



# From Graduation to Career: The Flexibility of UWG's Online Master's

Breanna Tillie  
News Editor

After several years of endless studying, getting minimal sleep, taking difficult exams and completing elaborate projects, many students agree that finally receiving their desired bachelor's degree is a satisfying relief. The mere thought of additional schooling after this milestone may appear overwhelming as students are ready to begin their professional careers.

However, the University of West Georgia offers students an opportunity to receive a graduate degree in numerous programs by delivering all course material completely online. The UWG online option of graduate degree completion allows for career advancement and increased knowledge, all while allowing students the flexibility to begin working full time in their careers.

"I wanted to get a master's degree to help me grow upon the skills that I already have to best help my students," said Emily Harris, a graduate student at the University of West Georgia currently pursuing Music Education while working full time as an elementary school music teacher.

"A lot of the other music teachers in my county had also chosen the program at UWG," continued Harris. "It can be really hard to find an online Music Education program for a

master's degree."

Harris believes that being in the master's program and teaching at the same time has enhanced her skills and benefited her work.

"It helps me stay aware of the work I'm having my students do," said Harris. "I've been able to focus on the most important aspects of my teaching."

Although being a student and simultaneously working full time can be a challenge, Harris states the online convenience of the degree program is easy to cooperate with.

"The program being online is one of the biggest benefits," said Harris. "I try to provide my music students with every opportunity that I can. Community performances and musicals keep them engaged and excited about music. I really appreciate the program being online with all of the other things that I do."

The flexibility of the online program gives Harris the time to focus on teaching music to children, which is what she loves most.

"The most rewarding parts of my job are the light-bulb moments where things finally click for the kids," says Harris.

Despite studying music at the University of West Georgia and teaching music full time, Harris says

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her passion for the art has never wavered.

"My dad exposed my brother and I to music when we were young. I just fell in love with it," said Harris. "When you do what you love, you never have to work a day in your life."



Photo courtesy of Emily Harris

## Mystery Science Theatre - A Night of Friends and Food

Kaden Carr  
Copy Editor

Members of the UWG Sci-fi Club gathered to meet with a gallery of English professors on Wednesday for an event they all dubbed the Mystery Science Theatre, a potluck that invited interested parties to share in good food and a delightfully awful film.

A screening of the 1957 B-movie classic Plan 9 From Outer Space took place as attendees rolled in. The event's creation was part of the Sci-fi Club's initiative to branch out into a wider array of activities and form new connections with other departments in the school.

Among this turnout was club founder Jay Fasone, as well as important figure heads in the English department, such as Professor Alison Umminger.

"I think anything that gets students together

to watch something as legendarily awful as Plan 9 from Outer Space and eat food is exactly what makes college fun. Count me in," said Umminger.

Being a fan of the sci-fi genre her whole life, she was more than happy to collaborate with Fasone's developing club.

Turnout was relatively small, due in part to its low key nature, but was very lively and close knit nonetheless.

"I'm always of the opinion that it's more about whether the people who attend enjoy the event as opposed to numbers," said Umminger. "I thought it was lovely to see such a nice crowd last night."

The crowd's kindness was a major breath of fresh air for all those involved, as they embraced both regular club members and strangers alike with an all encompassing openness

and exuberance. Together, everyone laughed and commented over the bad film, enjoying a wide selection of food ranging from taquitos, pizza and fried chicken.

"Like most humans, I found this semester pretty stressful and at times disappointing, but all of us need to find the things that bring joy and keep doing those," Umminger said about the event.

During this late period in the semester, where cramming and tension have reached their apex, it's little gatherings like these that give so many students and teachers a place to truly relax and unwind. Oftentimes the best cure for stress is simply the company of others, and in this case, a terrible sci-fi classic, too.

"It doesn't take much, and you can always find English faculty happy to



Photo: Kaden Carr, *The West Georgian*

sponsor events like these. But really it's the students who decided to form this wonderful club," said Umminger.

Even though the potluck flew under the general public's radar, quaint meetings like this one serve as a testament to the sheer vastness of social opportunities that can be found on UWG's campus, a true beacon of kindness and fun where many needed it most. Attendees of the event hope to make the Mystery Science Theatre a tradition, one that will continue to nurture their close knit and welcoming community for years to come.

## Atlanta Community Food Bank Provides Thanksgiving Baskets for Those in Need

Courtney Bixby  
Contributing Writer

Atlanta Community Food Bank is a non-profit organization that began in 1979 when the director of a community kitchen vowed to work with his neighbors and provide food to those who were in need and has now distributed over one billion meals to the community. The food bank works with over 700 community partners such as community kitchens, childcare centers, senior centers and more to distribute meals to those in need, serving 29 counties across metro Atlanta and North Georgia.

The company has over 1,700 volunteers, and the largest food bank facility in the United States. Agencies are able to simply place an order with the food bank and pick it up to distribute locally. Much of the food received is from donors across the state such as manufacturers, farmers, restaurants and individuals.

With Thanksgiving fast approaching, many in the community can turn to organizations such as this one. Products such as gift cards are given out, usable at any grocery store. Many local pantries that are partners of the Atlanta Community Food Bank will be serving a thanksgiving lunch or dinner.

Food banks may also be providing thanksgiving baskets, to include the protein and additional sides for the individual to prepare themselves. For individuals who may need assistance, many local food banks will provide free home delivery for thanksgiving meals.

For families who may want to get involved this season there are many ways to donate or volunteer. Every \$100 donated can provide around 300 meals. Other ways to donate include fundraising, donating



Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock Images

stocks or even cryptocurrency. The food bank also provides donations to be made in tribute to loved ones who have passed.

The food bank relies on volunteers for packing and distributing to the community. Volunteers may be individuals, groups and even families. There is also an opportunity through this program to be an advocate and reach out to our local representatives on the communities behalf.

The food bank holds many events throughout the year to help raise money for the metro Atlanta community. For 40 years, the hunger walk, an event where individuals participate in a 5k, has occurred and continues to benefit six local hunger relief organizations.

The Atlanta Apartment Association alongside the food bank hosts a black tie event each year that contributes to a Food-A-Thon held each fall. Lastly, each year

players can enjoy a charity event on the gold course to help local organizations. According to the Atlanta Food Bank one in every eight individuals in our community is food insecure and seeks help through local programs.

The food bank holds hunger education workshops throughout the year to advocate for the community, and teach individuals how they can help those in need. The bank partnered with the Girl Scouts of Greater Atlanta to educate them and encourage them to take action in their community in regards to food insecurity. Youth programs such as "Stop the Hunger Monster," where children are able to make tool-kits while learning about food insecurity, elevate the Atlanta Community Food Bank as an organization.

For more information on the Atlanta Community Food Bank visit here.

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## Lily Cone Becomes First Ever UWG Idol

Abbie Klein  
Feature Editor

UWG has always been a school full of a diverse student life. All students here come from different backgrounds and possess numerous different strengths that can help bring us together as a community.

This year, UWG's Student Musician's Collab (SMC) celebrated musically gifted students by giving them a chance in the spotlight in the first ever UWG Idol. The singing competition started with auditions in late October and finally crowned their first ever winner on Nov. 18, Lily Cone. Cone is a talented student with a strong voice who decided to continue her education at UWG after finishing her service in the U.S. Navy earlier this year.

"I feel so humbled and grateful," said Cone. "We had an extremely talented group of people competing and I'm so thankful for everyone who showed up to the shows and voted. This is absolutely a core memory for me."

Cone was one of nine competitors. While all competitors were equally talented, each had individual strengths in different music styles which made the competition even more exciting and competitive. Despite their stylistic differences, all competitors shared a deep love and passion for music.

"Music has always been a huge part of my life," said Cone. "I think it connects people in ways we couldn't do without it."

"Growing up I was always running around singing. I did a couple musicals in high school and sang in the school choir for a couple years, but nothing like UWG Idol," continued Cone. "When I joined

the Navy I sang cadence for my class in A school, so I feel like I've carried music with me in all my experiences. It gets me through everything."

Cone's background in musical theater shined in her vocal performances, specifically in the second round of the competition where she sang "Part of Your World" from *The Little Mermaid*, which won her a spot as a finalist.

Her confidence on stage and her vocal projection would've made anyone think that Cone has gone her entire life performing in front of an audience. In reality, this was a totally new experience for her.

"Singing for a live audience isn't something I normally do," said Cone. "The occasional karaoke performance, singing in the car, just average experiences with singing prior to this."

"I also mentioned earlier that I had some small roles in my high school's musical productions, and that was around 7 years ago," Cone continued. "I was on active duty for four years, so my timeline is a little strange. I'm so glad I put myself out there and participated in UWG Idol, it has been extremely rewarding."

SMC's mission is to connect students who have a deep passion for music. Whether that be through creating music or listening to it, the goal is to make a powerful connection through music. This is a goal that Cone has dreamed of and was able to achieve through UWG Idol.

"UWG Idol was an amazing experience.

I'm walking away from it with confidence not only in my vocal talent, but my ability to connect with people," said Cone. "I've always said that the kind of music I want to make is music that makes you feel something."

"That final performance, having the judges tell me that it made them emotional was an insane moment for me," continued Cone. "I think that's the ultimate goal of any musician, to connect with people and make them feel something, just creating that shared experience."

While being the first ever UWG Idol is enough of a prize as it is, Cone also walked away with a \$400 cash prize. This was, of course, the cherry on top of the experience. Cone shared that she planned to use the prize money to pay her bills, but save some for her dog as well.

"I have a very spoiled dog, Nugget, who I'm sure will reap some of the benefits," said Cone.

The SMC plans to make the UWG Idol an annual competition for UWG students. All students are welcome to audition and share their talent with fellow music loving peers.

"Just go for it," said Cone. "Beyond the musicality, you'll meet a wonderful and supportive group of people. I'm a firm believer that everyone should get to experience being up on stage like that at least once in their lives. It's terrifying and exhilarating and also completely freeing."



Photo courtesy of Lily Cone

# News

## Carrollton Receives the Largest Grant in City History to Fund The Maple Street Project

Emma Swales  
Editor-In-Chief

The City of Carrollton has been awarded a \$9.2 million grant through President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law as part of the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) program. This funding will enhance Maple Street, making it a safer and more accessible route for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.

This grant marks the largest ever received by the City of Carrollton and will be used to fund Project Maple Street. The project will address critical infrastructure improvements to this well-traveled road, creating a safer route for students walking from campus to downtown Adamson Square. Carrollton City Planner Hayley Beaver notes that Maple Street has become a significant safety concern for students and pedestrians, emphasizing that enhancing walkability has been a key goal in advancing the city's infrastructure.

"We have actually had commercial corridor improvement as a priority for the city of Carrollton since 2017," said Beaver. "Our

goal is to reduce speeding. Maple Street used to be a state highway. People still drive through it as a highway, which is unsafe. We will make sure it fits more as a local street so that pedestrian and bicycle travel, as well as driving, is less dangerous."

Two years ago, the city applied for the SS4A grant in response to a gradual increase in vehicle accidents and speeding in the area. The city planners developed a comprehensive Safety Action Plan and enlisted consultants to create a detailed strategy, demonstrating the city's commitment to improving safety and its readiness for funding.

"The Safety Action Plan identified places all over the city where heavy traffic occurs," said Beaver. "It also highlighted the most areas of concern by the types and amount of accidents, if pedestrians were involved, and what caused them. One of the areas highlighted was Maple Street.

"We noted in the plan that

Maple Street is not necessarily at its highest capacity for safety right now," continued Beaver. "The mayor and council approved the plan this past year, which led to us applying and being awarded the grant through SS4A."

Project Maple Street will address transportation issues along Maple Street, focusing on the stretch between the University of West Georgia's south entrance and the South Street intersection. The plan aims to reduce speeding and enhance pedestrian safety by narrowing lanes, eliminating unnecessary curb cuts, and adding wider sidewalks with designated bike lanes. Additionally, new street lamps will be installed along the sidewalks to further improve safety. Hayley Beaver emphasizes that the Maple Street Project will significantly enhance the area, providing greater development and growth for both the community and UWG.

"The street will have lighting to make sure it's safe at night

and we are even adding landscape to improve the area," said Beaver. "There will be dedicated bike lanes instead of the dangerous shoulder being the only options for those with bikes. And with the narrowing of lanes, speeding will naturally slow down, resulting in easier and safe travel for everyone."

The Maple Street Project is set to begin in early 2026. Until then, Beaver explained that the city is constantly working towards improvement and advancing our community.

"We want to upgrade all of Carrollton's commercial corridors," said Beaver. "We hope to be able to provide pedestrian safety and bicycle lanes for all of Maple Street, as well as other popular areas like Bankhead Highway. It is in the works for the future for sure."

Find out more about the Maple Street Project and future city advancement: [https://carrolltonga.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Comp-Plan\\_2023\\_web.pdf](https://carrolltonga.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Comp-Plan_2023_web.pdf)



Photo courtesy of The City of Carrollton