CLA

College of Liberal Arts

EXPLORE/ENGAGE/ENRICH/EARN

Fall 2022 ▬ *vol.* 10, *no.* 1



ONE NATION UNDER A GROOVE

Graduates help museum expand access to musical understanding

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

CLA
College of Liberal Arts

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Dean's Letter



Access. Possibilities. Impact.

Someone recently asked me to describe my deep connection to MTSU. In responding, I talked about my status as an alumna and that I have worked here for more than 20 years. As I reflected more deeply on my ties to the University, so many memories were evoked from my time here: studying and traveling abroad, being challenged intellectually and rising to intellectual challenges, encountering mentors and being a mentor. I realized that MTSU and my CLA experience provided me with opportunities that I would not have had otherwise—and would not have even imagined. Being a part of a vibrant community of faculty, staff, and students has opened my eyes to the possibilities that lie before me and has equipped me to seize those opportunities to have a greater impact on others' lives.

In CLA, we promote the values of a liberal education—a broad-based education in the arts, humanities, and social sciences—that allows students to develop the skills they need to confront the challenges of the changing landscape of our world. Whether through the arts, advocacy, analysis, or activism, liberal arts students develop a love for creative problem-solving to serve our communities. Our goal is to provide access to a quality education for all and, in so doing, ensure that everyone is prepared to take their seat at the table with confidence in their ability to be an agent for change.

This rich education happens both within and outside the classroom. We prioritize cocurricular opportunities such as mentorship, studying abroad, and internships. In stating these priorities that align with our strategic plan, I must underscore that CLA seeks to create these opportunities for everyone—not just a select few. We are committed to removing barriers to access and increasing participation in the experiential learning that we know has a tremendous impact on our students. Access to these opportunities changes lives.

In this edition of *CLA Magazine*, you will read about some of the ways we are ensuring access for our students. You will learn about the expansion of the CLA team to better serve our students, staff, and faculty; the MTSU community; and our broader, global community. You will read about our connection to other people's stories and how we make those stories accessible to others. We are confident that this edition of the magazine will inspire you to join us in expanding access, discovering new possibilities, and having an even greater impact on the world around us.

—Leah Tolbert Lyons

Q&A

Interview with the Dean

by Gina Fann

In new role, alumna Leah Tolbert Lyons enhances opportunities for CLA students

As Leah Tolbert Lyons carries out her first full academic year as dean of the College of Liberal Arts, she is often reminded of the value of a liberal arts education, the sort of education that she herself has benefited from as an MTSU alumna.

First coming to MTSU as a student in 1990, Lyons earned the Bachelor of Arts degree with a dual major in French and English. Passionate about education, Lyons went on to earn M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in French from Vanderbilt University. Since joining the MTSU faculty in 2001, Lyons has devoted herself to teaching, offering numerous courses in French language, literature, and film at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. She has held every faculty rank from adjunct and instructor to advancing on the tenure track and achieving the rank of professor. She also has seized opportunities to teach in France, present her research to international audiences, and participate in an international faculty development seminar in the West African nation of Senegal. In 2020, Lyons received one of the University's most cherished honors: the John Pleas Faculty Award, which recognizes excellence in teaching, research, and service.

Lyons' commitment to students and their success has led her to serve in multiple administrative roles, from interim department chair to director of MTSU's Master of Arts in Liberal Arts program for two years. She became associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts in 2019 and was appointed interim dean in early 2021.

In February 2022, University Provost Mark Byrnes announced that Lyons had "emerged as the top candidate from a highly competitive national search," naming her CLA dean. Lyons, immensely proud of the faculty, staff, and students she serves, oversees 11 departments incorporating more than 20 academic majors and course offerings from the fine and performing arts to the humanities and social sciences. Seventy-four percent of MTSU's Fulbright Scholars are liberal arts students, and the college's majors earn nearly half of all national undergraduate fellowships at MTSU.

As an educator, Lyons favors collaborative, experiential education that empowers students to think critically as they examine subject matter from various perspectives. This is a privilege that she enjoyed as a student, and she wants all CLA students to have access to the same quality education and attendant opportunities.

Lyons recently discussed how MTSU's College of Liberal Arts continues to serve an increasingly diverse student body and community.

How has working within the College of Liberal Arts at MTSU changed your perspective on how students can learn within the college and use its disciplines?

I started my career more than 20 years ago as a lecturer. Working in CLA at MTSU has affirmed my perspective that liberal arts students can do anything! Their potential is limitless. In the liberal arts, we focus on the foundational skills that transform students' lives. We prepare students not only for their first careers but for their second, third, and any subsequent careers. With liberal arts skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and problem-solving, students can tackle the myriad challenges facing our world. In liberal arts, we are lifelong learners. We not only have natural curiosity, but we have developed the skills to find the answers we seek and to teach ourselves how to approach the tasks before us.

How has the perception of liberal arts changed from your student days to your teaching days, and how has that informed your leadership as dean?

When I was a student majoring in French and English, I concentrated on literature and film because that is what interested me. Even during my year studying abroad in France, I took literature and film classes at the French university where I was enrolled. I was not focused on liberal arts per se; I was focused on developing my analytical skills, considering how to work as an effective part of a team, learning to be a better writer. Of course, I was honing my liberal arts skills.

My goal as a professor—and more so now as dean—is to help students understand what skills they gain through the liberal arts and how valuable a liberal arts education is. When our students graduate, they are prepared to work in various sectors. When you look at successful people in all areas of public life, you almost always find liberal arts in their backgrounds.

Continued on page 6

Q&A with the Dean

What is the greatest benefit of a liberal arts education at MTSU? How are we balancing that with an education in the sciences?

It is difficult to identify the greatest benefit of a liberal arts education because there are so many. If I were to narrow it down to one, I would say it is the ability to evaluate situations from multiple perspectives. When you can see all sides of an issue, you are better positioned to address the issue cohesively: articulate the issue, formulate an opinion, anticipate counterarguments, and present your argument with confidence. If you need to research the issue, you are equipped to do that. If you need to contextualize the issue, you can do that. If you are called upon to project what might happen in the future regarding that issue, you can do that.

In terms of how that relates to the sciences, scientists often are looking for the answer to a single question, and they do that through a particular lens. That is not to say that scientists cannot or do not think broadly; we have social sciences within the liberal arts. It is to say, however, that the way of addressing problems is different. That's why other disciplines are so well complemented by the liberal arts. With the focus on creativity, social concerns, questions of ethics, and the human condition, the liberal arts help bring balance to other disciplines and balance in life.

What would you implement for students with additional funding?

We have fantastic students at MTSU. The intelligence, the work ethic, and the creative potential of MTSU's students are unmatched. What our students don't always have is the available resources to clear some of the roadblocks in their path to success. With additional resources, we would increase scholarships for students who meet diverse criteria. We would increase internship support for students with unpaid internships. We would increase scholarships specifically designated for students who wish to study abroad. We would provide mentoring opportunities for more students. We would increase the resources available to provide emergency grants to students with acute financial needs.

Each of these initiatives is already being implemented in CLA because serving students in these ways is a priority for us. However, we know that we could serve even more students and serve them even better with additional financial resources.

As far as further initiatives are concerned, we would provide support for students seeking other immersive learning experiences. Oftentimes, students have big dreams about what they would like to do and how they would like to apply their liberal arts skills to solve problems that they see in society. With additional resources, we would provide a fund to support immersive experiences for our students to concretize what they learn in the classroom. Such a fund could also support student travel, accommodating both study-away opportunities and conference travel. Not all students can afford to attend professional meetings, workshops, and conferences. With additional monies, we would make some of these learning activities realizable for students. Such development allows students to apply what they learn in the classroom and see applications beyond what they might ordinarily encounter.

Of course, we would also want to help students obtain specialized equipment. Musical instruments, computers and software needs for graphic designers, and other discipline-specific items can be cost-prohibitive for students—or at least come at the cost of sacrificing in other key areas. Additional funding for students could be used to help offset these costs.

The goal in all these initiatives is to support all students by ensuring limitless opportunities to enhance their educations. Our students persevere to overcome challenges. They apply themselves to their work and finish their degrees. Additional financial support would simplify matters for students so that they do not have to focus on finding resources when they could be focusing on finding their paths in life.

CLA's "Explore, Engage, Enrich, Earn" brand encapsulates the spectrum of a liberal arts education. What, if anything, would you revise about that brand?

There's no need to revise perfection! I am extremely proud of the work of my predecessor and the faculty, staff, and students who contributed to the CLA branding, and I am honored to be able to continue the work of expanding the reach of CLA by continuing to promote the value of a liberal arts education. When I think of the liberal arts as contributing to the quality of life of productive, contributing citizens of our world, I think that "Explore your world, Engage your mind, Enrich your life, Earn a living" is a fitting brand. The only thing that I might add is "Enhance"—Enhance the lives of others. When we think about contributing to a global society, the end goal cannot be to satisfy yourself; our goal must be to enhance the lives of others.



Leadership Updates

Jeff Gibson

Associate Dean



Jeff Gibson ('93) joined the dean's office as associate dean after serving as chair of the MTSU Department of Theatre and Dance. He is a past president of the Southeastern Theatre Conference, former chair of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Region IV, and past chair of the Theatre Division of the Tennessee Governor's School for the Arts. Before pursuing his graduate degree, he held the position of university theater manager for MTSU in 1994–99. Gibson received his M.F.A. in Theatre Management from the University of Alabama in 2001 and was a management assistant at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Karen Austin

Advising Manager



A CLA advisor for seven years and now advising manager, Karen Austin will tell you she has spent more of her life on MTSU's campus than anywhere else she has lived or worked. Her influences are her father, who created a state agency (Tennessee Corrections Institute) to ensure fair treatments of inmates, and her mother, a lifelong social worker. Austin began her professional career working in the prison system as a correctional officer in a men's minimum/medium security prison. This experience was followed by a year in Alaska as a VISTA volunteer for an adult education center. She earned two degrees at MTSU, and it was during her M.A. in Sociology program that she began to connect her previous experience with the importance of access to a liberal arts education for each member of society. She previously served MTSU in Career Development Services and the Forensic Institute for Research and Education. Her daughter attends MTSU, and she hopes her son and husband will come to MTSU in a few years.

Meredith Dye

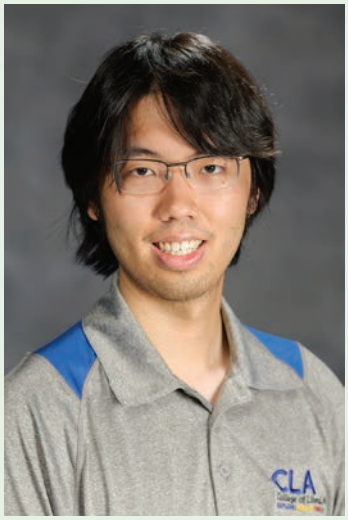
Associate Dean



Meredith Dye served as the undergraduate program director for Sociology and advisor for the Criminology minor prior to assuming her role as associate dean. Since joining the MTSU faculty in 2008, she has taught courses in sociology, criminology, research methods, and statistics at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Dye currently serves as faculty advisor for MT Student Sociologists and works with the CLA Student Emissaries. She also regularly supervises students in Women's and Gender Studies, the Honors College, and the Sociology master's program on research projects and theses. Her own research centers on the experiences of incarcerated individuals with a specific focus on suicide in prison and women serving life sentences. Dye is the co-author of *Women Lifers: Lives Before, Behind, and Beyond Bars*. Above all, she enjoys spending quality time with her kids, Piper and Jasper, and her husband, Dwight. In her free time, she likes reading a good book, watching movies, and playing the piano.

Don Srisuriyo

Student Engagement Coordinator



Don Srisuriyo, a double MTSU alum, brings a variety of experiences and campus knowledge to engage liberal arts students. They previously assisted veterans and military dependents at the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center regarding veteran educational benefits, provided accommodations to students registered with the Disability and Access Center, and worked with applicants, parents, and school officials through the application process in Undergraduate Admissions. Srisuriyo wrote a novella for their creative-based Honors College thesis and presented undergraduate research during Scholars Week.

Heather Trimis



Executive Secretary

Heather Trimis began her career at MTSU in 2018 as an executive aide in the History Department and joined the CLA dean's office in June 2022 as the executive secretary. She received her B.A. in English in 2017 from American Public University. She loves classical ballet and tap, as well as taking dance classes on campus and watching the dance program grow.

Jennifer Rice



Events Coordinator

Jennifer Rice began her career at MTSU in 2020 as the secretary for CLA Advising and is now excited to serve as events coordinator. She is completing her M.A. in Liberal Arts at MTSU and holds a B.A. in Art from California Lutheran University. While she was born and raised in California, Rice lived in Maine and Rhode Island for many years before finding a home in Tennessee. She is a proud mother of two kids, Catalina, an MTSU Theatre major graduating in May 2023, and Joseph, a Blackman High School senior who plans to attend MTSU as a Music Education major. When Rice is not busy with work, school, or family, she enjoys going to the theater, where she has been known to get behind the scenes from time to time.

Thomas Holland



Director, Forensic Institute of Research and Education

As scientific director of the Department of Defense laboratory in Hawaii that searches for and identifies missing American military personnel, Thomas Holland led recovery missions in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, China, Iraq, Kuwait, and North Korea. During his 25-year tenure at the lab, the remains of over 1,600 missing veterans were identified and returned home, including the Vietnam War Unknown Soldier. Holland is one of only about 100 board-certified forensic anthropologists in the world. An Arkansas native, Holland studied painting and printmaking in Salzburg, Austria; holds a B.A. in Fine Art and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Missouri; and earned a J.D. from the University of Hawaii. He is the author of over 50 scholarly articles in anthropology, forensic science, and the law, as well as several novels. Holland is also a consultant to numerous national and international groups, such as the Department of Justice and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mary Beth Asbury



Chair, Communication Studies

Mary Beth Asbury joined MTSU in 2011 after completing her Ph.D. at the University of Kansas. Originally from Knoxville, she loves the middle Tennessee area and has found a home and a community here. Her research focuses on the examination of communication in health and interpersonal contexts, specifically looking at weight/obesity stigma. Known to her students as "Dr. A.," Asbury enjoys teaching in the areas of interpersonal, health, and organizational communication and has earned recognition for her effective teaching at the university and regional levels. In her free time, she enjoys being active in her church, hanging out with her friends and family, viewing reality competition shows, listening to audiobooks, working jigsaw puzzles, exercising, watching college football and basketball, and taking in reruns of *The Golden Girls*.

Amy Atchison



Chair, Political Science and International Relations

Amy L. Atchison is a professor and current chair of the Department of Political Science and International Relations. Her research focuses on women's representation in European politics and the status of women in academia. In addition to her peer-reviewed articles, Atchison is the creator of *political science is for everybody*, an intersectional introductory political science textbook, and the co-author of *Survive & Resist: The Definitive Guide to Dystopian Politics*.

Olaf Berwald



Chair, World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

Originally from northern Germany, Olaf Berwald has lived and worked in the U.S. since 1994. His research publications on how poetry and fictional prose help us work through trauma include seven books and more than 20 articles and book chapters, and he has presented his research at more than 50 national and international conferences. Berwald loves to teach at every level and, like others in the department's global faculty team, considers it a daily joy to work with students and empower them to find their unique voices and to succeed and flourish on the globally interconnected job market.

Emily Baran



Chair, History

As the world's foremost expert on Soviet and Russian Jehovah's Witnesses, Emily Baran has authored two books on the subject and many articles. For the past two decades, she has researched marginal religious communities in the Soviet Union and former Soviet states. Baran earned her Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina and her undergraduate degree from Macalester College, but still calls Wisconsin her home (Go Packers!).

Jimmy Mumford



Chair, Art and Design

Artist Jimmy Mumford is a visual storyteller who touts the power of art as a tool for communicating, celebrating communities, and influencing positive behavior. He earned his B.F.A. in Graphic Design at Delta State University and his M.F.A. in Computer Arts from the Memphis College of Art. Now, Mumford is shaping the careers of others using the same echoes from his mentor: "Everything has been thought of before. Your job is to think of it again in a different way."



Anniversary OF THE ARTS

by Jeff Gibson

Fine arts programs celebrate over a decade of collaboration

MTSU Arts celebrated a milestone season in grand style, commemorating the fine arts programs' 10th anniversary under one umbrella with special events to accompany traditional exhibits and performances.

An exhibition of selected artwork by James S. Gibson, the celebrated and late professor emeritus, highlighted the 2021–22 anniversary calendar. Titled *James Gibson: A Life in Sculpture, A Retrospective*, the March exhibit offered a decade-by-decade memorial of his lifetime's work. In addition to experiencing the nationally renowned artist's work, visitors were able to purchase pieces to support art students through the James S. Gibson Scholarship.

The Jason Max Ferdinand Singers, an American choral ensemble comprising vocalists from across the nation, performed in Hinton Hall in February. The performance featured Music Professor Cedric Dent who serves as artist/arranger for the group led by award-winning Oakwood University music professor Jason Max Ferdinand.

Ascend Federal Credit Union, continuing as presenting sponsor for the season, expanded its support to create an MTSU Arts Scholarship for students in the Art and Design, Music, and Theatre and Dance programs. Scholarships were presented at the annual College of Liberal Arts Spring Awards celebration in April.

Upcoming MTSU Arts events for spring 2023 include:

Feb. 2 concert as part of the 22nd Jazz Artist Series

March 13–31 ceramics showcase in Todd Art Gallery, featuring regionally and nationally known American clay artists from the Pacific Northwest to New England

April 6–8 performance of *Cabaret* in Tucker Theatre

April 20–22 Spring Dance Concert on stage in Tucker Theatre

For additional events and details of the 2022–23 season, visit mtsu.edu/mtsuarts.

MTSU Arts
Proudly Presented By
Ascend Federal Credit Union



MTSU Arts

10TH season

BY THE NUMBERS

10th anniversary season presented to students, faculty and staff, and community:

41,000+ attendance

25+ gallery exhibits

10+ community arts workshops

200+ concerts and student recitals

6 theatrical productions

2 dance concerts









Lighting a LAMP

Liberal Arts launches mentoring program

by Leah Tolbert Lyons and Ella Weaver

The transition from high school to college can be fraught with challenges. There are so many new roads to navigate, and it can be overwhelming.

While this has been true for quite some time, the COVID-19 pandemic and attendant shutdowns brought these challenges to the fore. The staff in the College of Liberal Arts worked to develop strategies to address the difficulties students would face coming to MTSU for the first time. From this work emerged the Liberal Arts Mentoring Program (LAMP), designed as a peer-mentoring service for students new to MTSU.

The idea is to identify students who have achieved some level of experience and success at MTSU and CLA and create a way for them to help incoming students. This help would take the form of connecting students to campus resources, helping them find student organizations related to their majors, or in some instances, simply helping them find their classroom buildings. Students thrive when they find a sense of belonging and participate in community. In community, we find the confidence to meet and exceed academic expectations. We know better what questions to ask and where to find the answers. LAMP addresses this critical need for CLA students who are here at MTSU for the first time.

In the pilot phase, we worked to create an effective program with existing resources. We first turned to the CLA Student Emissaries, whom the college employs to represent CLA across campus and to prospective students and their families; they also do their own group projects to promote the college. Emissaries are trained to understand campus resources such as Counseling Services, the Food Pantry, Disability and Access Center, Career Development Center, the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center, and more. Further training offered around mentoring best practices and mental health first aid prepared some of the CLA Emissaries to serve as LAMP mentors.



Carla Clampitt (r) was among LAMP mentees served during the pilot semester of Spring 2021. She lacked confidence in learning new class-related technologies and wondered how she would fit into life at MTSU as a nontraditional student. Clampitt was hoping to be paired with someone who was kind, friendly, and able to answer all her questions, even those that seemed obvious. She was paired with another nontraditional student, Liz Lamb, who like Clampitt was working full time in addition to working toward completing her degree.

In reflecting on the program, Clampitt says that Lamb was open in sharing her own challenges and struggles, always willing to answer questions, and a great encourager when she did not feel like she was able to succeed.

"It's helpful to know you're not the only one struggling with a problem. She was more than just a mentor, more like my own personal cheerleader," Clampitt said.

"I don't know that I could have made it fully through the semester had I not had her."

The pilot phase was a great success. During the 2020–21 academic year, 20 students were mentored through LAMP. Ninety-five percent of those students reenrolled the next semester.

The Pathways to College Network recognizes mentoring as a valuable strategy to provide students with the emotional and practical support they need to achieve the goal of a college degree. By providing information, guidance, and encouragement, mentors can play an important role in nurturing students' goals, helping them prepare for college, and assisting them in making successful transitions from high school to their first year on campus. In addition, mentoring helps college students feel more connected and engaged on campus, which can ultimately improve student outcomes.

LAMP continues to enjoy great success. The number of students being mentored doubled to 40 CLA students during 2021–22 academic year. Students who received mentoring persisted at a rate of 95%, matching the high level of efficacy from the initial phase.

The future of LAMP is bright. We look forward to seeing these CLA students being served, as they acclimate to MTSU and their academic programs. First-semester transfer students and first-year students alike are benefiting, and we are investigating ways to expand the reach of LAMP and to better serve CLA students. Whether through affinity groups or through increased engagement activities, we will reach our goal of helping our students make the transition to being Blue Raiders.

"It's helpful to know you're not the only one struggling with a problem. She was more than just a mentor, more like my own personal cheerleader."

—Carla Clampitt

Learn more at mtsu.edu/liberalarts/lamp.php

Photo by Grant Ritchie on Unsplash (altered)

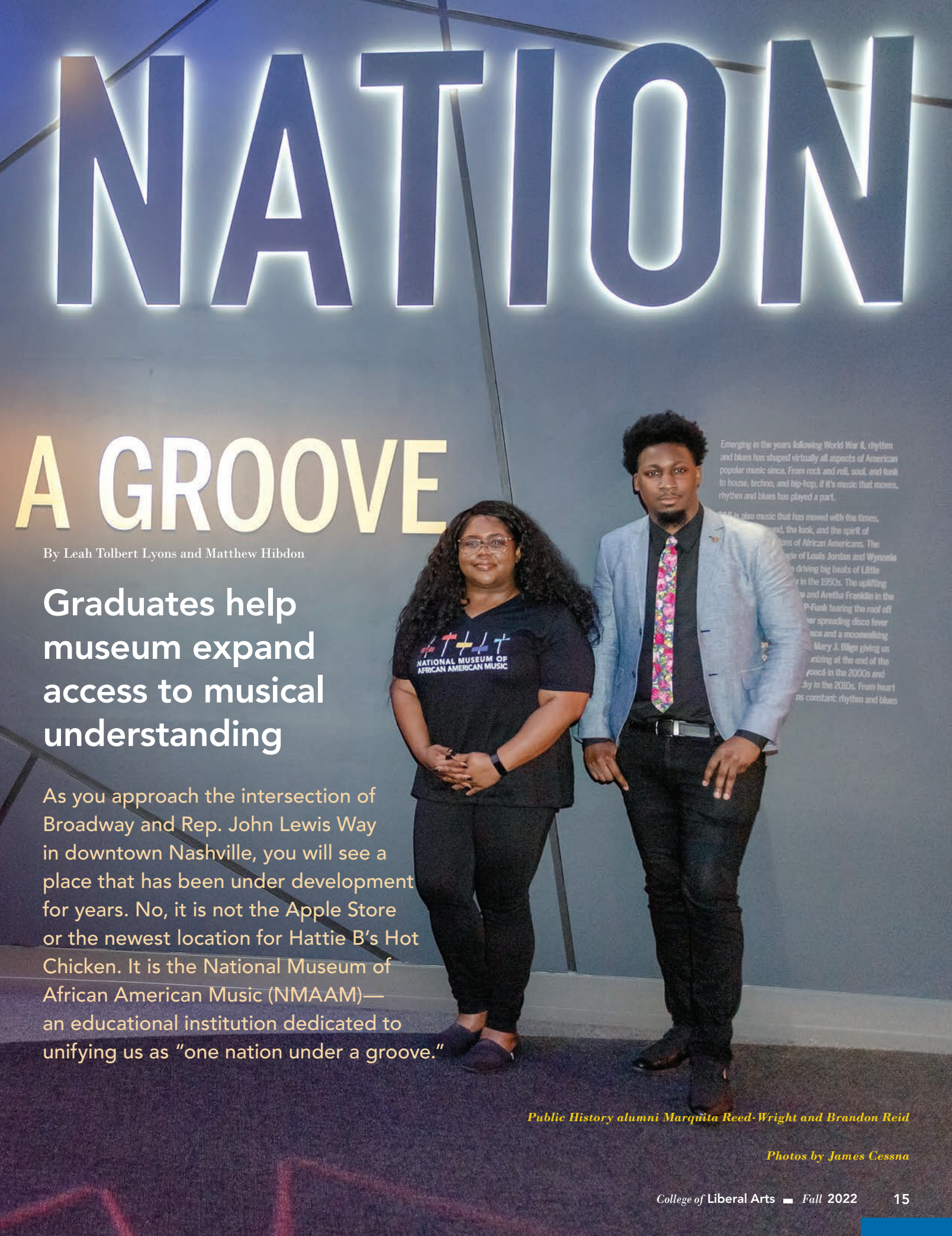

BEYONCÉ KNOWLES
ONE
UNDER

NATION A GROOVE

By Leah Tolbert Lyons and Matthew Hibdon

Graduates help museum expand access to musical understanding

As you approach the intersection of Broadway and Rep. John Lewis Way in downtown Nashville, you will see a place that has been under development for years. No, it is not the Apple Store or the newest location for Hattie B's Hot Chicken. It is the National Museum of African American Music (NMAAM)—an educational institution dedicated to unifying us as "one nation under a groove."



Public History alumni Marquita Reed-Wright and Brandon Reid

Photos by James Cessna


"Slaves are generally expected to sing as well as work. A silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers."
FREDERICK DOUGLASS
MUSIC PLAYED IN SLAVEOWNER HOMES AND LANDS
AFRICAN CUSTOMS SURVIVE
MUSIC OF SLAVERY POINTS TO THE BLUES
AFRICAN ROOTS OF THE BLUES
Roots and Early Development (Prehistory–Early 1900s)
"I'll tell you where the blues began. Back there working on them cotton farms, working hard and the man won't pay 'em, so the people started singin'..." SONNY TERRY
Musical traditions rooted in Africa, from vocal patterns to the use of stringed instruments, provided the musical foundation of American blues. Together with the unaccompanied "field hollers" and work songs associated with the harsh conditions of African American life across the Southeast—particularly the Deep South during and after the slavery era—these elements gave the blues much of its original and defining structure.
Over time, unique features such as "slide" guitar emerged. Musicians placed a smooth piece of a glass bottleneck or metal pipe over a finger and slid it across the guitar's fretboard. The voice-like effect reinforced the "call and response" dialogue between instrument and singer.

The immersive journey begins in the Roots Theater with a film that provides context about west and central African cultures, the institution of slavery, and how distinctly African American musical traditions were created and continue to flourish.

"Working with the CHP . . . I got to explore different ways to use material culture to teach and to help the public understand history, but also understand that it is their history."

— Marquita Reed-Wright (Ph.D., 2018)

Just as the grooves on a record are a single spiral, the main galleries showcase the connections and lasting legacy of African American religious music, the blues, jazz, R&B, hip-hop, and rap, which are among the more than 50 genres and styles finding their roots in African American music.

NMAAM is on par with any Smithsonian museum in Washington, D.C., because it answers the questions of how the music fits in our national story and because it has been created through the work of numerous talented historians. Two of those museum professionals who worked so hard to bring NMAAM to life are proud alumni of MTSU's Public History graduate program, Marquita Reed-Wright (Ph.D., 2018) and Brandon Reid (M.A., 2022).

Reed-Wright, who now works as a project manager at 1220 Exhibits, spent over five years of her career at NMAAM. Reed-Wright used her experience at MTSU exploring different areas of public history, museum work, and cultural history in her role at the museum. She credits her studies at MTSU and her work with Carroll Van West, Tennessee state historian and director of CLA's Center for Historic Preservation (CHP), for the ability to apply her skills and expertise to her current career trajectory.

The well-established Public History program boasts scores of alumni like Reed-Wright and Reid who are practitioner professionals working in museums, supporting community projects, and making archival work more accessible.

"Working with the CHP . . . I got to explore different ways to use material culture to teach and to help the public understand history, but also understand that it is their history. . . . It's not me telling them what they need to know, but them telling me what is important to them," Reed-Wright said.

Finding Power in Music

Almost two decades in the making, the NMAAM's initial moniker was the "Nashville Museum of African-American Music, Art, and Culture." The current iteration of the museum opened in 2021 and has expanded its reach to a national scale. This one-of-a-kind, 56,000-square-foot museum preserves and celebrates Black music, with an eye toward innovation and accessibility. And it does so at the corner of the busiest pedestrian intersection in our state's capital by being a beacon of knowledge for locals and tourists alike.

When visitors enter the museum, they are greeted by a friendly staff to guide their way and artifacts that invite them into this musical wonderland. The museum also embraces technology to create an interactive experience throughout.

After viewing the introductory film, they enter the Rivers of Rhythm corridor that connects the permanent exhibits and features an animated timeline to guide visitors along the historical development of Black music. As visitors move through the exhibit and pass through Rivers of Rhythm, they become joyful participants in some of music's most powerful moments, with full light and video shows featuring icons like Prince and James Brown.

Music in the museum is a constant presence, engulfing visitors in sound and amplifying the genres' interconnectedness. Reed-Wright had an internship at NMAAM during her studies at MTSU and made such an outstanding contribution that she was hired as collections manager. An integral part of her work there was to create similar opportunities for others. She appreciates the access that her chosen education path has provided and is eager to share that access with others.

"Even if I am not the most famous historian or anything, I want to be a person who says 'yes.' We talk a lot, in my field, [about] how it is hard to find internships," Reed-Wright said. She emphasizes the importance of creating "access and spaces for other people."

Honing Their Craft

One way she accomplishes this goal is by being an avid proponent of paid internships. She was able to put this ideology into practice by mentoring Reid during his paid internship at NMAAM while he was pursuing his master's degree at MTSU.

Reed-Wright exemplifies what MTSU's College of Liberal Arts desires for students: someone who understands the value of what they have been given and wants to provide those same opportunities for others. Yet she acknowledges the need to provide support for the interns she seeks.

"Access is providing a space—physically here and off-site—for gathering more stories," Reed-Wright said.

She emphasizes the importance of access in different modes to accomplish the stated goal of gathering more stories. Whether in the office or in the field, giving access to interns to learn and hone their craft is key.

There is a constant recognition of the need to represent history as a discipline that allows equal access to participation for everyone. Reed-Wright embraces this philosophy.

"One access point that I want to create is one of community stories, not just the Nashville story, but the communities of musicians, those who work behind the scenes," she said. NMAAM wants "to tell all of those stories. It's local, it's national, and it's global."

Reed-Wright points to the common ground that emerges from diverse stories. Each distinct story is like the groove in a record; together, the grooves compose a beautiful record of the history that unites us all.

Making History Inclusive

Reid, now assistant director of education at NMAAM, shares a similar story.

"MTSU allowed me to see my love for education. When I reflect on my time at MT, the first thing that comes to mind is theory meets practice," he said.

He emphasizes the importance of applied theory in bringing history to life. Reid sees NMAAM as "creating a space where history becomes Our Story." His goal is for people to "see themselves and celebrate themselves within history."

Music is an integral part of Reid's life, and it is clear how much his career at NMAAM is the perfect combination of his talents, passions, and academic interests. Prior to pursing his master's degree at MTSU, Reid earned a B.A. in History in 2017 from Tennessee State University, where he was a member of the Aristocrat of Bands and served as drum major.

Reid has worked his way up at NMAAM, rising from a part-time administrative analyst to a full-time manager in the museum's education department. He has adopted the same mindset as his mentor, Reed-Wright, in developing his understanding that he does his best work when he can help others do theirs, through mentorship.

"Having a mentor, you have investors," he noted.

This desire to help others is not limited in scope, and it translates into all his work at NMAAM.

"Representation is a big thing for us. NMAAM goes out into the community, being representation for the students—so they know they can do it as well," Reid said.

Creating Community

NMAAM is dedicated to offering professional development to educators, scholars, and graduate students through programming like its annual Rivers of Rhythm Institute for Social Education. Events like this provide resources for curriculum development and promote the free exchange of ideas through a symposium.

Even before the museum opened in 2021, NMAAM had offered educational programming to K–12 students throughout middle Tennessee since 2016. Now housed in a world-class facility, NMAAM is not content to allow history to remain confined by four walls. NMAAM has community and educational programming that allows the impact of the museum to reach its audience where they are. This mindset of accessibility allowed the museum to pivot to virtual programming during the coronavirus pandemic and reach an audience of more than 180,000 students.

While NMAAM is a fun, vibrant, interactive space, it is so much more. NMAAM states that it seeks to provide "a way to celebrate and preserve African Americans' influence on music and provide residents and visitors with diverse cultural offerings." Creating access where it once was absent is a hallmark of NMAAM that resonates with CLA's mission statement to instill in students a strong sense of responsibility and belonging to their local and global communities. Achieving this goal means providing a safe space for students to encounter difference and to expand their worldviews.

CLA wants to broaden students' horizons and open their eyes to the richness of the world around them. What students learn and experience can contribute to the formation of their core identity as members of society. Through the college's academic disciplines, CLA teaches myriad perspectives on issues and provides multiple frameworks for assessing situations and problems. This approach gives students access to various tools they can use to build their lives. The college does not narrowly focus on one point of view or one methodology, so students can find themselves and see their experiences within the disciplines we teach.

Similarly, NMAAM, with its focus on the contribution of African Americans to American music, moves beyond any one genre, any single location, or any specific era. It guides visitors to a place of inclusivity that allows all Americans to see themselves in the stories represented, the American story, the story of African American music. It provides insight into the formation of our national identity, "one nation under a groove."

"Representation is a big thing for us. NMAAM goes out into the community, being representation for the students—so they know they can do it as well."

— Brandon Reid (M.A., 2022)


NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC


The National Museum
of African American Music
With profound thanks to the founding staff of
the National Museum of African American Music
for the tenacity and teamwork required
to deliver this institution to Nashville and the world.
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NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC

Drives to Help

CLA groups collect food and toiletries for fellow students

CLA's commitment to community engagement is evident in our students and their desire to support their peers on campus.

Since 2015, Communication Studies Associate Professor Patrick Richey and his MTSU Debate students have organized a service project to collect unopened and unexpired food items from students moving out of residence halls at the end of the fall and spring semesters.

"We put out boxes to collect food students would otherwise throw away," Richey said. "Spring is always a much bigger haul."

In addition to food, the group collected toiletries this year. Boxes upon boxes of donated items from the residence halls get stacked into the bed of Richey's pickup truck and hauled across campus to the MTSU Student Food Pantry.

MTSU's debate program has a history of success that dates back to the institution's founding in 1911 and continues today. The array of trophies in Jones Hall showcases the talents of this group of student leaders, but it does not tell the story of how MTSU Debate demonstrates the values of CLA year after year. Even when the team travels for competitions, Richey asks the students to collect unopened soaps, shampoos, and hand lotions from their hotels to donate to the MTSU Student Food Pantry.

To continue to build on their food collection project, the group plans to host a campuswide competition in spring 2023 and will award a trophy to the residence hall with the most donations.

The 2021–22 CLA Student Emissaries hosted their first Food + Drive for the MTSU Student Food Pantry for two weeks last fall. The group included: Jillian DeGrie (Art), Jasmine January (Music), Kei Laribo (Sociology), Sam Glover (Music/French), Sarah Oppmann (Theatre/Journalism), Carla Clampitt (Anthropology), and Deanna Sekulich (Spanish/Biology).

Below: 2021–22 CLA Emissaries (l–r) Jasmine January, Jillian DeGrie, Kei Laribo, and Sam Glover load up donations for the Student Food Pantry.

Bottom Right: Dorm snacks left behind by residents moving out find new purpose thanks to MTSU Debate Team students and their coach, Patrick Richey.





By Meredith Dye

Others

Working as a team, these students coordinated with CLA departments, college advisors, and student organizations and strategically placed multiple collection boxes in high traffic areas in each CLA building. One of the emissaries even placed a box on her front porch asking neighbors to donate items, and they did! The combination of CLA faculty, staff, and student donations made this student-led drive a huge success.

With the support of groups like MTSU Debate, the CLA Student Emissaries, and many others, the MTSU Student Food Pantry has grown tremendously since it opened, collecting over 166,000 pounds of food, and has served a diverse group of over 8,300 students in need.

In helping the pantry, College of Liberal Arts students showcased the values and skills that accompany a degree in liberal arts. They approached these food collection projects with creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, service, and leadership as they helped provide greater food security for MTSU students. Students and faculty supporters carried out these acts of service with compassion for others.





About the Student Pantry

The MTSU Student Food Pantry is committed to making sure no Blue Raider goes hungry. It opened in 2012 and joined the College and University Food Bank Alliance in 2017. Located in MT One Stop (SSAC Room 210), the pantry is open 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Monday–Friday.

Students can stop by the MT One Stop location or submit an online food pantry request. Likewise, to make a donation, individuals or groups can bring items to the MT One Stop location, purchase items from its online wish list, or make an online donation.

The pantry accepts donations of nonperishable food items such as cereal, crackers, snacks, single-serve meals, pasta, and rice as well as hygiene and household items such as toothpaste, deodorant, and laundry detergent. It cannot accept candy or gum, opened or expired items, or medications.

For more information about how to support students, visit mtsu.edu/foodpantry.

Music TO THEIR EARS

by Stephanie Wagner

MTSU offers online master's to music educators across the country

Stacy Ray, a mother of two young children, had wanted to earn her master's degree for years before MTSU announced a new online Master of Music program that specializes in music education for current music teachers.

"When they devised this program, it just struck a chord with me," Ray said. "It's been really, really great. I've already applied so much of what I'm learning even in these past few months into the classroom. . . . It's seriously made for people like me that are moms and also teaching full time."

While Ray is an elementary school music teacher at Homer Pittard Campus School in Murfreesboro, the Master of Music program is accessible to teachers across the nation since it's 100% remote—including online assessments.

Not only does the program offer competitive in-state costs, but it also allows out-of-state students to take advantage of MTSU's eRate tuition, a 42% discount.

Current K–12 music educators who qualify for the specialization include band, orchestra, choir, and general music teachers. Those interested must be concurrently teaching in a K–12 music setting—with at least one year of experience in the classroom.

"Because we're using so much from their day-to-day teaching practice, there's a focus on general improvement of their craft and their teaching," said Chris Dye, an associate professor for Instrumental Music Education and coordinator of Music Education.

"We want that year of practical experience people bring, so they can start reflecting on their experiences while in the program."

In Tune with Their Needs

Jennifer Vannatta-Hall, interim director of the School of Music, said that this 33-hour program is "very targeted," unlike many other music master's degrees.

"Every single course is specific to music education," Vannatta-Hall said. "For most music education programs at the master's level, students take a set of general, core music courses, then they take courses for their specialty. At MTSU, we have designed every graduate music education course to be practical and applicable for practicing K–12 music educators."

It meets student needs "whether they're looking to improve their teaching practice," Dye said, or are "interested in going on for doctoral studies or moving into leadership roles in professional organizations."

The faculty even added a new course to better equip students pursuing leadership positions with professional organizations.

"I get that instant one-on-one. I don't feel forgotten. It feels very, very personal."

—Stacy Ray

"The Policy and Advocacy course is one unique piece that is distinctive from other programs," Dye said.

With students required to complete a master's project as part of the research component, the program also equips those who want to continue on to a Ph.D.

Personal Touch Key to Success

Though the program is taught entirely remotely, the School of Music has maintained a focus on building strong relationships between students and professors.

"The program here is very intimate," said Joseph Morgan, an associate professor and coordinator of graduate studies for MTSU's School of Music. "They have close relationships with professors here, despite the fact that it's asynchronous. There's so much communication going on between faculty and students that I think it really sets the program apart."

Ray, thankful for help she received in returning to student life for the first time in years, echoed the program's focus of building strong relationships between the master's candidates and professors.

"The classes are smaller," Ray said. "I get that instant one-on-one. I don't feel forgotten. It feels very, very personal."

Achieving such a personal connection despite conducting lessons in remote fashion is no small accomplishment. Doing so allows music teachers to travel to the beats of their own lives while still progressing in their craft and their own education.





Top: Jamila McWhirter (r), a professor in MTSU's School of Music, conducts one of the courses from the new online Master of Music program via Zoom to student Stacy Ray.

Bottom: Music teacher Stacy Ray plays the piano and sings along with her elementary school students at Homer Pittard Campus School.

Opening Doors Abroad

by Meredith Dye

Scholarships offer students a world of possibilities

As he neared his senior year at MTSU, Sam Glover, a double-major in Music and French and a Human Geography minor, thought a study abroad trip would not be possible for him until he discovered Aliou Ly's signature program to Senegal.

Ann McCullough, a professor of French who also traveled with the group, encouraged Glover to "go for it." He had an interest in African history, was already fluent in French, and wanted to study abroad. For two weeks this summer, Glover traveled in Senegal and West Africa with Ly, an associate professor of History, as well as other faculty and six fellow students from all different backgrounds.

Having never traveled on a plane or outside of the United States, Glover described the entire trip as "powerful" and experiencing a country so different than his own as "eye-opening." Many of the cities were in coastal areas, where he also swam in the ocean for the first time.

Going Global Again

After two years of cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MTSU's CLA programs saw a full return to study abroad during summer 2022. Only one MTSU study abroad program occurred during summer 2021, a signature program in Israel led by Provost Mark Byrnes and Matthew Hibdon, CLA's strategic communications manager. In addition to the MTSU-led programs, which are typically one- to two-week programs abroad, students have semester and yearlong options for study at universities and through consortium and exchange programs all over the world.

Among the many options this summer, more than 100 CLA students participated in 11 programs that were led by CLA faculty. The choices spanned the globe—students traveled to Vienna for a history of western art and music with Joe Morgan, to Italy for watercolor with Sisavanh Houghton, and to Brazil for a film production and anthropology field school with Richard Pace.

Students also explored Peru with Corey Perkins, Spain with Jim Chaney, and Scotland with Stacey Graham. Two groups traveled to France—one with Joan McRae, for a monthlong French course in Normandy, and the other, a forensic aviation archeology project with Tiffany Saul.

Students across all CLA majors and minors were represented among these groups, and most (like Glover) received scholarships from CLA, the Office of Education Abroad, and the Honors College to financially support their programs. Glover said he would not have been able to go without scholarships provided by CLA and the study abroad office.



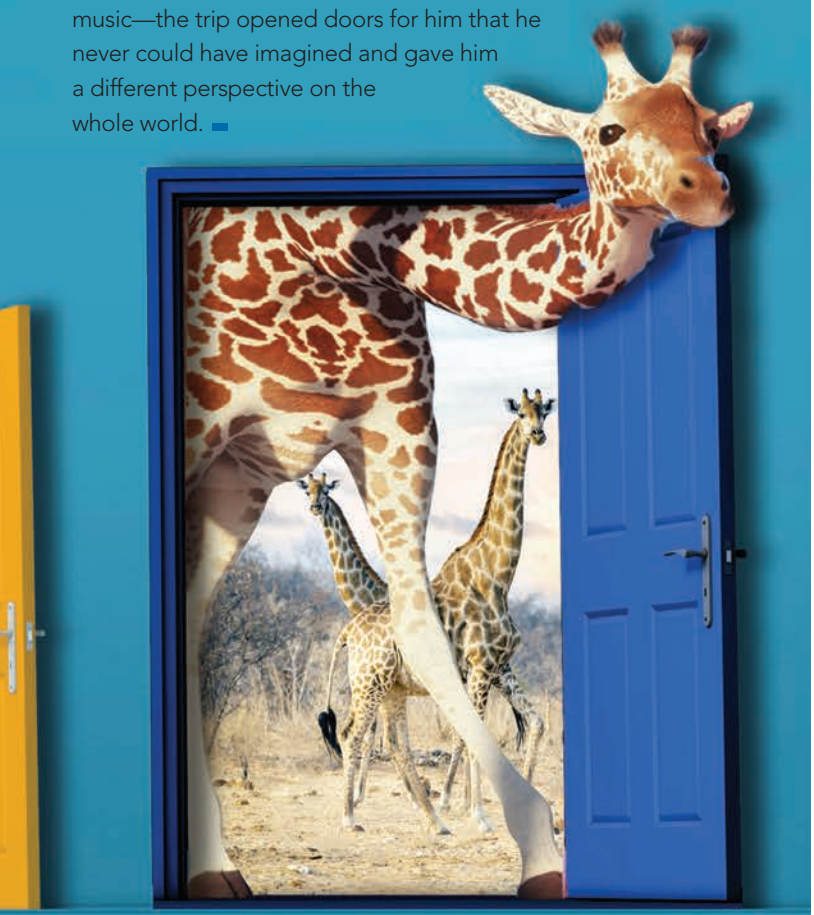
Cultural Connections

Starting in the capital city, Dakar, and then visiting Gorée Island, the Senegal group spent two to three days in different cities and towns, including St. Louis, where they encountered important historical sites, learned about key events and people, and interacted with the local culture.

Glover had to use the skills he acquired in the liberal arts while traveling, including problem-solving and critical thinking. Speaking French and learning the local languages and different dialects was very important to him, but the contrasts he witnessed—including poverty and wealth, diversity and unity—left a lasting impression upon him as well. A guitarist focusing on jazz performance in his Music major, Glover also discovered a connection between Senegal and his love and talent for playing jazz.

To encourage students like Glover to participate in study abroad programs, specifically the signature programs led by MTSU faculty, CLA offers several scholarships up to $1,000 for study abroad activities. The Geraldine Sayward, Elrod Family, Mary Foye Huhta, and the CLA Education Abroad scholarships are endowed scholarships that support CLA students each year. For summer 2022, over $12,000 was awarded from these funds to support 30 CLA students participating in study abroad programs.

While Glover's family was not in a position financially to cover all the costs, his parents were very supportive and committed to helping him achieve this goal. His parents also encouraged and helped him to pull together the resources to travel solo to France following his trip to Senegal. He stayed four additional days in Paris and Nice. Of everything he observed and experienced—people, food, architecture, religions, music—the trip opened doors for him that he never could have imagined and gave him a different perspective on the whole world.





While students (and their parents) may have reservations about travel abroad (such as financial burdens and health risks), CLA is committed to supporting opportunities for all students who have a desire to study abroad. In fact, more than half of those who study abroad at MTSU are CLA students.

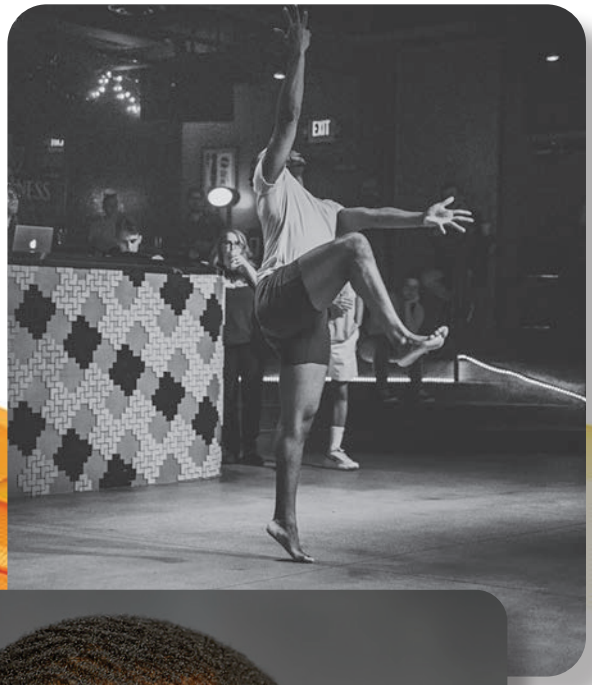
Study abroad aligns with the values and goals of the liberal arts because it allows students to not only explore the world, but also engage their minds and enrich their lives, and it gives them transferable skills to earn a living.

Providing resources like these to students is a top priority for CLA. Help from CLA alumni and friends is always appreciated and makes a real difference in students' lives. Anyone who would like to learn more about how they can support international opportunities for CLA students can contact Meredith Kerr, CLA director of development, at **meredith.kerr@mtsu.edu** or **615-898-5223**. You can also give to the CLA Education Abroad Scholarship endowment and many other CLA strategic priorities by visiting **mtsu.edu/liberalarts/giving.php**.



Alumni/Faculty **Spotlight**

Aaron Allen Jr.



Aaron Allen Jr., a first-generation college graduate from Chattanooga, knew at age 18 that he wanted to dance and make a career out of it, but one thing was standing in his way—finances. Through numerous college visits and interviews, he decided to attend MTSU in fall 2010 where he was immediately drawn to the Dance program.

Today, Allen has performed with The Weeknd, received a 2023 Tennessee Arts Commission Individual Artist Fellowship, and holds a master's degree in Dance Performance and Choreography from the University of Colorado. He also is a lecturer in the Dance program at MTSU, where he earned a degree in Liberal Studies in 2014 with a cognate in Dance.



During his undergraduate career, Allen was offered numerous opportunities to tour with the Dance Theatre company and even travel to China with select students to perform and teach with faculty from the department. While pursuing his dream, however, he was repeatedly challenged as he tried to balance coursework, rehearsals, and a "normal life." He worked full time as a bartender while he was a full-time student throughout his four years at MTSU. But he learned how to work as a professional dancer through budgeting his time, work, rehearsals, and social activities. These skills all helped propel Allen into a career that is full of dance, and all these challenges and opportunities fuel his teaching.

In both the classroom and studio, he is passionate about exposing his students to the dance world through numerous channels. Allen has mentored students through prestigious summer intensive applications, graduate school applications, and dance company auditions. Rigor and authenticity are his driving forces when it comes to pushing students to be the best they can be. He is excited to continue challenging his students through teaching choreography and dance another year at MTSU.



Creating Connections

By Lucy Langworthy

Rutherford Arts Alliance links creatives with community and the world

Much talk has transpired over the past few years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, about the benefits of creativity to a person's mental well-being. The Rutherford Arts Alliance (RAA) has certainly found that to be true but also discovered that it does much more than this: It connects people more deeply to their world and opens them up to new ways of seeing.

This has been RAA's mission since its launch in January 2019 with input and guidance from various entities, including MTSU's College of Liberal Arts. And even though the effects of the pandemic hit this sector harder than many others, the arts in middle Tennessee still ranked fourth in the country in the 2020 Arts Vibrancy Index by Southern Methodist University's National Center for Arts Research.

Studies like these exposed a great need: someone to identify the thousands of creative entities in our area and then advocate, promote, and create opportunities for them. Thus, the mission of RAA became "connecting creatives and community."

Mark McLeod, associate professor of Art and current RAA board chair, emphasizes the importance of CLA's collaboration with local creators. "Connecting Rutherford County artists and arts organizations to each other strengthens not only the arts, but also the people within our community. A vibrant, well connected arts community provides a space to reflect on big questions through dance, music, literature, and the visual arts."





In this quest, the area arts alliance has met the challenges of its first few years with openness and a willingness to learn. RAA has defined itself as broad in scope, offering interest groups in diverse areas such as visual arts, literature, culinary arts, dance, fashion, film, and theatre. The group is cooperative, not competitive among its members, and it is inclusive, recognizing local cultural history and the region's growing diversity. These distinctions have been crucial to helping members create deeper connections to one another, connections that have resulted in:

- Programs for the Discovery Center's **STEAM Festival**, created by MTSU's colleges of Basic and Applied Sciences and Liberal Arts, working together
- Three **community murals** and resulting guidelines for future murals created in collaboration with the city of Murfreesboro
- **Workshops** each year for the community on topics such as 3D woodcarving, auditioning, photography, painting, the Artist's Way, and salsa dancing
- 11 **membership meetings** each year with a focus on the variety of creative work in the county's various municipalities
- Artists showcased at the city's **Greenway Arts Festival** each year
- Participation in Bradley Academy and Cultural Museum's **Juneteenth Celebration**
- Free memberships to **laureates and sponsorship** of their workshops, in topics such as photography, painting, and writing
- **Creative Cheer** projects through social media during COVID-19
- Young Creatives board that installed **little libraries** at three sites in Murfreesboro
- **Leading Ladies Project** and play, *Party of Twelve*, created in partnership with the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce, the city of Murfreesboro, MTSU, the African American Heritage Society of Rutherford County, and the Rutherford County Library System



Two 2021 laureates for the city of Murfreesboro have MTSU connections (l–r): English Lecturer Amie Whittemore, poet laureate, and Cameron L. Mitchell ('13), actor laureate.

These connections were never more apparent than in RAA's first in-person meeting after the pandemic. The beautiful artwork of local artists at Church Street Gallery, the music of a fiddle player, and the live painting of muralists in Graffiti Alley all created an energy that almost could not be contained in May 2021. Some started dancing. Others feverishly passed out business cards. But all shared dreams of future collaborations, not yet realized. Truly, creatives want and need to connect, and the Rutherford Arts Alliance is making that happen.





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College of **Liberal Arts** hopes you've enjoyed this edition of the *CLA Magazine* and are as excited as we are about the accomplishments of the College of Liberal Arts students, alumni, and faculty.

Please consider a tax-deductible gift to support one of the programs highlighted in this issue—your generosity makes innovative learning in and out of the classroom possible. You can easily help make our stories possible by giving a gift online by visiting mtsu.edu/supportliberalarts.









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Celebrating "Joys of the Season"

2022 will mark the second year of our made-for-television holiday special *Joys of the Season*. The inaugural presentation received two Telly awards, so make sure not to miss this year's special edition of *Out of the Blue*, airing throughout December on True Blue TV.

mtsunews.com/out-of-the-blue-dec-2022



Expanded English Online Offerings

The Department of English offers a fully online undergraduate degree that allows students total flexibility to remotely complete the program on their own schedules, and student interest has increased in recent years.

mtsunews.com/online-english-program-great-flexibility



Sharing Holocaust Studies

MTSU continued its commitment to scholarship and education about the Holocaust during its 14th biennial Holocaust Studies Conference in September. This interdisciplinary event brings together scholars from around the world and from diverse disciplines to share their research.

mtsunews.com/sonja-dubois-holocaust-studies-speaker-2022



Pathway to the Humanities

Through a continued partnership with Siegel High School in Murfreesboro, CLA provides opportunities for students to explore career choices across the humanities, social sciences, and performing and fine arts.

mtsunews.com/siegel-humanities-academy-april2022

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