

# Ling 495 Senior Seminar in Optimality Theory

Dr. Nick Danis, [nsdanis@wustl.edu](mailto:nsdanis@wustl.edu)

## Description

This seminar is an in-depth exploration of linguistic analyses in the Optimality Theory (OT) framework. OT is a constraint-based system where linguistic structure (be it from phonology, morphology, or syntax) is evaluated in parallel to determine the “best” candidate for a particular language. Students will engage in the primary literature on OT, dissect published analyses, and conduct formal OT analyses of their own. The seminar serves both to survey OT as well as to develop mastery in formal analysis and linguistic argumentation in general. No prior knowledge of OT is necessary. Prerequisite: Ling 313. Course Attributes: EN S; AS SSC; FA SSC; AR SSC

## Course Info

Course Number	L44 Ling 495
Semester	Fall 2023
Time	T-R 11:30am-12:50pm
Location	Sever 102
Office	
Office Hours	
Homepage	<a href="https://wustl.instructure.com/courses/117294">https://wustl.instructure.com/courses/117294</a>

## Goals

1. Engage in the primary literature for linguistics, specifically in Optimality Theory.
2. Create novel analyses for real linguistic data in the Optimality Theory framework.
3. Understand and critique existing analyses in the Optimality Theory framework.
4. Understand and define explicit, falsifiable theory.

## Required Materials

All readings and PDFs are posted on Canvas. Please make sure you stay up to date on all readings.

## Schedule

The exact schedule is likely to change as the semester progresses. Please see [Canvas](#) for all up-to-date readings and assignment due dates. Below is a selection from the reading list we will cover throughout the semester.

Author	Title
McCarthy	A Thematic Guide to Optimality Theory
McCarthy	Optimality Theory in Phonology A Reader
McCarthy	Doing Optimality Theory: Applying Theory to Data
Prince & Smolensky	Constraint Interaction in Generative Grammar
Prince	Entailed Ranking Arguments
Lombardi	Positional Faithfulness and Voicing Assimilation in Optimality Theory
Rice	Markedness in Phonology
Brasoveanu & Prince	Ranking and necessity- the Fusional Reduction Algorithm
Alber	Clash, Lapse, and Directionality
Bane & Riggle	Consequences of Candidate Omission
Bakovic & Keer	Optionality and Ineffability
Alber & DelBusso & Prince	From intensional properties to universal support
de Lacy	Markedness Reduction and Preservation in Phonology
Zsiga	The Sounds of Language ch 14 Constraint-based phonology
McCarthy & Prince	Generalized Alignment Prosody
McCarthy & Prince	Faithfulness and Identity in Prosodic Morphology
McCarthy & Prince	Generalized Alignment Introduction and Theory
Myers	OCP Effects in Optimality Theory
Pater	Austronesian Nasal Substitution and Other NC Effects
Beckman	Positional Faithfulness
Lombardi	Positional Faithfulness and Voicing Assimilation in Optimality Theory
Alderete	Dissimilation as Local Conjunction
Zec	The syllable

## Grade

The grade for this class is evenly divided between three categories: attendance/participation, technical practice, and the final project. As this is a small seminar, constant participation and attendance is mandatory. Technical practice refers small, low-stakes exercises that make sure the fundamentals of theory are understood. The final project is a research paper that you work on

throughout the semester, culminating in 10-15 pages (single spaced) of analysis and research. More detail is given in class.

### *Letter grades*

Letter grades are assigned based off the following scale. Numerical grades are **not** rounded.

$100 \geq A+ \geq 98$	$80 > C+ \geq 77$
$98 > A \geq 93$	$77 > C \geq 73$
$93 > A- \geq 90$	$73 > C- \geq 70$
$90 > B+ \geq 87$	$70 > D+ \geq 67$
$87 > B \geq 83$	$67 > D \geq 63$
$83 > B- \geq 80$	$63 > D- \geq 60$

If you are taking this class pass/fail, you must receive at least a C- (70%) to pass.

If you believe there has been an error in grading, I am happy to discuss it with you. However, you must bring it up to me within one week of the graded assignment being returned to you. After this, the grade is considered final.

## Academic Integrity

This course adheres to the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#), and takes cheating and plagiarism very seriously. All work completed online must be done alone unless instructed otherwise, and no resources not approved by the instructor may be used during exams.

## ADA Compliance

Washington University is committed to providing accommodations and/or services to students with documented disabilities. Students who are seeking support for a disability or a suspected disability should contact Disability Resources at 935-4153. Disability Resources is responsible for approving all disability-related accommodations for WU students, and students are responsible for providing faculty members with formal documentation of their approved accommodations at least two weeks prior to using those accommodations. I will accept Disability Resources VISA forms by email and personal delivery. If you have already been approved for accommodations, I request that you provide me with a copy of your VISA within the first two weeks of the semester. Please see more information at <http://cornerstone.wustl.edu>.

## Sexual Assault Resources

The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations (e.g., no contact order, course changes) to students who are victims of relationship or sexual violence, regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. If you need to request such accommodations, please contact the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center (RSVP) at [rsvpcenter@wustl.edu](mailto:rsvpcenter@wustl.edu) or 314-935-3445 to schedule an appointment with an RSVP confidential, licensed counselor. Information shared with counselors is confidential. However, requests for accommodations will be coordinated with the appropriate University administrators and faculty.

Please see more information at <https://students.wustl.edu/relationship-sexual-violence-prevention-center>.

*Last updated: August 23, 2023*