

M.A. in Liberal Studies Newsletter

Fall 2024

“Go For It:” Kimberly Johnston, SUNY Graduate Diversity Fellow, on OW’s MALS Program

Kimberly Johnston graduated from SUNY Old Westbury in American Studies in Summer 2022, and immediately enrolled in the university’s Master’s in Liberal Studies (MALS) Program. “Invited into” the program by Prof. Llana Barber (American Studies), now at University of Minnesota, Johnston thought it a good idea to continue her education immediately. Before getting her BA as an adult student Johnston had worked in a variety of fields—business, security, and retail.

Johnston loved her first class, *LI6000 Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*, which focused on New York City. Students took a day-long trip to Gotham—visiting Brooklyn’s Greenwood Cemetery, an immigrant Mexican restaurant, the Skyscraper Museum, and a walking tour exploring radical women’s history in Greenwich
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Kimberly Johnston, second from left, distributing food with volunteers at New York Cares, in September.



Dr. Catherine Bernard

Art Across Continents: Dr. Catherine Bernard on African Diasporic and Indigenous Arts

Dr. Catherine Bernard will be teaching VA 6320 *African Visual Traditions in the Americas* this spring for the MALS program. She is a scholar and curator, working on African art, art of the African diaspora and indigenous art forms,
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Will Wilson, “Auto-Immune Response: Confluence of Three Generations. (2019) ©Will Wilson, part of *Trees Also Speak*, curated by Dr. Bernard

(cont. from p. 1)

African Visual Traditions moves from centuries old traditions in Africa to diasporic arts seen as more traditional here in the U.S. for example Mississippi artist, James “Son Ford” Thomas’s clay sculptures, or the potters of Edgefield, South Carolina. The course also examines more contemporary art, for example the work of Washington D.C. based Renée Stout who mixes African sculpture, modern technologies, and mixed media to suggest Black defiance of racism, or the work of Nari Ward, a Jamaican-born sculptor and installation artist, now living in Harlem, who according to the New Museum uses “humble materials...folk traditions,” and “creative recycling” to “articulat[e] relationships between people, [that] address topics such as historical memory, political and economic disenfranchisement, racism, and democracy in an effort to express both the tenuousness and the resilience of community.”

Dr. Bernard studied at the Sorbonne, earning her Ph.D. in Art History. She worked with a pioneering professor of African Art History, Jean Leaud, and Edouard Glissant, writer, poet and influential theoretician of Caribbean cultures. Dr. Bernard is an active scholar and the range of her scholarship is wide. A few of her recent works include an essay on arts of the African diaspora, “Modernism, Transnational Networks and Pan-Africanist Thought in Early Twentieth Century African American Art,” in *Global Modern Art Anthology*,

(Routledge, 2024,) artistic investigations of refugees and migrants in the book chapter “Transcultural Spaces: Post Migrant and Plural Identities in Films and Videos from North Africa and the Middle East,” in *International Art Opportunities* (Vernon Press, 2019)



**James “Son Ford” Thomas, “The Devil and his Blues. cont. on p. 3
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and contemporary indigenous arts, often with a focus on video and digital arts, as evidenced in the recent collection she edited, *Digging Earth: Extractivism and Resistance on Indigenous Lands of the Americas* (Ethics Press, 2024).

In 2018 Dr. Bernard organized the exhibition, *Trees Also Speak*, which Humanities New York, and the SUNY Research Foundation helped fund. The exhibition

explored, in her words, “Native artists who affirm our interconnectedness with the natural world and underline our responsibilities for its stewardship.” This exhibition also explored how indigenous investigate the “present and future exploitation” of the land. Students taking *African Traditions in the Americas* will obtain an enriched understanding of the arts of the Americas, and the ways in which African traditions shape this nation’s cultural landscape.



2024 MALS students, L-R, Aryanna Griffin, Juliana Hatzinger, Brendan Lipford and Michael-George Davis-Anderson at Greenwood Cemetery.



Students, Faculty, and Parents from MALS, *Intro to Interdisciplinary Studies*, *Intro to Women’s Studies*, and *U.S. Women’s History* enjoy an October afternoon on Patchen Place, part of Kathleen Hulser’s *Bad, Rad and Boho Women of the Village* tour.

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Village—all in one day. She also found Prof. Jermaine Archer's course, *AS6310 Atlantic Slavery and Folklore*, meaningful. He focused on the role of music in the Black



Kimberly Johnston won the SUNY Graduate Fellowship in the Spring, 2024.

community, how it sustained the African diaspora in the Americas from the colonial era to contemporary hip-hop. Johnston was particularly moved by the generational transfer of music within the diaspora—from gospel, to blues, to jazz, and more recently, to hip-hop—offering African Americans “a rebirth” on this continent.

The MALS program's small seminars were its biggest positive: “We can always reach out to professors and we gain friendships through our classes.” For her capstone she is interning at New York Cares, which provides food to those in need. She believes her communication skills have grown, and enjoys working with and serving a diverse set of Americans. She is considering a doctorate in Government as her next step.

Johnston is “grateful” for the MALS program. She says, “As an older student—with other older students, I feel as if I belong, I feel that comfortable.” She continues, “Go for it, if you have the time and patience, go for it.”

Graduate Honors Convocation— Naiya Edwards and George Cienfuegos receive Honors



Edwards, Cienfuegos, and Prof. Carol Quirke. Edwards entered a doctoral program at Morgan State University; Cienfuegos teaches English to Long Island high school students.



Prof. Quirke, Edwards, Old Westbury President Timothy Sams, and Ms. Edwards's mother at Graduate Honors Convocation reception.

Graduation—2024



Left: Lillian Horn, Prof. Carol Quirke, (American Studies/MALS Graduate Director), and Naiya Edwards, at Graduation, May 2024.

Right: Close up.

Below: Prof. Marty Cooper (Psychology/Mental Health Counseling) with MALS graduates.



Spring 2025 Courses for MALS students

January 27-May 20, 2025

Monday

8:00-10:30 am MH 7510 (crn 20945) *Career Development*, Prof. Hughes
4:30-7 pm EL6540 (crn 20935) *Topics in World Literature*, Prof. Schmermund (Taught via zoom)
4:30-7 pm HI6540 (crn 20937) *Topics in European History*, Prof. Shields-Mas

Tuesday

4:30-7 pm HI6570 (crn 21248) *Topics in Islamic History*, Prof. Anderson (Taught via zoom)
4:30-7 pm ML6530 (crn 20932) *Cervantes and the Golden Age*, Prof. Lara
5:15-7:45 pm VA6320 (crn 21412) *African Visual Traditions in the Americas*, Prof. Bernard

Wednesday

8:00-10:30 am MH6500 (crn 20938) *Lifespan Development*, Prof. Cooper (Instructor approval required)
4:30-7 pm EL6520 (crn 21375) *Foundations of English Literature*, Prof. Torrell (Taught via zoom)
4:30-7 pm EL6530 (crn 20934) *Topics in Multicultural Literature*, Prof. Emery (Taught via zoom)
4:30-7 pm HI6520 (crn 20936) *US Political and Constitutional History*, Prof. Cocca

Friday

8:00-10:30 am MH7500 (crn 20944) *Diagnosis and Treatment of Addictive Disorders*, Prof. Leone

Asynchronous

ML 6540 (crn 20933) *Points of Contact: US and Latin America*, Prof. Gonzalez (Fully online, no zoom)

In consultation with the Graduate Director, students with 15 credits may take an Independent Study with an interested professor. Also, please contact the Graduate Director as you near your final 8 credits to determine if an 8-credit thesis or a 4-credit internship is the right course for you.