Kate Mesh is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Texas at Austin. She specializes in language documentation, with a research focus on embodied language. Her projects explore how semi-conventional gestures (1) contribute fixed meanings to messages conveyed in speech and bodily action, and (2) serve as a source of lexical items in developing signed languages.

Since 2012, Mesh and her research partner, Lynn Hou (Ph.D., UT-Austin, May 2016), have worked to document the structure of San Juan Quiahije Chatino Sign Language, a constellation of family sign languages emerging in an indigenous Chatino community in Oaxaca, Mexico. Mesh and Hou are currently archiving more than 30 hours of annotated filmed interaction featuring deaf signers.

In her dissertation project, Mesh documents the various strategies hearing speakers of San Juan Quiahije Chatino employ when indicating spatial referents: these include the use of spoken demonstratives and fixed bearing expressions, as well as gestural behaviors such as manual and lip pointing. She investigates the conventional features of Chatino co-speech pointing and considers how pointing conventions are altered and elaborated when used by deaf signers within the same community.

Mesh holds a B.A. in Philosophy and Religion from New College of Florida (2006) and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics from Boston University (2011). She has received more than 40 hours of instruction on how to make corn tortillas by hand but has failed to produce even one truly satisfactory exemplar.