

CUNY PHONOLOGY FORUM
Professor Charles E. Cairns
March 24, 2004

BACKGROUND

The goals of the CUNY PHONOLOGY FORUM are to provide whatever modest support it can to the field of phonology and to contribute to the intellectual welfare of the [M.A./Ph.D. Program in Linguistics at the City University of New York](#) in the field of phonology.

The field of phonology has not agreed on two important theoretical questions: How should phonological objects be represented? What is the optimal architecture for phonological theory? These questions cut across different schools of thought within the discipline. The Forum will cosponsor public events at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and/or at other Colleges or Universities in the New York City metropolitan area, devoted to these two questions. The Forum will also maintain a website that will contain dialog and announce events appropriate to this goal.

The Forum is a natural sequel to the [CUNY Symposium on Phonological Theory](#), held at the CUNY Graduate Center February 20 and 21, 2004. This symposium brought together leading scholars in the field of phonology; MIT Press will publish a book based on the papers presented at the symposium.

STRUCTURE AND FUNDING

The Forum should have a broad leadership for it to attain its goals. I will invite scholars interested in phonology in the City University of New York to help lead the Forum, and I will invite scholars who participated in the recent Symposium to serve as an advisory committee to help the Forum attain its goals. I also plan to solicit the close cooperation of phonologists at other universities in the New York City Metropolitan area, especially NYU and Stony Brook.

The proceeds of the [Cairns Family Fund](#) will constitute a continuing source of modest funding, which can be augmented and leveraged when possible.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Idea 1: Public Events. The public events will all focus on foundational topics in Phonology. The first such event, which is now in the early planning stages, will consist of a three-day workshop on the feature system. In order to foster an atmosphere of fruitful discourse, we are inviting two important scholars whose views are sufficiently similar for a productive dialog, but whose views are different

enough that a lively debate would be useful. Professor Nick Clements has agreed to participate, and I am now about to invite another scholar.

We will ask the participants to exchange ideas with each other well in advance of the workshop, so they can see for themselves what topics might provide the most productive interchange. We would ask them to produce a short document that could constitute the description of the content of the workshop; this document will be posted on the Forum Website.

To give a concrete idea of how such an event will be organized, we will schedule the workshop for Thursday through Saturday. The planning is now in the early stages, but one model would have the workshop consisting of some combination of two types of events, regularly scheduled colloquia and informal meetings and conversations. For example, most of Thursday could be devoted to the scholars meeting with each other and with others who may wish participate in their conversations. The two scholars could give a joint Colloquium at CUNY at 4:15 pm on Thursday, the time regularly set aside for Linguistics Colloquia. If Stony Brook and NYU were to participate, they might sponsor Colloquia on or both of the other days. Ideally, these would be coordinated in such a way that the topics discussed at the various colloquia would be sequential. At this writing, I am actively pursuing making the arrangements for this event; I will update the website as these plans become more concrete.

Idea 2: Website. Scholars in the field of phonology will be invited to participate in public dialog on foundational issues in the field. This would be a natural sequel to the Symposium. The website will be interactive and the scholars on the advisory committee would help decide topics that appear on it.

Idea 3: Student Projects. The Forum will hire students to carry out specific, well-focused projects in phonology. For example, one of the papers that was presented at the Symposium made reference to a technical concept known as the Sonority Dispersion Principle. There exists no place in the literature where this concept and debate around it is well articulated. Furthermore, it would take an inordinate amount of space to devote several pages to it in most research papers that appear in the professional literature. It would be reasonable for an advanced graduate student to research such a project, write a concise statement describing it, and, after faculty members and, when appropriate, scholars outside CUNY have vetted it, post it on the web.

CONCLUSION

I urge readers of this proposal to communicate any ideas they might have that could improve the effectiveness of the CUNY Phonology Forum.