The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language presents:

Sandra Waxman, Northwestern University

A precocious link between language and cognition
Is this a link for language writ large?

Monday, January 10, 2022 @ 10:30am CT
Join us via Zoom at https://tinyurl.com/SWCGSL

The link between language and cognition is unique to our species and emerges early in infancy. But most of the evidence for this precocious language-cognition link has focused exclusively on spoken language. In this new line of work, we broaden the net, asking whether infants’ earliest language-cognition link is sufficiently broad to include sign language. Sandra will present evidence from four- to six-month-old hearing infants, never before exposed to sign language. First, she finds that at 4-months, infants link sign language (ASL), like spoken language, to cognition. Second, it is specifically the linguistic elements of sign language that undergird this link to cognition: infants in a control condition, who observed pointing and gazing gestures but no sign language, did not establish this link to cognition. Third, the link to cognition quickly narrows: by 6-months, watching ASL no longer supports hearing infants’ cognition, although listening to their native spoken language continues to do so. Together, these findings illuminate the breadth of infants’ early language-cognition link and how it unfolds. They also point to the power of early linguistic input in fueling language and cognitive development.

Free and open to the public. ASL-English interpreting will be provided. Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this event should contact Zena Levan at zena@uchicago.edu. Organized by The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language.