 12:10 - 1:30 p.m.
Location: Scott Hall (SC), Room 114
Canvas Site: <https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/263276>

Instructor: Gérard Avelino
E-mail: gerard.avelino@rutgers.edu
Office Hours: By appointment, Tuesdays, 3:30 - 5:00 p.m., Ling. Dept. basement;
Additional times (and online meetings) available by appointment.

THE COURSE

This course serves as an introduction to the linguistic subfield of **semantics**, the **study of meaning in natural language**. In this course, we'll attempt to answer the following broad questions: How do we interpret the meaning of a sentence? How do the individual parts of a sentence come together to make sense to us? How do relationships between sentences affect how we understand what they mean?

Throughout the semester, we will take a precise look at natural language data through the lens of set theory, propositional and predicate logic, and lambda calculus. Our goal is to learn how to use these formal, mathematical tools to scientifically model how we, as humans, transmit and interpret meaning through our use of language.

Prerequisite: You must have completed LING 201- Introduction to Linguistic Theory (01:615:201), or an approved equivalent, to enroll and be successful in this course.

Linguistics Majors and Minors: LING 325 is a required course under Requirement R2: Theoretical Subfields.

Course learning goals

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Reason about language scientifically by investigating and analyzing linguistic data;
- Apply formal tools such as set theory and propositional logic in modeling natural language meaning;
- Understand the relationship between form and meaning of natural language expressions, and distinguish between the concepts of semantics and pragmatics;
- Connect formal linguistic theory to broader issues in the understanding of human cognition, society, and culture.

This course meets the following department learning goals:

- Students will be able to reason about language scientifically; demonstrate knowledge of crosslinguistic variability and universal patterns in language; evaluate a range of views on the nature, origin, and/or structure of language; and identify what someone knows when they know a language.
- Majors and minors who complete the core courses in Linguistics will demonstrate technical mastery over the tools of linguistic analysis in syntax, phonology, semantics and pragmatics and apply linguistic theory in these areas. They will be able to investigate and analyze linguistic data; demonstrate strong problem-solving skills; extend their understanding of theoretical linguistics into other domains of linguistic research; apply the techniques of linguistics to new topics; and access current research in the field.

COURSE MATERIALS

Course Website

This course has a website, which can be accessed on [Canvas](#). After logging in with your NetID, find this course listed on your Dashboard or under the Courses tab. **Please check the Canvas site periodically.** Weekly announcements, readings, homework assignments, and other course materials will be made available only through Canvas.

For specific technical requirements or support in using the course website, please visit the Canvas [Getting Started](#), [FAQ](#), or [Help](#) pages.

Readings & Course Materials

You do not need to buy a textbook for this course. Any required readings or course materials will be provided in digital format via the course Canvas site.

Be aware that different readings may use different symbolic systems for the same concepts. Where sources differ, follow the system taught in class.

The course may also include material from the following sources:

- Elizabeth Coppock & Lucas Champollion. 2023 Draft. *Invitation to Formal Semantics*. Downloadable at: <https://eecoppock.info/bootcamp/semantics-boot-camp.pdf>
- Irene Heim & Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell.
- Jens S. Allwood, Lars-Gunnar Andersson, and Östen Dahl. 1977. *Logic in Linguistics*. CUP.

Tools and Software

You will need reliable access to the internet to be able to access the course materials and do the work required for class. Recommended software for this class includes:

- A LaTeX compiler, such as Overleaf: overleaf.com
- A PDF editor, such as Adobe Acrobat. Rutgers IT offers Adobe Creative Cloud to students for free: <https://it.rutgers.edu/adobe/adobe-creative-cloud-for-students/>

Intellectual Property

Course material made specifically for this class, including but not limited to slides, class handouts, quizzes, homework assignments, or exams, are the instructor's intellectual property. Sharing or posting any part of the course materials without explicit permission from the instructor may qualify as an academic integrity issue.

Evaluation & Required Work

Your success in this course will depend on a combination of homework assignments, class attendance and participation, a midterm exam, and a comprehensive final exam. The final grade will be composed and given a letter grade as follows:

		A	≥ 90%
		B+	85–89.9%
		B	80–84.9%
		C+	75–79.9%
		C	70–74.9%
		D	60–69.9%
		F	< 60%
Assignments	60%		
Midterm	15%		
Final Exam	15%		
Participation	10%		

Assignments - 60%

There will be six homework assignments throughout the semester. For each week with an assignment, the problems will be made available on the course Canvas site after the Tuesday class. They will then be due one week later, before the next Tuesday class. Consult the schedule in this syllabus for the weeks when homework will be given.

Late work will not be accepted; any late homework will be given a grade of zero.

Only five of the six homework assignments will count for your final grade, each weighted equally. **Your lowest assignment score will be dropped** at the end of the semester.

Midterm and Final Exam - 15% each

The **Midterm Exam** will be held in person on **Friday, March 8**, during the regularly scheduled class time. It will cover material from the first half of the semester.

The **Final Exam** will be held in person on **Friday, May 3, from 12 to 3 p.m.** It will mostly cover the material discussed in the second half of the class.

For both exams, you may consult your notes and class material, but you may not discuss the problems or collaborate on the answers with anyone.

Without proof of illness, religious observance, or other previously-discussed accommodation, **missed exams will result in a score of zero.**

Attendance & Participation - 10%

Active participation is key to success in this class. This includes attending each class session, listening attentively to the lecture material, asking questions, completing in-class practice exercises, and collaborating with your peers for discussions and activities.

Attendance will be recorded. For any reason that you cannot make it to class, **please both use the University absence self-reporting site (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>) and send me an e-mail.**

Please do not come to class if you are unwell. This goes for any illness or adverse condition whether physical or mental. Rest assured that there will always be ways to make up for in-class participation and any missed material; please send me an e-mail to discuss your options.

If you do not communicate with me at all about an absence, that absence will be marked as unexcused. Each unexcused absence will incur a 10% reduction in your participation grade. Every three unexcused absences will incur a further 10% reduction in your overall grade.

For more information on the Rutgers policy on attendance and class cancellation, please visit the SAS policy page here: <https://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/degree-requirements/policies/attendance-and-cancellation-of-classes>.

Extra Credit

Up to 2% extra credit can be earned in this class.

Primarily, extra credit can be earned through participation in experiments conducted by faculty and graduate students at the Department of Linguistics. All students enrolled in Linguistics undergraduate courses at Rutgers are automatically added into the **SONA** online experiment system and are eligible to participate. Keep an eye out for e-mail notifications for available studies to participate in. (Please note that this system is separate from the Psychology Department's.)

Any student enrolled in a Linguistics undergraduate course is eligible to participate in Linguistics experiments, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, language status, or impairments, disorders, or disabilities. You cannot be denied participation for any of these reasons.

You have the right to not have to take part in an experiment to receive extra credit. Please get in touch with me for alternatives (e.g., a short research paper or article review).

Other opportunities for extra credit may be announced in class if and when they are made available.

Warning Grades

If, by the Midterm Exam, a student has not been performing adequately in class, either due to poor homework grades or poor attendance, a Warning Grade may be assigned to them. These are not permanent; they are simply a signal that a student should speak to the instructor to make sure that any problems could be addressed and any expectations clarified.

SCHEDULE

Weekly Schedule

The following schedule is subject to change; always check the course Canvas site for the most up-to-date schedule.

During each week marked with a homework assignment, that week's assignment will be made available after the Monday class. It will then be due one week later, before the next week's Monday class. Feedback and grades will be made available, to the best of my ability, before the Thursday after the homework is due.

Please note the following dates:

Tue, 16 Jan Class will not meet. Our first meeting will be on Fri, 19 Jan.

Fri, 8 Mar Midterm exam. This will be held in person in our regular classroom at the regular class time.

Week 9 Spring Break. Class will not meet. No work will be due Enjoy the break!

Fri, 3 May Final exam. This will be held in person in our regular classroom from 12 to 3 in the afternoon. Note that the timeslot is not our usual one.

Week	Tue	Fri	Topic	HW
1	16 Jan	19 Jan	Introduction	
2	23 Jan	26 Jan	Sets, Relations, Functions	
3	30 Jan	2 Feb	Sets, Relations, Functions	HW1
4	6 Feb	9 Feb	Propositional Logic	
5	13 Feb	16 Feb	Predicate Logic	HW2
6	20 Feb	23 Feb	Predicate Logic	
7	27 Feb	1 Mar	Meaning & Compositionality	HW3
8	5 Mar	8 Mar	Review & Midterm	
9	12 Mar	15 Mar	SPRING BREAK	
10	19 Mar	22 Mar	Lambda Calculus	HW4
11	26 Mar	29 Mar	Lambda Calculus	
12	2 Apr	5 Apr	Nouns, Adjectives, Quantifiers	HW5
13	9 Apr	12 Apr	Verbs & Events	
14	16 Apr	19 Apr	Intensional Semantics	HW6
15	23 Apr	26 Apr	Wrap-Up & Review	
FINAL		3 May		

Office Hours

I am available for individual and group meetings to discuss the course material, any questions related to (but not specifically in) the homework, or any other topic regarding linguistics and academia, such as your personal projects or career plans. Please note that I will not completely re-teach the material during office hours.

In-person office hour will be held every Tuesday from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. Please make an appointment beforehand. You will find me in one of the basement offices Linguistics Department at 18 Seminary Place.

If you are unavailable during that time, please e-mail me. We can set an appointment for either an in-person or Zoom meeting depending on my availability.

Disability Services

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation.

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS website at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/getting-registered>.

Student Support & Mental Wellness

The University has provided a number of resources to you and your fellow students to support not only success in your academic endeavors but also your safety and wellbeing.

- **Student Success Essentials:** A portal with links to resources for financial assistance, academic support, and health services, among others. <https://success.rutgers.edu>
- **Student Support Services:** Academic advising, learning and writing support, career services, and other resources. <https://www.rutgers.edu/academics/student-support>
- **The Learning Centers:** The Learning Centers offer free services such as peer tutoring, academic coaching, writing tutoring, professional development, and other programs for enhancing your academic career. <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/>
- **Rutgers Libraries:** The University Libraries are a great resource for finding information to improve your research. <https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/>
- **Bias Incident Reporting:** If you are a victim or witness of a bias incident, please report it to the Office of Student Affairs here: <https://studentaffairs.rutgers.edu/bias-incident-reporting>
- **Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services:** <https://veterans.rutgers.edu>
- **Student Health Services:** Take advantage of your Student Health Center! If you need any medical services or mental health assistance, give them a visit: <http://health.rutgers.edu/>
- **Counseling, Alcohol and Other Drug Assistance Program & Psychiatric Services (CAPS):** <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>
- **Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance:** <http://vpva.rutgers.edu/>

Academic Integrity

Rutgers University takes academic dishonesty very seriously. By enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for familiarizing yourself with the Academic Integrity Policy (<http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>) and the possible penalties (including suspension and expulsion) for violating the policy. As per the policy, all suspected violations will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: copying homework answers, cheating on exams, plagiarism, failure to cite sources, fabrication, using ideas or words without attribution, sabotage, and aiding others in committing a violation.

Communication & Civility

If you have any questions, comments, concerns, suggestions for improvement, or any other message regarding something that involves this class, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. For our mutual security, e-mails must be from your rutgers.edu addresses. Please expect a reply within the next two working days, and within normal working hours.

All communication in this class, whether in person or online, must be civil and polite. We should all expect professionalism, courtesy, and honesty from each other. Should you encounter ideas in class that are difficult or controversial, please feel free to raise the issue in a respectful manner. Harassment, intimidation, coercion, and any other abusive or prejudicial behavior is unacceptable. Our class is a space where respect for the diverse backgrounds, identities, and perspectives of each individual is paramount.