

# MALS

## Master of Arts In Liberal Studies

Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan

# S p e c t r u m

Winter 2012  
Volume 7 Issue 2

### Letter from the Director

#### Farewell and Best Wishes

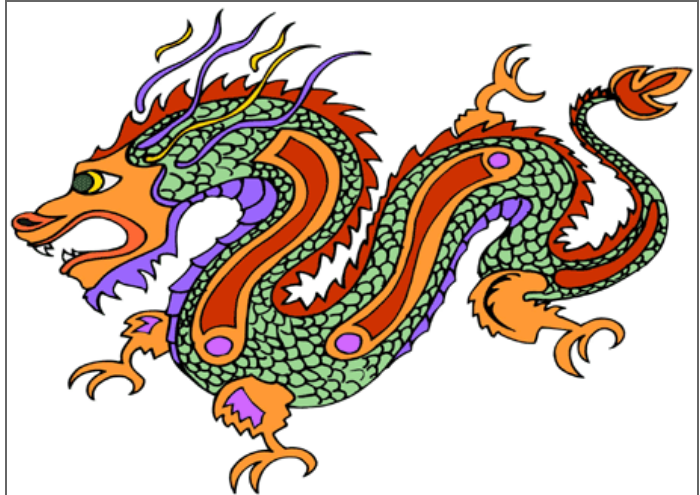
In Chinese tradition, this is the New Year of the Dragon, and it has special significance for me this time as it marks my last year at Oakland University.

The past six years I have spent as director for MALS have been the best of all my time here at Oakland University. MALS students and faculty have been a wonderful group of people to work with over the years, and I know I am going to miss you all. Your broad range of interests, personal educational goals, and endless curiosity has enriched me personally and professionally, and I have enjoyed immensely my classroom experiences and lively conversations with students and colleagues alike. To all of you in the program, my warmest thanks.

In this farewell letter, I want to acknowledge and thank those who have so ably supported the program for so long. The program secretary, Graciela Osterberg, has been indispensable to the running of the program, and she has my enduring gratitude for all she has done. My graduate assistants deserve a special word of praise: Angela Kayi, Kathleen Fabian, and, currently, Laura Gononjian prepared the newsletter, tutored students, assisted with special events, and provided myriad lesser services, earning my respect, admiration and my heartfelt thanks. Last but not least, I also thank and acknowledge the CAS Dean's office for its support and, especially, the good counsel of Kathleen Moore, associate dean, with whom it has been my pleasure to work throughout my terms as director.

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#### HAPPY YEAR OF THE DRAGON!



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OU colleagues have added immensely to the pleasure of directing MALS especially the members of the MALS Executive Committee which oversees the program. The current committee members have been extraordinary, and I thank Eric LaRock, Deb McGinnis, Aldona Pobutsky, and Alberto Rojo for their collegial, engaging support. They have been a stimulating mix of ideas, collegiality, and rewarding discussions as we have sought to guide the program.

As director I also had the opportunity to work with some of the university's best and brightest professors. This group willingly volunteered their time to teach MALS seminars, advise students on courses, and provide invaluable support by serving on final projects. All in all, between wonderful colleagues, talented graduate students, and a strong support system, this has been an amazing experience.

What lies ahead? I have spoken with some of you about the variety of interests I want to pursue in the coming years. Whether I travel with my husband, spend more time with family, re-new my almost lost acquaintance with watercolor paints or Chinese calligraphy, I will have warm memories of my years with MALS. I wish all of you every success in your future endeavors and hope that, now and then, you will update me on where you are, how you are doing—and your own memories of the time when you were part of the MALS program at OU.

With warm farewell wishes,  
Linda

## **HAIL AND FAREWELL!**

**THE STUDENTS AND FACULTY OF THE MALS  
PROGRAM WISH TO OFFER THEIR HEARTFELT  
THANKS AND APPRECIATION TO**

**PROFESSOR LINDA BENSON**

**FOR HER HARD WORK AND DEDICATION TO  
THE MALS PROGRAM OVER THE PAST 6 YEARS.**

**BEST WISHES FOR AN ENJOYABLE  
RETIREMENT!**

**MALS NEWS**

*You are Cordially Invited*

**MALS Dessert and Coffee**

**Monday, March 5, 4:30—6:30pm**

Lake St. Clair Room (Next to the Gold Rooms) in the Oakland Center

Please join us for this informal opportunity to meet with  
your fellow MALS students, prospective students and professors.

R.S.V.P. to Graciela at 248.370.2154

**MALS Student Appointment**

First year MALS student Valerie Edge will serve as a Graduate Assistant for the undergraduate liberal studies program under program director

Dr. Cynthia Sifonis for the winter 2012 semester.

Congratulations, Valerie, on your new appointment!

**Final Project**

Do you have 20 credits or more completed in the MALS program? Then it is time to start thinking seriously about your Final Project, the last step in completing your MALS degree. A proposal must be submitted and approved by the MALS Executive Committee before you may register for your Final Project (LBS 600). Check out the MALS website for more information on planning for your final project at [www2.oakland.edu/mals/](http://www2.oakland.edu/mals/).

**MALS Student Article Appears**

Susan Walsh, MALS student, has had her article "Man, Metal and Metaphor" published in the Fall 2011 issue of the OU publication, *Oakland Journal*. Susan wrote the paper for the MALS course "Metals and Man" in the Winter of 2011.

Congratulations to Susan on this noteworthy achievement.

## **FEATURED STUDENT**

*Garth Glazier is a MALS student who recently finished his final project and received his M.A. in December 2011.*



### **What is the title of your final project?**

“Where Have All the Giants Gone? A Study of the Aesthetic and Social Causes and Consequences of the Extinction of Three American Shade Trees.”

### **What is it about?**

In this thesis project, I undertook a personal journey of discovery in the form of three creative non-fiction essays dealing with the disappearance of three culturally and economically significant native trees from our landscape. Specifically, I presented the stories of the American Chestnut, Elm, and Ash as part of a continuing narrative of extinction that has had an important meaning in my personal life, as well as a larger impact on our landscape and our culture. The writing style was in the form of three personal essays tracing the story of these extinctions in chronological form, starting with the American Chestnut, and proceeding forward with the American Elm, and ending with the American Ash. I saw the approach to this project as falling within a continuing tradition of American environmental writing as exemplified by the works of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, John Burroughs, Bill McKibben, Michael Pollan, and others.

### **What was the most challenging aspect of the project?**

The construction of these essays involved a balancing of personal revelations told in narrative form with more research-oriented material. The switching between these personal narratives (mine and that of other nature writers) and the factual data that supported my thesis was the tricky part. What I was most concerned about was achieving an important connection between my own personal story and the larger subject of the thesis in a way that felt natural and flowed well as a work of non-fiction literature. I believed that the meaning of my thesis could be achieved more effectively in this form than through the more conventional presentation of a thesis followed by supporting research.

Once I had read Aldo Leopold’s “A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There,” I understood how this fusion could be done. Leopold, who was among the first generation of ecologists in the 1950s, used the creative non-fiction form to impact the reader by creating a sense of personal connection with the landscape. By presenting my research in a narrative form, I hoped that the reader would become more aware of the deep sense of loss that individuals like myself and others have felt in the changes that are happening right outside our back doors. I also hoped that the reader would begin to see through the eyes of the storyteller, while considering the weight of factual information presented to establish the scope of destruction that has occurred.

### **What did you learn about the subject that is of particular interest?**

I learned about memory—how fragile it is—and how that fragility seems to shape our very imperfect view of the natural world. In fact, I realized about halfway through this project that memory was the real focus of each essay. Because of this I included references to Washington Irving’s Rip Van Winkle, the

Ann Frank Tree, and the famous Washington Elm as three interlinking references to the flexible nature of memory in forming new mythologies and in our modern resistance to the mounting evidence that our actions are reshaping the biomass of this planet.

**What did you learn about yourself?**

I learned that I have stories to tell and that act of telling it gives me great pleasure. I gave up a major in journalism for a major in art during college due to the steady mental decline of my father who was a talented crime reporter for the Detroit News. I feared that writing had played a role in his illness—especially since his idol was Ernest Hemmingway who also spiraled out of control late in life. I have now returned to writing.

**What advice do you have for your fellow MALS students as they think about and prepare for their final projects?**

After you have considered every practical option and every sensible idea for your thesis project throw them all out and take that one crazy thought you had back in your second or third class and run with it. My thesis idea grew directly out of a thirty-page essay I wrote in the two weeks after completing the Writers in the Garden course with Linda McCloskey. I was inspired and just started writing what became a memoir style essay about growing up next to the small patch of woods behind my house in St. Clair Shores. This essay called “Into the Green Wall,” became the core of my thesis project five years later and once I understood that this was my correct path (pun intended), my thesis project seemed to write itself.

**What was your favorite MALS course and why?**

The Writers in the Garden course with Linda McCloskey was my first and favorite course in the MALS program. It was the first course available when I signed up in spring of 2005 and I thought it was just a nice survey of writers on the subject of gardening. When I received a copy of the syllabus in advance and realized the class was would focus on actually writing a series of essays in nonfiction form as a form of storytelling, I went nuts and read all the books before the first day of class and could not wait to start writing.

**How has the MALS course of study changed you?**

I have become a writer again and now believe that writing was probably my first and best talent, while art was my chosen skill by which I could make a living as an illustrator. I hope to publish my thesis through Wayne State University Press.

**Feel free to ask/answer any other questions you feel are relevant or interesting.**

Many people have asked me what exactly can you do with this degree. Personally, I am using my masters to qualify for teaching positions at 4-year colleges and universities, which require at least a masters. While the MALS degree is not considered a stepping-stone to a terminal degree, it can be useful in raising your profile in the academic world. I have just taken a part-time position at Baker College and the extra degree was helpful. Many community colleges like Macomb are now requiring a masters for instructor positions and this gives me a distinct advantage in their program. I have also become a better instructor by observing the styles of the different professors in the program.

## **MALS Graduate Assistant**

The MALS program is now accepting applications for the position of graduate assistant beginning in the fall 2012 semester.

The graduate assistant works with the MALS Director to support the program's teaching and research mission in various ways. Among the responsibilities of the assistant are editing and compiling information for the newsletter, occasional classroom support, event planning, and tutoring fellow students in research, writing and/or technology for the classroom, and other miscellaneous duties. The graduate assistant must be enrolled in two MALS courses each semester (eight graduate credit hours).

### **The basic requirements necessary for this position include:**

- Undergraduate degree or MALS graduate record with strong academic record (3.5 GPA or higher)
- Completed no more than 20 hours of MALS graduate credits
- Not employed elsewhere for the duration of the assistantship
- Strong writing and organizational skills
- Ability to use Photoshop and other computer programs.

### **The position offers the following benefits:**

- Semester stipend of approximately \$2,200.
- Remission of tuition for eight credit hours a semester.

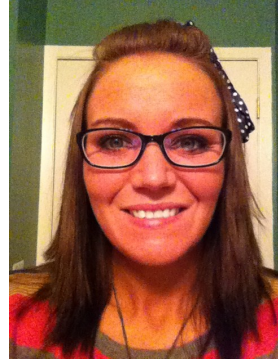
**To apply for this position, please submit the following materials to Dr. Linda Benson, VAR 411, by Friday, April 20, 2012.**

- Letter of application
- Two letters of recommendation sent directly to the MALS director
- Transcripts (waived if applicant is a current MALS student)

Questions? Please contact the MALS Director, Linda Benson, at [benson@oakland.edu](mailto:benson@oakland.edu) or 248.370.3531



*MALS student **Valerie Edge** was recently hired as the graduate assistant to the new undergraduate program in Liberal Studies.*



**Where did you go to undergrad? What was your major?**

I went to Michigan State University for undergrad and got my Bachelor of Arts in English.

**Why did you make the choice to pursue a graduate degree?**

My ultimate goal has always been to eventually get my PhD and become a university professor, so graduate school was always the next natural step in my career path.

**Why did you select Oakland University?**

I chose OU because my sister went here for her undergrad and had nothing but great things to say about the school. I also began correspondence with Dr. Benson and she was really helpful and welcoming, so I knew I had made the right decision.

**Why did you select the MALS program?**

I chose MALS because although I had always assumed I wanted to study English through to my doctorate degree, I began to learn about other disciplines that I also found interesting and thought would coincide with my academic interests but never had the opportunity to study them at length. MALS allows you to take different courses in different fields and combine them into one idea, making the ultimate project much more informed and insightful. Knowing that I could still take literature courses in addition to sociology or gender courses, for instance, really appealed to my academic goals as well as my natural tendency to draw on different disciplines while studying literature.

**What has been your favorite course?**

Thus far I have only completed two courses while in the MALS program at OU, however, my favorite course thus far was my colloquium with Dr. Benson. We studied heroes, villains and fools, which I didn't necessarily think would be a topic of interest for me, but turned out to be extremely intriguing and helpful. Additionally, the class dynamics of having only 5 people in the class made the class much more rewarding as we got individual attention and help but also had thoughtful and personal discussions.

**How do you believe a MALS degree will benefit you in the future?**

Once I complete MALS, I plan to apply to a few doctorate programs. And while I had always assumed it would be in literature, I am now considering also applying to sociology and women/gender studies programs. I think MALS will help because my undergrad doesn't directly translate to these fields, but being able to say that I have completed courses in these areas at the graduate level will speak to my ability to succeed in the doctorate programs to which I apply. As far as literature programs, I think

MALS would still be helpful because I can express an interest in a more focused area within literature, for instance feminist literature, and show how I have an interdisciplinary background in both literature and gender related fields.

### **How do you like being a graduate assistant?**

Being a graduate assistant is great, especially for a brand new program because we all seem to be learning everything together but get to make decisions regarding the program rather than simply walking into a pre-existing situation. As opposed to past jobs I've held, I also feel that working as a graduate assistant I am actually working towards something and making a difference, both in terms of helping the program and students, rather than simply doing mundane monotonous tasks. I think being able to see higher education on the opposite end rather than just being a student will also help me once I pursue teaching because I already have an idea of what goes on behind the scenes within departments and for teaching staff.

### **What are your responsibilities?**

Thus far I am responsible for advising any students during office hours, updating the department website and researching interdisciplinary studies in general. As far as the website, I am also responsible for researching specific information that can be posted, topics of interest for potential students in the program, and contributing entries to the department blog and facebook pages. Eventually, I will also be working towards publicity aspects to garner interest and recruit undergrads as well as helping with workshops and lectures on the topics of interdisciplinary teaching. Because Kevin (the other graduate assistant for the program) and I both want to teach when we graduate, Dr. Sifonis, the director of BALS, wants to give us opportunities to help with syllabi and potential lesson plans for the intro courses to become familiar with teaching at the university level.

**Summer 2011/Fall 2012/Winter 2012**

**Course description booklets are now available!**



**Learn about the exciting and intellectually stimulating  
courses that are being offered and be sure to register  
as soon as possible to secure a spot!**





## MALS Spring Celebration

Join your fellow MALS students and faculty  
for a casual dinner and camaraderie.

We will be congratulating  
MALS Director, Linda Benson  
for her years of service  
as well as welcoming the new MALS Director.

Date: Saturday, April 21, 2012

Time: 6:00pm—8:00pm

Place: Oakland Room

R.S.V.P to Graciela at [osterber@oakland.edu](mailto:osterber@oakland.edu) or by phone at  
(248) 370-2154 by April 18, 2012.



## **Summer 2012 MALS Courses**

**Summer is just around the corner Sign up for a summer course today!!**

**LBS 511 Ethical Issues Media** Tues/Thurs 6:30pm—9:50pm G. Gilbert 7/2—8/22

A study of professional ethics with an emphasis on print journalism, but helpful and applicable to electronic journalism as well. Class is conducted in a discussion format where students analyze a series of factual problems that arise in daily media operations.

**LBS 511 Communication Theory (Online course)** J. Heisler 5/7—6/27

This course will focus on central concepts in communication and the relation of communication to system theory, the acquisition of knowledge, the nature of language and the maintenance of values.

**LBS 513 Surveillance Society** Tues/Thurs 8:30am—11:50am J. Meehan 5/7—6/27

Topics explored will include (among others): privacy and security in the “risk society,” CCTV and crime, bio/medical surveillance, consumer surveillance, the militarization of surveillance, personal information and dataveillance/data mining by states and corporations.

**LBS 513 Politics Through Film** Tues/Thurs 6:30pm—9:50pm P. Piskulich 7/2—8/22

Art reflects and shapes reality. This course uses film to address various concepts of society, polity, justice and more. The main goal is to develop group dialogue and critical discourse about politics and film.

**LBS 514 Organic Farming in an Urban Setting** Tues/Thur 8am –10 pm 5/27—8/22

F. Hansen 4 credits

**LBS 514 Organic Farming in an Urban Setting** Tues 10am-1pm (LAB)

F. Hansen 1 credit **Note: This course requires students to take both the 4 credit course and the 1 credit lab.**

This course will be held at the Oakland University farm area and will include field as well as lab work. We will engage in reading relevant materials, individual and group experimental learning, field trips and community engagement.

**LBS 514 Permaculture Theory & Practice** Saturday 8:00am—2:30pm F. Hansen 7/2—8/22

Explores the relations between food production, fuel resources, environment and the world’s food supply also includes discussion of hydroponics and aquaponics as viable food systems for the developing and developed world.

**LBS 590 Independent Study and LBS 600 Final Project**

**Fall 2012 MALS Seminar****LBS 502 Seminar in the Humanities****Consciousness, Persons & Free Will****Monday 6:30pm—9:50pm****E. LaRock**

This course explores central questions about the nature of consciousness, persons and free will. Readings by philosophers and neuroscientists will assist MALS students in developing an understanding of current research that seeks to address such issues as the relationship between consciousness, attention and voluntary action, mental states and free will, and the links between consciousness and neural organization. In doing so the course will demonstrate why an interdisciplinary alliance between philosophy and neuroscience is needed to make progress on such problems.

**Don't forget to apply for graduation!**

Graduate students receiving degrees at the master's level need to apply for graduation one semester or session prior to the semester or session of intended graduation.

Please go to: [https://www2.oakland.edu/grad/web/secure/app4deg/app\\_grad.cfm](https://www2.oakland.edu/grad/web/secure/app4deg/app_grad.cfm) to complete the application process.



The deadlines for applications are:

April Graduation—Last Friday in January

June Graduation—Last Friday in January

August Graduation—Last Friday in June

December Graduation—Last Friday in September

# MALS

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

## 2012 IMPORTANT DATES

January 16	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Classes Suspended
January 27	Last Day to Apply for Graduation
February 18	Winter Recess Begins 10:00pm
February 27	Classes Resume 7:30am
March 5	MALS Dessert and Coffee
April 17	Classes End 10:00pm
April 21	MALS Spring Celebration
April 19-25	Final Exams
April 28	Commencement
May 7	Summer Sessions 01 and 03 Begin
June 27	Summer Session 01 Ends
July 2	Summer Session 02 Begins
August 25	Summer Sessions 01 and 03 End
September 4	Fall Semester Begins 5:00pm

**MALS**    Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

Linda Benson Ph.D., Director

benson@oakland.edu    Phone: 248.370.3531