UW LINGUISTICS DEPARTMENT IS SADDENED TO REPORT THE PASSING OF OUR DEAR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE DR. AKIRA OMAKI

Submitted by Kirby A Conrod on August 22, 2018 - 12:43pm

The UW Linguistics Department is saddened to report the passing of our dear friend and colleague Dr. Akira Omaki on August 6, 2018, due to complications from lymphoma. Dr. Omaki joined UW Linguistics in 2016 and developed curriculum and research on first language acquisition and language processing and established the Language Development and Processing Lab.

Dr. Omaki received his PhD from the University of Maryland in 2010, and worked as a post-doctoral researcher at University of Geneva and an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University before joining us at the University of Washington.

As a researcher, Dr. Omaki developed an unusually broad reach, extending from comparative syntax to cognitive neuroscience, with publications in leading venues across all of these areas. He was the leader or key partner in multiple awards from the National Science Foundation, and he gave invited talks and classes in Europe, Asia, and North America.

However, it was as a mentor to younger scientists where Dr. Omaki really came into his own. He was a tireless advocate for his students and had the highest expectations for them. The number of students who he touched extended far beyond his official advisees to students all over the world.

In his time at UW, he had a profound influence on the curriculum, research philosophy, and directions in the department, in part through his many collaborations. It is through these collaborations that we continue to investigate the questions that drove his work.

He leaves behind his wife Elise, and their two-year old daughter Aya. Elise writes: "In lieu of flowers, please consider sending a donation to UNICEF (https://www.unicefusa.org/). Akira cared very much about making the world a better place for the next generation, and this was one of his favorite charities."

A longer memorial for Dr. Omaki is posted here.