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## MUS 124: Life Soundtracks

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## IGS Small Grants Proposal - Fall 2021

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### OBJECTIVE

I am applying for a grant to develop a research project for MUS 124 (Life Soundtracks AR, G), which will be offered for the first time in Spring 2022. The project will give students the opportunity to explore connections between an important social issue (e.g., migration, marginalization, fundamentalism, identity, globalization, etc.) and specific music traditions of communities outside of the US, with particular emphasis on Latin America and the Arab Levant. The project will initially allow each student to ground themselves in one social issue and one musical tradition. They will then work with all other students exploring the same social issue within other musics, to try to understand how shared social problems often impact, give birth to, or are embodied within, incredibly diverse cultural (musical) manifestations. The final research product will be a number of poster sessions prepared and organized by social issue, which will address connections between music and the social issues in general, and between the social issue and each student's particular music tradition. The poster sessions will be presented in class and in an additional forum to be decided upon.

### RATIONALE

The call for projects that examine issues of diversity, identity, and inequity in a transnational level aligns particularly well with one of the new courses in Musicology that I will be teaching within the revamped music curriculum. The course in question, MUS 124: Life Soundtracks (AR, G), offers students the opportunity to explore music as a social and cultural phenomenon and the roles it plays in connection with primordial facets of the human condition around the world: love, religion, gender, dance, story-telling, nationalism, etc.

One of the oldest cultural manifestations, music has always played an important role in daily human life. Its connection with ritual, religion, work, dance, and entertainment has often placed it at the center of the human experience. So has its enormous power to move the emotions. IGS's call for projects with the characteristics stipulated has suggested the possibility of a "culminating" research project which would allow students to research long-standing connections between music and some pressing social issues particularly close to it. At the same time, it will allow them to witness how the same social issue shape and/or bring about a wealth of diverse musical manifestations.

### DESCRIPTION

Students will be asked to choose a "social issue" and a specific "musical tradition" outside of the U.S. from among a number of given choices. The possible "social issues" will be selected by the professor and will relate to aspects of the social experience that have particularly strong connections with music (e.g., migration, identity, oppression, nationalism, fundamentalism, globalization, etc.). The "musical traditions" will also be chosen by the student, according to their interest, knowledge, and resources, from within a number of options given by the

instructor. Examples of “musical traditions,” for instance could be Arab or Latin Rap, Dabke (a Palestinian traditional dance), Venezuelan music from the Plains, Salsa, Reguetón, the New Chilean song, the New Cuban *Trova*, the music of Umm-Khaltum, Sufi music, etc.) (I will have to do additional research to ensure I have enough suitable “musical traditions” that will work with each of the “social issues.”)

Once they have chosen a “social issue” and a “musical tradition,” students will conduct research on a topic at their intersection. They will be expected to do bibliographical research and conduct interviews with people from the IWU or larger community who may identify with the “musical tradition” they are studying.

Students will subsequently be grouped according to their “social issue” and will have to present their research findings to the professor and to all students within their group. They will have the opportunity to ask question, learn from each other and explore the totality of their findings. They will work towards a presentation on the connection between their “social issue” of choice and music in general, which must address some theoretical background and take into consideration the result of their individual and collective findings. At this step of the process, each of the groups by “social issues” will have one or two hour-long meeting with me so that I can guide the process whereby their individual research meets that of their classmates, that is, so that I can ensure that there is a good balance between the students’ emphasis on the individual traditions they have researched; the commonality of the experience shared by peoples across the world; and the similarities and differences in their findings which may depend on particular circumstances (i.e., cultural, political, economic, religious, etc.). These meetings will take place in a computer lab in the library so that they can explore questions that may arise while they discuss their findings and begin to shape the group’s presentation.

At the end of the semester, each “social issue” group will prepare a multiple-poster presentation on the connection between the “issue” and music, in general, as illustrated by the individual musical traditions they have explored. I will seek to create an opportunity for student to present their poster sessions in an additional venue (other than the classroom), perhaps in the context of some of the special activities around the University theme or of IGS or as a special event in the library.

As a last caveat, the project in question will involve community based-learning to the extent that students will have to reach out to non-US members of our communities (IWU and Bloomington-Normal) to interview them and learn about their musical traditions and the role(s) they play in their lives. Although not a “standard” student-faculty research project, the project will involve substantial faculty-student collaboration (considerably more so than a regular or even writing intensive class) as, once they have finished their individual research and are grouped according to their “social issue,” I will be meeting extensively and separately with all the groups in order to guide their discussion across cultures, and help them identify any further necessary research.