Speaker: **Whitney Ward**  
Graduate Student, Yale University

Title: **A Perceptual Account of Creole Phonotactics**

Date: Friday, November 3, 2006  
Time: 12:00pm  
Place: Linguistics Seminar Room (201)  
370 Temple St

Abstract:

A central question in the field of creole studies concerns whether creole grammars reflect the emergence of language universals during creolization or if these grammars closely replicate the grammars of the substrate languages from which they emerge. The problem has been most considered in creole syntax but with the development of Optimality Theory, with a special emphasis on universal phonological markedness, this debate has expanded into the field of creole phonology.

This paper discusses some problems with universalist and substratist accounts of creolization that rely on high ranked markedness to explain the relative unmarkedness of creole segment inventories and syllable structures. A proposed alternative account suggests that phonological changes that occur in creolization can be modeled similarly to perceptually based sound changes with the additional complication that speakers initial perceptions are biased by their native language.

Because of this, creole segment inventories and phonotactics reflect both universal facts about the perceptibility of segments and the structure of the substrate language(s). A number of observed phonological changes between lexifier and creole phonotactics are used to exemplify this perceptual account of creolization, with special focus on the English based creole Sranan.