

# M.A. IN LIBERAL STUDIES *News*

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SUNY College at Old Westbury, Spring 2021

## Do You Like Scary Movies? Prof. Orquidea Morales on History and Horror



Professor Orquidea Morales loves horror. Startling, shocking, even repulsive horror. Horror films frighten her, yet she describes feeling scared as the best feeling—one she seeks out from films. Prof. Morales has turned this life-long love with the genre into a serious academic pursuit.

She first encountered horror films as a young child of four or five. Her aunt watched them on television, and so did she. Now as a professor and horror

fangirl, Prof. Morales shares her breadth of knowledge of the genre, the film industry, and critical media theory with Old Westbury students.

After her undergraduate studies Prof. Morales thought she would research the development of Mexican American or Chicano Studies programs for her master's thesis at the University of Texas—Pan American in Edinburg, Texas. But an ethnic literature professor noticed her interest *La Llorona* and encouraged

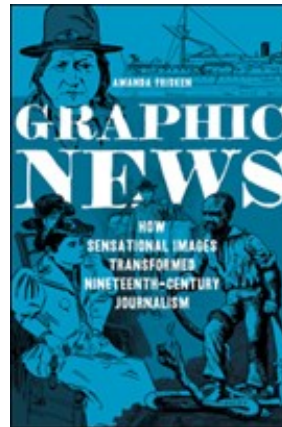
her inquiry into this centuries-old folkloric figure. *La Llorona* can be found in Latin American literature and film, and as Prof. Morales writes, even in popular song or branding consumer products like coffee beans. Prof. Morales heard of “The Wailer” as *La Llorona* can be translated, as a child, from her mother. *La Llorona* is responsible for the death of her children—by accident, or on purpose—dies herself, and is consumed by grief, hence her wail. Prof. Morales notes *La Llorona* is tied

## *Newsworthy*—MALS Program

Phabian Winfield, who will graduate this spring, is recipient of the 2020-2021 SUNY Graduate Diversity Fellowship. After interning at the Hempstead Schools bi-lingual program, Winfield will continue his studies in Social Studies education.



American Studies Professor, and former MALS Graduate Director



Amanda Frisken recently published *Graphic News: How Sensational Images Transformed Nineteenth Century Journalism* with University of Illinois Press. She has a new position as Old Westbury's Acting Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences. Professor Carol Quirke currently serves as the MALS Graduate Director.

Continued on Page 4

to conquest, of the female body and of the colonized body, those subjugated by patriarchy and colonization. Chicana feminists have reconceptualized the narrative of *La Llorona*, making her someone whose wails of loss become demands for recognition to the traumas of conquest. In contrast, the constricting, patriarchal archetype remains influential, Prof. Morales's thesis argues, through horror films about *La Llorona* produced for U.S. and Spanish-speaking audiences and seen by millions globally.

Like other genres such as the musical, the romance, or the Western, the academy "disrespected" horror films as an object of study. But that has changed dramatically in the



Film still, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, (1968) with Duane Jones and Judith O'Dea as Ben and Barbra.

past few decades. Prof. Morales attended the American Studies program at the University of Michigan, where she amplified her investigation into the genre. Her doctoral dissertation, "Border Horror: Genre of Death and Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border" explores how horror film can be used to "process histories of trauma, war, colonization," and the deep wounds of racism and sexism and their attendant violence. She placed U.S. and Mexican horror films "in conversation" as both nation's film industries have imagined the border as a space of death and violence. She observes that a preoccupation with monsters and horror allows viewers to "simplify and break down" complex histories, allowing audience members to analyze and confront them. *Godzilla* was never just about a frightening sea mon-

ster, but rather a Japanese cultural response to the trauma of WWII and the atomic bomb. Similarly *Get Out* provoked a difficult conversation on U.S. racism; films can be a starting point to explore social injustices. The University of Michigan awarded Dr. Morales a Ph.D. in 2018 for her study, which operates at multiple levels, as she examines the historic roots to this genre, how the genre circulates within and across borders, the production of these filmed stories, and audiences' responses to the genre.

Since arriving at Old Westbury in the Fall of 2019, after a one-year César Chávez Post-Doctoral Fellowship at Dartmouth College, Dr. Morales has taught a variety of media studies courses, from the introductory *AS2652 Media Studies* and *AS3732 Politics of Media* to courses in her field such as *AS4160 Latinx Media* and *AS3472 Myth and Film*.

Her course for the MALS program, *AS6370 Monsters Below the Border: Latin American Horror Film*, to be offered in the Fall of 2021, will look at the horror genre in the context of national cinemas. Argentina and Mexico have the most developed national cinemas, but the course will look at Caribbean and Central American films as well. Students will push at the definition of the genre, and examine how each national cinema differs in relationship to definitions of "classic" horror. She will look at historic films, *Alucarda* (1977) for example, but also more recent, low-budget, limited-release, direct-to-streaming horror films, such as the Mexican film *Tigers are Not Afraid* (2017). She expects the course will allow in-depth dialogue with students about the deeper meanings of these films.

If you ask Dr. Morales what horror films are "must watches," she suggests two classics, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and George Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005), which comments on the post-9/11, U.S. "shock and awe" military campaigns in Iraq. Romero directed the quintessential zombie film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), another favorite. Prof. Morales suggests that "any movie can be a horror film," depending on who is the audience. She loves pushing students past the immediate story, and engaging them in some of the deeper social and political realities that these films navigate.

**MALS Students may personalize their studies by taking an *Independent Study (LI7990)*. Generally, a student should have taken several classes already, have a clear focus of study, and should do preliminary research to consider their study's direction. For more information, email Prof. Quirke, [quirkec@oldwestbury.edu](mailto:quirkec@oldwestbury.edu).**

# Phillip Griffin: Touches History at the Huntington Historical Society

Recent MALS graduate Phillip Griffin (2020) transitioned to the MALS program from Old Westbury's Social Studies MAT. He has a passion for history and had assumed his career options were to be a social studies teacher or college professor. He admired his teachers and appreciated the message to foster the next generation of historians. Ultimately, he decided he had "blinders on" as his real interest was with hands-on experiences with preserved artifacts. "I went to museums a lot as a kid, and I felt that I was experiencing history through those objects. It dawned on me that this must be a way to work with history."

Griffin's love for history developed through intimate contact. His grandfather served in World War II in the 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. He landed in France in February of 1945, and in the following months faced the Sixth [Waffen] SS Mountain Division. The battles were harsh, and his grandfather was sent to a field hospital, for "battle fatigue." Griffin said, "It's not the glorious part of war that everyone talks about, but it's the reality."

Though his grandfather died before he was born, Griffin better understood him through historical research. He learned about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and how veterans coped with what they saw and what they did. His grandmother shared her husband's discharge papers, a DD214, which summarized his service, and his civilian work in a defense-industry factory in Cocksackie, NY, before joining the military. Taking that information, Griffin dug more, and found books about his grandfather's unit, a dog tag and i.d. bracelet and patches from his uniform. He finds it "incredible that this history had been sitting in a dresser drawer for decades, and here I am, getting to see it and understand someone I never met." His "digging and diving into history" led him "to surviving veterans, a division history association, museums, and reference books." He met his grandfather's platoon commander, who was 93 at the time, and also met his grandfather's friend from boot camp.

Griffin's core interests were in military history, but courses in History and Philosophy and American Studies at Old Westbury broadened his interests. Taking *Islamic History* with Professor Alice Hunsberger (H&P) "filled in blanks." Griffin grew up as a Catholic, post 9/11, and he encountered discrimination towards Muslims. Prof. Hunsberger introduced students to an imam who shared stories of his life, and she introduced them to the Islamic arts at the Metropolitan Museum. "It made me be proud to be learning to bridge divides." Additionally, Old Westbury offers smaller



Phillip Griffin at the Huntington Historical Society, where he interned last summer.

classes; "we weren't in big lecture halls. I never had more than 25 students in a class. You had the opportunity to be heard; it wasn't one professor speaking down to everybody. It was a conversation...we would "share experiences, and reflect on them." These less traditional methods "made you question and ask questions."

For his MALS capstone project, Griffin interned at the Huntington Historical Society, which he found out about "by accident." He was interviewing for a docent position, "dressing up in period dress to draw students into history," when "he stumbled across one of their collections and met Robin Horn who is in charge." He learned that the Society's objects have been donated, and that volunteers ensure that the objects are in the right climate, temperature, and acid-free storage so they're around for the next 100 years. "I stepped back and said I'd really like to work with you." Griffin's focus was their weapons collection which "no one had worked with." Firearms and edged weapons such as swords, bayonets, or knives, are pieces of history. He photographed, researched, and cataloged in Past Perfect, a curatorial database, some 30 firearms in the collection. He



MALS students **Ian Abraham** and **Sebastian Agosti** will both receive honors from the program at this year's Honor's Convocation on April 29, 2021.

American Studies Professors **Samara Smith** and **Laura Chipley**, along with Mathematics, Computer and Information Science Department's Professor **Ashok Basawapatna**, recently won one of seventeen grants from the **National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Digital Projects for the Public**, for their *Virtual Aquapolis*. The \$30,000 planning grant invites them to create a framework for a historical exploration of New York City harbor, above and below the water line, to chart relationships between the harbor, its waters and its peoples, from the Lenape Indians to the harbor of today. Their design plan allows them to compete for future NEH funding. In the planning phase they are creating a design document



for a virtual reality project to draw together archival photography, film and audio, animation, underwater video, expert interviews and narration to explore inter-relationships between humans and the natural world. Chipley and Smith both teach in the MALS program, *Ethnographic Media* and *New Media Narratives*, respectively. Along with Prof. Özgür Akgün, they have initiated the Advanced Video Production Certificate, slated to begin in Fall 2022.

Profs. Smith, Chipley and Basawapatna in New York Harbor

#### Griffin Continued from Page 3

was “digging through old firearms, manifests back to the 1920s when the weapon was received in the Historical Society. I used my knowledge of how to preserve, and clean, and was marking, taking notes on all, and it’s now all online, anyone who comes to research can see this. Here’s history, a connection to Huntington.” Weapons are now “sorted properly, and displayed beautifully in custom built cabinets.”

The Huntington Historical Society created a paid position to keep him on for the 80th anniversary of the Dec 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. He’s reading microfilm to find the 3,600 men and women who served from Huntington, Long Island. Griffin is also

identifying Huntington veterans with great stories, or potential donations to the Society.

Griffin advises students to benefit from the MALS program’s flexibility. “Take your time to look at what courses are offered, consider what you’d like to see yourself doing, and ask what can I take out of this course that will help me achieve this goal. I was able to take Prof. Hyewon Yi’s course on curation, that set me up for what I’m doing. Prof. Laura Chipley’s course on ethnographic media on how to interview has been very useful when documenting history before someone passes. That’s the liberal college experience, liberal studies in a nutshell. You’re taking what you’re given and catering to your needs.”

To learn more about Old Westbury’s MA in Liberal Studies and Advanced Certificate in Video Production degrees, contact the Graduate Director, Professor Carol Quirke, by phone at 516.628.5024, or by email at [quirkec@oldwestbury.edu](mailto:quirkec@oldwestbury.edu).



## MALS Courses

Fall 2021

**AS6370 MONSTERS BELOW THE BORDER, LATIN AMERICAN HORROR FILMS (24253) MORALES, T 4:45-7:00**

EL6510 FOUNDATIONS OF U.S. LIT (23319) HOBSON, T 4:45-7:00

EL6520 FOUNDATIONS OF ENGLISH LIT (23320) CAMARASANA, TH 4:45-7:00

HI 6510 TOPICS IN US HISTORY (23247) QUIRKE, W 4:45-7:00

HI6530 ECON: THEORIES, TOOLS & DEBATES (23333) DEL GUIDICE, M 4:45-7:00

HI 6570 TOPICS IN ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION (24226) ANDERSON, T 4:45-7:00

HI7500 QUESTIONING GLOBAL HISTORY (23332) MARECHAUX, W 7:15-9:30

**LI6000 INTRODUCTION TO INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (23859) QUIRKE, TH 4:45-7:00**

**LI6300 INTERNSHIP FIELD PLACEMENT (BY ARRANGEMENT WITH GRAD DIR.)**

**LI 7990 INDEPENDENT STUDY (BY ARRANGEMENT WITH GRAD DIR.)**

MH6120 PSYCHOPATHOLOGY\* (23339) KAMENS, M 1:00-3:15

ML 6510 STRUCTURE OF SPANISH (23231) ASSA, M 4:45-7:00 *IN SPANISH ONLY*

ML 6520 MASTERPIECES OF HISPANIC LITERATURE GONZALEZ (23232) *IN SPANISH ONLY—ONLINE*

ML 6810 ART MOVEMENTS AND LETTERS IN SPAIN GUERRERO (23268) TH 4:45-7 *IN SPANISH ONLY*

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**COURSES IN BOLD are designed specifically for students in the MALS program.**

Remaining courses are open to MALS students on a space-available basis. It helps to register early. Some require pre-requisites and/or instructor permission, especially courses with a \*, in the Mental Health Counseling program.