

# M.A. in Liberal Studies Newsletter

Spring 2025

## Lee Blackstone: “Through Music People Connect”

Dr. Lee Blackstone teaches one of MAL’s most popular courses, *SY6310 The Sociology of Music*. He publishes extensively about different forms of music, such as English folk music, Southern Italian *tarantella*, and more recently on the use of music in therapeutic settings. He states, “I’m very moved by the theories of English musicologist Tia DeNora.” She claims music “is an affordance,” in that music allows for other things to happen. For example, music can build identities; music can be used for mental renewal and therapy; and, it can be used to divide up time, or to regiment the body. Music often encapsulates memory and how we experience the flow of our lives.

In 2017 Blackstone was interviewed by famed restaurateur, chef, and TV personality Anthony Bourdain, for his show *Parts Unknown*. Blackstone was featured in an interview for Season Ten, Episode 9 on [Southern Italy](#). He shared his deep knowledge of the *tarantella*, a form of folk music and also a ritual dating back thousands of years to Greek settlements in Italy with their Dionysian cults. Impoverished women, working in agriculture had fits, thought to be brought on by a spider (*taranta*) bite. Music brought women out of their trances or fits. Over time this ritual has transformed, and Blackstone studies recent folk music based on this tradition.

Blackstone’s *The Sociology of Music* course has students examine how music can commemorate in public life, as with classical requiems. A recent example, John Adams’s *On the Transmigration of Souls*, provides ambient music such as New York City street noises, while the names of those lost during September 11<sup>th</sup> are spoken by family members, with a chorus mixed in. “It is so powerful to listen to—it is a haunting piece,”



**Prof. Lee Blackstone—Sociology**

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## MALS Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

See Inside for Information on our May 19<sup>th</sup> Alumni Party. (you can come too!)

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Blackstone maintains. The pull on memory also emerges in hip hop culture, with the whole process of sampling that plugs listeners into past shared musical experiences while infusing the music with pleasure in recalling the original sampled recordings.

Students in Blackstone's class also explore how music establishes concepts of national identity. Romania's former President (and dictator, executed in 1989) Nicolae Ceausescu tried to ignite a rebirth of the "folk," looking backwards to an imagined past. He organized folk revivals in the hopes of nurturing Romanian nationalism. Blackstone also noted that he is also "...very interested in the Roma people, derogatorily referred to as 'Gypsies.'" The Roma or Romani came from Asia to Europe in the middle ages—they've lived in the crossroads for much of their lives, though many settled in Transylvania in Romania, and Moldova, now an independent Republic. But the Roma are distinct

from the Romanians, and their music has its own character. Blackstone is now looking at musicians who fuse traditional music with more contemporary sounds such as hip-hop, pop, and electronica, such as the hip hop collective Subcarparti, and dub artist Andrei Bucureci (known as Obeah; and his avant-garde electronic music precursor, Rodian G.A). For them music is "a vessel to reclaim culture and not be ashamed of it — through music, people connect to their old village lives."

*The Sociology of Music* students do final projects on a form of music that they choose to explore, and have done projects on the music of African-American slaves and ex-slaves, the sociological transformation of north Indian classical and Hindustani music, the influence of Indian music on the Beatles, and the roots of jazz and the construction of African-American identity.

## Master's in Liberal Studies 10-Year Anniversary

Old Westbury's MALS graduates are doing advocacy work, teaching at the primary and secondary levels, running their own businesses, teaching as college faculty, and doing doctoral research.

Our anniversary will begin with a roundtable. Alumni will share their experiences with the program and the paths they've taken since. Then time to enjoy refreshments, chatting, and relaxed Q&A.

Ian Abraham, ('16 Philosophy and Religion, '21 Liberal Studies)  
Pursuing his History PhD at SUNY Stonybrook.

Fatima Logan Alston ('06 Virginia Commonwealth University, '22 Liberal Studies)  
American Studies Adjunct Faculty, Co-Director, Threads of Truth Arts Company

Phillip Griffin, ('17 History, '20 Liberal Studies), Citizens Advocate, Huntington Town Council,  
and Co-Founder and Chair of the Town of Huntington's LGBTQ+ Task Force.

Join current, former, and prospective MALS students, and MALS faculty.  
Celebrate our program and learn more about what a MALS degree can do for you.

**Monday, May 19, 2025 6:00-7:30 pm NAB 2034/Red Room**

FMI and to RSVP by 5/14: Carol Quirke, Graduate Director, [quirkec@oldwestbury.edu](mailto:quirkec@oldwestbury.edu)



# Aryanna Griffin wins Graduate Diversity Fellowship

Aryanna Griffin graduated in 2023 with a BA from SUNY Old Westbury's Visual Arts department, thinking she might like to open her own gallery. Since then she has reconsidered and chosen to pursue a Master's in Liberal Studies to move into the field of art therapy. She's interested in emotions, and their artistic expression. "Sometimes words fail you; you hit a dead end," she said. "If you put it on paper it can help you determine what is going on."

Griffin is moved by Otobong Nkanga, a Nigerian-born multi-media artist whose work, according to her website, explores the "social and topographical relationship with our everyday environment." Nkanga looks "at the land as a place of non-belonging." Griffin was taken by Nkanga's tapestries, one of which she saw recently at MOMA. They are monumental and shift meaning as you see them close up. Gekidan Inu Curry, a Japanese anime duo inspired her mixed media art. As an undergraduate Griffin made artist books out of textiles she crafted, and she keeps a multi-media journal, which she loves as the medium of art bookmaking doesn't have any rules.

Prof. Jill Crocker's *Invisible Labor* course deeply moved Griffin when she returned to Old Westbury as a master's student. She now sees such labor

everywhere; she has a consciousness about the work that is done by students, retail workers, sanitation workers, landscapers, mothers, all who do "care" work that is often invisible or devalued in the larger society. MALS students take courses in traditional disciplines such as History, Modern Languages, or English. They also have access to specially designed interdisciplinary courses that pose important questions about contemporary life and which draw from the most exciting scholarship being written today that are taught by faculty who are passionate about these subjects.



The Graduate Diversity Fellowship is awarded each year to students who, according to SUNY, "have demonstrated academic achievement and overcome a disadvantage or

other impediment to success in higher education." The MALS program is thrilled that Aryanna Griffin has won the award in 2025.



**Prof. Amanda Frisken** will return to direct the MALS program in Fall 2025. Prof. Frisken founded MALS

with the support of faculty in American Studies, English, History, Politics, Economics and Law, Sociology and Visual Arts in 2015. The program's students are diverse in age, race, ethnicity and educational background. Students have proposed their own courses, including African American dance, Salvadoran poetry, feminist theory, even midcentury U.S. dams.



**MALS alumna Kimberly Johnston ('24)** at a New York Cares volunteer appreciation event.

# FALL 2025 Courses for MALS Students

## Monday

8:00-10:30 am *MH6120 Psychopathology* CRN 91035 Prof. Marty Cooper

4:30-7:00 pm *EL6530 Topics in Multicultural Literature* CRN 92162 Prof. Jacqueline Emery.  
*Remote*

4:30-7:00 pm *HI6320 Asian American History* CRN 91605, Professor TBA

4:30-7:00 pm *HI7500 Questioning Global History* CRN 91028 Prof. Edward Bever

## Tuesday

4:30-7:00 pm *ML6810 Spain and the Civil War* CRN 90965 Prof. Fernando Guerrero

4:30-7:00 pm *HI 6530 Economic Theories and Tools* CRN 91029 Prof. Glen Gerstner

## Wednesday

4:30-7:00 pm *EL6510 Foundations of U.S. Literature* CRN 91016 Prof. Chris Hobson *Remote*

4:30-7:00 pm *HI6510 Topics in US History: Struggles for Justice* CRN 90944 Prof. Amanda Frisken

## Thursday

4:30-7:00 pm *LI 6000 Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies\** CRN 92143 Prof. Amanda Frisken

7:10-9:40 pm *SY6310 Sociology of Music \** CRN 92138 Prof. Lee Blackstone

## Fully Asynchronous

*ML6510 Masterpieces of Hispanic Literature* CRN90929 Prof. Ruben Gonzalez

**Students who have taken at least 15 credits may speak with the Graduate Director about an Independent Study to move your academic interests forward. Also, at 15 credits you should discuss your choices of internship or thesis capstone project, worth 3 or 6 credits, needed for graduation.**

\* MALS designated courses