

Department of Linguistics

Erik Zyman

will defend his dissertation

**On the Driving Force
for Syntactic Movement**

Thursday, March 15, 2018
at 3:00pm

Humanities 1, Room 202

Abstract:

A crucial task for syntactic theory is to determine what syntactic operations are made available by the human capacity for language, what their properties are, and why they have the properties they do. This talk aims to bring us closer to that goal by pushing forward our understanding of adjunction. Lebeaux (1991) and others argue (controversially) that adjuncts can merge into syntactic structures late. Here, I provide a new argument for, as well as a new analysis of, late adjunction. The English adverb *exactly* (or *precisely*) can adjoin to a *wh*-phrase, and *wh*-movement can affect either the whole adjunction structure (*What exactly is it for?*) or only the host (*What is it for exactly?*) (cf. Urban 1999). This type of adjunction structure ($_{WH} + exactly$) can be generated VP-internally, but surprisingly—and despite surface appearances—*exactly* cannot be stranded VP-internally (by movement of the adjunction host alone). I argue that the seemingly strange and intricate restrictions on *exactly*-stranding receive a principled explanation if adjuncts merge late (Lebeaux 1991), obligatorily (Stepanov 2001), in every phase. More specifically, all adjunction within a phase immediately precedes spellout of the phase head's complement. A surprisingly wide array of predictions of this analysis are argued to be correct.

The larger picture that emerges is one in which the syntax fundamentally prioritizes satisfying featural requirements imposed by lexical items, and it is for this reason that it waits until the last possible moment (within each phasal subderivation) to merge in the "peripheral" or "inessential" elements (adjuncts).