

LTS Faculty Profile

Keli Yerian

By Trish Pashby

The faculty members of the language teaching specialization bring to the program academic backgrounds in linguistics, language acquisition, and education as well as extensive experience teaching language in the U.S. and abroad. The latest addition, Keli Yerian, is no exception.

Keli Yerian comes to us via Georgetown and Stanford universities. She received her Ph.D. in linguistics from Georgetown, where she focused on sociolinguistics under adviser Deborah Tannen. While at Georgetown, she taught a variety of linguistics courses. The research for her dissertation brought her to the San Francisco Bay Area, where she completed a study on the role of gender, gesture, and body movement in interaction at self-defense courses for women.

At Stanford, Keli taught courses for international graduate students in the Language Center. She focused on speaking and advanced graduate writing for students from all majors. She was also involved in international teaching assistant training and became a certified ACTFL (American Council on Teaching Foreign Language) rater. A course she designed in advanced oral skills, based on some of the ACTFL categories—accuracy and fluency in description, narration, and critical thinking and discussion—became a very popular elective. In addition, Keli taught Teaching Spoken English, a teacher-training course for undergraduates, and developed and led workshops for volunteer teachers working with international students in summer programs. She also continued her research on body movement by investigating gesture use in presentations by native and nonnative English speakers.

While at Stanford, she met and married fellow instructor Robert Elliott. Together they have two sons,

Oliver and Theo, ages five and three. The family decided to move to Oregon to create a more enjoyable lifestyle—including less time in the car and more camping opportunities—and to be closer to Keli's family, who now live in Corvallis and Washington State.

Keli grew up in Alaska, a place she loves and credits with developing not only her enthusiasm for the outdoors but much of her character. Her family adhered to a "create your life" philosophy. While building their own house in Fairbanks, they lived in tents,



Keli Yerian with sons Oliver and Theo

even in winter. Keli was in charge of chopping wood and melting snow on the woodstove for dishes. Her mother was an educator, which influenced Keli's eventual career path. While Keli was a child, her mother completed an M.A. and taught in public schools. Her mother later received a Ph.D. in education and worked as a university professor.

Several international experiences cemented Keli's interest in the areas of linguistics and language teaching. As an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Keli spent her sophomore year in France, which inspired her to complete a double major in French and linguistics. After graduating, she headed to Barcelona for a six-week teacher-training program (with

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International House), which included opportunities to directly apply what was learned in an EFL classroom setting. Then, when her plans to spend six months in Togo, West Africa, were thwarted by political unrest, she ended up in Senegal, where she managed to find a host family (in the home of a popular actress) and spent four months studying Wolof with a linguist and tutoring students in English.

Since arriving at the UO in fall 2007, Keli has been very busy teaching. In addition to her LTS courses—including LING 540, Linguistic Principles and Second-Language Learning, LT 545, Second-Language Teaching, and the LTS seminar, Focus on Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar—she teaches academic English courses for international students at the American English Institute. She appreciates the opportunity to do both. Keli laughs and explains, "I have to practice what I preach." Teaching the LTS courses "keeps you sharper in your own language classes."

This fall she is teaching LT 546, Second-Language Teaching Practice, along with a writing course in the AEIS (Academic English for International Students) program and several pronunciation courses in the Intensive English Program at the American English Institute. She is also putting the final touches on the syllabus for a new linguistics course designed specifically for College of Education students, which she will be teaching this summer.

Keli enjoys teaching in the LTS program. Finding the students "experienced, interesting, and mature," she sees her role as "providing an opportunity for sharing and learning together."