The Department of Linguistics
is pleased to present

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speaking on

Dynamic signing space, pronouns, and continuous disambiguation

Friday, April 9, 2021
1:20 PM (PST) via Zoom
Zoom Information: Will be emailed on Thursday, April 8, 2021

Abstract:
In the study of the formal semantics of sign languages, much attention has been given to the analysis of sign language "loci", or the use of signing space to keep track of discourse referents. Functionally, the space around a signer disambiguates coreference; formally, this use of space has been analyzed as (a) an overt version of the typically covert dynamic semantic indices, or (b) as syntactic features that trigger agreement, or (c) simply as a gestural deixis with a metaphoric extension to anaphora. I'll present a view emerging from collaboration with Dorothy Ahn (Rutgers) and Annemarie Kocab (Harvard) that takes insight from all three: it's essentially featural but acknowledges that the implementation of a feature with infinite disambiguating potential differs in minimal ways from dynamic indices under certain views of pronominal morphosyntax, highlighting aspects of dynamic semantic accounts more broadly for spoken languages. It also accounts for the important but mostly ignored fact that overt loci are not especially common in sign corpora and are infelicitous in certain pragmatic conditions. In the end, we see that it's possible to "offload" complicated iconic interpretation functions to non-language-specific spatial cognitive representations while still accounting for loci as they are used in e.g. donkey sentences, interpretation under focus, etc., providing new insight into the language/cognition interface more broadly. from multiple sources, including modification, locative clitics and urban landmarks.