

A PUBLICATION FOR ALUMNI, STUDENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS

# SILVER & BLUE

FALL 2020

## THE BIG PIVOT

The University reimagines instruction and student support during a fall semester unlike any other in its history.



>> A SHARED JO...  
UNO  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS



# FIRST LOOK

*Autumn brings a welcome respite from summer's humidity and a walk, or bike ride, across campus typically happens at a more leisurely pace.*





CHANGE



*University of New Orleans student Josie Oliva lends her voice about the year 2020 and deciphering its lessons.*

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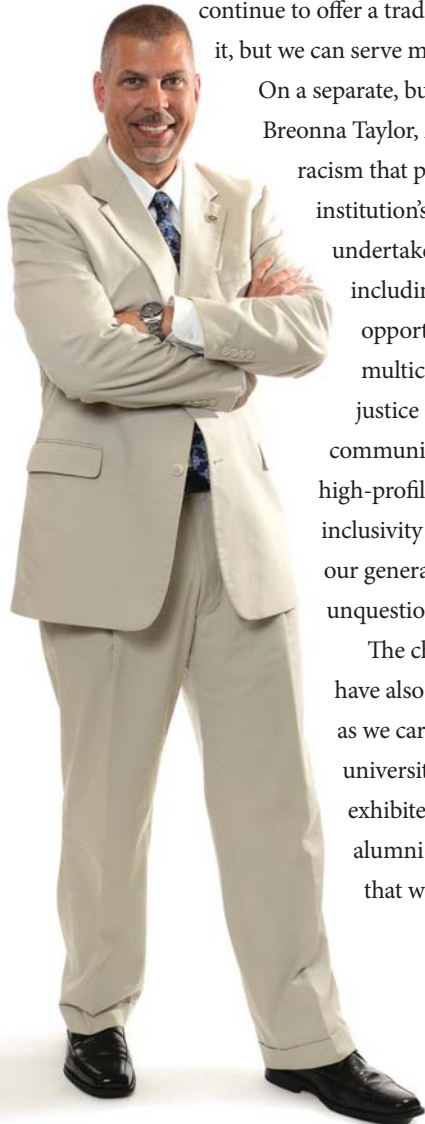
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# DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS:

FIRST OF ALL, I HOPE THAT YOU ARE SAFE AND HEALTHY. RECENT EVENTS HAVE continually reinforced the fragility of life. As an institution of higher learning, we take seriously our responsibility to cultivate knowledge, to serve as agents of positive change and to lead in response to the challenges our world faces. The last six months have presented us with many opportunities to realize and even test that responsibility.

The global pandemic has disrupted nearly every facet of our lives. Universities are no exception. I am proud of our institution's response—implementing safety protocols, increasing technology in classrooms to allow for more hybrid instruction, and modifying our behaviors, all the while treating the safety of our students and employees as our highest priority. Our faculty and staff have continued to educate and support our students in new and innovative ways. I'm thrilled to see how our faculty members have engaged in COVID-19-related research, offered healthcare expertise to government leaders and helped small businesses pursue loans. Our alumni and friends have stepped forward to support our current students through the UNO First Fund, which assists students in their times of greatest need. What had the potential to splinter our university community has actually had the opposite effect—it has galvanized it.

The outlook surrounding the pandemic remains uncertain. But there are lessons we have already learned that will endure. The University needs to be flexible in how we deliver instruction to our students. That will ensure that we are accessible to the greatest number of students. We will continue to offer a traditional campus experience, even if it's a reimagined version of it, but we can serve more students by accommodating their varied learning needs.



On a separate, but equally important topic, the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and others awakened us to the systemic racism that pervades our country. Once again, I was proud of our institution's response—particularly that of our students. We have undertaken a number of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, including a campus climate survey, professional development opportunities, a "Courageous Conversations" series, a new multicultural student lounge, and programming around social justice and racial equality. It's important that all members of our community not just have a seat at the table, but a voice as well. These high-profile crimes have highlighted the urgent need for equality and inclusivity in our communities. We need to be leaders of change, for our generation and for those that follow. This is not easy work but it is unquestionably worthwhile.

The challenges of 2020 have spawned anxiety and exhaustion. They have also given us opportunities to demonstrate strength and resolve as we carry out our responsibilities as the city's only public research university. I am grateful for the teamwork, compassion and humanity exhibited by members of our campus community, including our alumni and partners. It is because we are a determined UNO family that we will emerge stronger, closer and more dynamic than ever.

UNO Proud,  
**John Nicklow**  
PRESIDENT

 @UNOPresidentJN  @unopresident

*EXECUTIVE EDITOR*  
Littice Bacon-Blood

*EDITOR*  
Adam Norris

*DESIGN AND LAYOUT*  
Eric Gernhauser

*CONTRIBUTING WRITERS*  
Matthew Schaefer

*PHOTOGRAPHY*  
Shane Banegas  
Avery Gray  
Tracie Morris Schaefer

Send Correspondence to:  
Silver and Blue Editor  
University of New Orleans  
Administration Building 103  
2000 Lakeshore Drive  
New Orleans, LA 70148  
Phone: (504) 280-6832  
Email: unomagazine@uno.edu

## THE UNIVERSITY of NEW ORLEANS

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To inquire about alumni events or to join the UNO Alumni Association, contact: Office of Alumni Affairs, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA 70148  
Phone: (504) 280-2586  
Fax: (504) 280-1080  
Email: alumni@uno.edu

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# THE BIG PIVOT

The University reimagines instruction and student support during a fall semester unlike any other in its history.

## CAMPUS SCENE

HEADLINES AND HAPPENINGS



## THE BIG PIVOT

In March 2020, with the number of positive COVID-19 cases surging across the country, the University of Orleans—like so many other universities—ended face-to-face instruction, canceled all events, directed employees to work from home and moved all classes online for the rest of the spring semester.

The University spent the summer transforming campus by reconfiguring classrooms; adding new technology to allow for distance learning; and installing acrylic barriers, hand sanitizer dispensers and signage on the importance of wearing masks and social distancing.

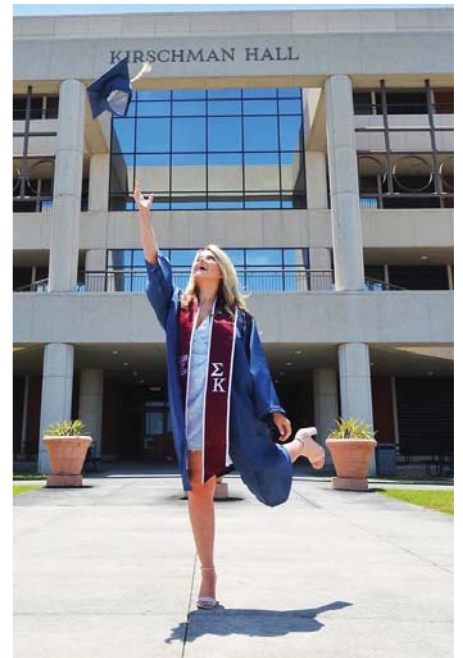
Faculty members studied how to best design and deliver online and hybrid courses. Staff members revised in-person support services so they could virtually engage with students.

The start of the fall 2020 semester unquestionably looked and felt different. New Student Convocation was online. New Student Move-in Day was stretched out over several weeks to prevent the customary crowds from massing at the residence halls.

Although it took longer, students did move in. Faculty and staff returned to campus. Classes resumed, even if many had a virtual component. The University of New Orleans had discovered new and imaginative ways to persevere, just as it has throughout its more than six-decade history.

## SPRING COMMENCEMENT

The University of New Orleans hosted a virtual commencement ceremony for its spring 2020 graduates that was streamed live on YouTube. President John Nicklow kicked off the virtual commencement in full regalia while students submitted their own graduation photos and had use of custom UNO Class of 2020 social media filters.

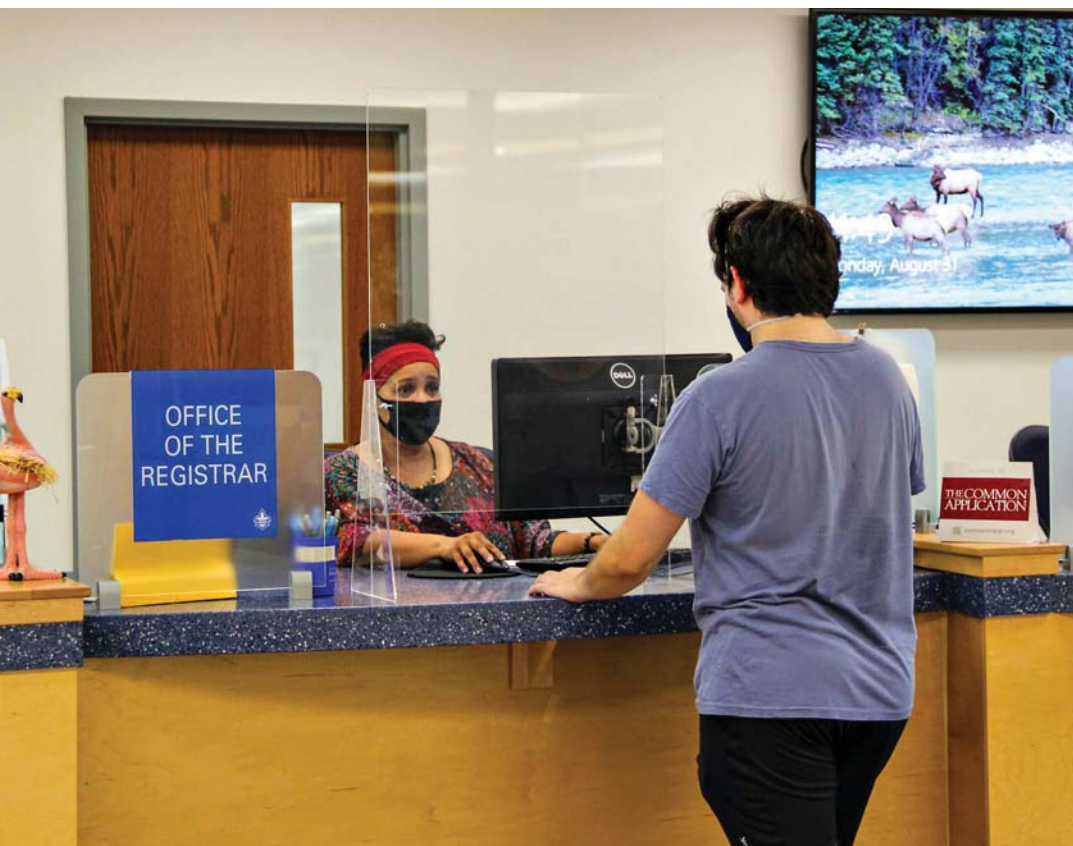






## MOVING IN

Move-In Day at Pontchartrain Hall was transformed into a staggered check-in held over several weeks to ensure it was a socially distanced event in keeping with CDC guidelines. That did not mean the amount of personal belongings hauled in by students, parents and volunteers was any less!



## FACE-TO-FACE

While some events, such as New Student Convocation, were moved online this fall, in-person help is still available on campus. The Privateer Enrollment Center – the one-stop shop for academic advising, financial aid and admissions—is on the first floor of the Earl K. Long Library.

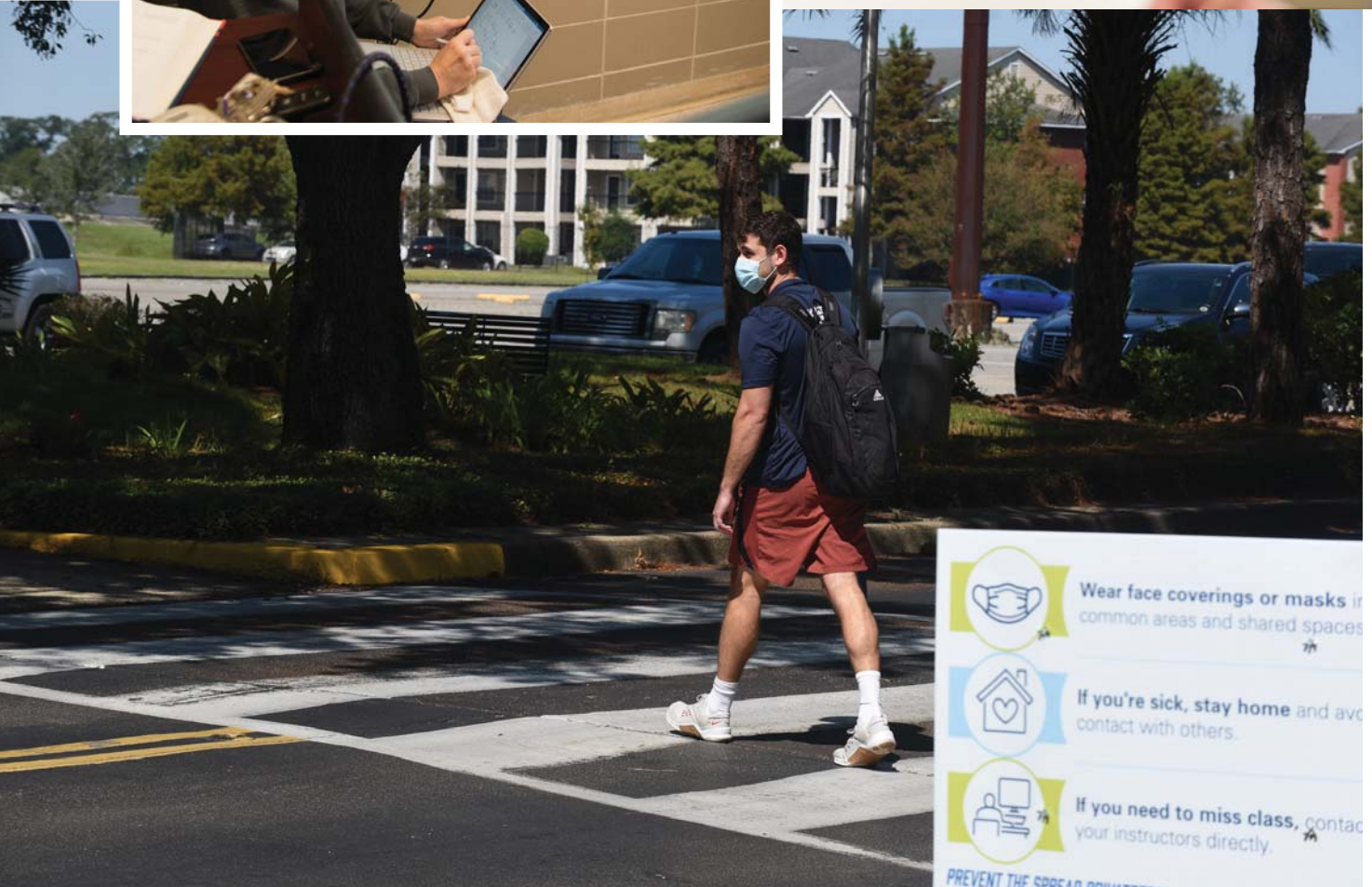
# CAMPUS SCENE

## THE BIG PIVOT

### CARRYING ON

*Masked up and physically distanced, Privateers go about the business of teaching and learning. Floors are marked, desks are separated and partitions have been erected where needed to maintain safe distances. It looks a bit different, but the UNO community is rising to the challenge and carrying on.*





# NEWS & EVENTS

## THE ESTATE OF FORMER UNO HISTORY PROFESSOR JERAH JOHNSON WILL FUND TWO ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIPS



THE ESTATE OF FORMER University of New Orleans history professor Jerah Johnson has donated \$240,000 to the UNO Foundation. The gift will be used to fund two endowed professorships in history, a department Johnson helped shape over his 44-year career at UNO.

History has been an integral part of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum since the University's founding and Johnson was there at its beginning. He joined the faculty of what was then Louisiana State University at New Orleans (LSUNO) in 1959, a year after the University opened.

Johnson's field was Renaissance Europe, but he also taught Louisiana history, world history, and the introductory graduate course in research and writing. Even after retirement, Johnson's home in the Marigny was open to UNO students seeking research advice on some aspect of New Orleans history.

Because of his widespread interests, his extraordinary erudition, and his aesthetic appreciation of the arts, architecture and design, colleagues fittingly referred to Johnson as the department's "Renaissance Man."

"We feel these two endowed professorships bearing his name will be a fitting tribute to such a unique man," says Anthony Gregorio, executive director of the UNO Foundation.



The names of the proposed professorships are: The Jerah W. Johnson, Ph.D Endowed Professorship in Maritime Studies and World History and The Jerah W. Johnson Endowed Professorship in Louisiana History.

Johnson served as department chairman from 1968 to 1980. In that role and as a faculty member, he contributed to numerous university committees, advised students and helped to build a vibrant history program. Additionally, he approved the study abroad program in Munich—the forerunner of the immensely successful UNO-Innsbruck International Summer School.

Johnson was born in south Georgia in 1931. His parents relocated the family to Venezuela and then to France during the late 1930s. He spent much of World War II in London and returned to Georgia to finish high school at the age of 16.

Johnson earned his undergraduate degree at Emory University and his doctorate at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He majored in history at UNC with minors in both linguistics and comparative literature. In 1956-58 he spent time in France on a Fulbright Fellowship at the University of Paris. He later confessed that most of his time there was spent in cafes drinking coffee and cognac.

Taking a job at a new branch of LSU might have seemed an odd choice for some at the time. Johnson recalled telling his grandmother "I'm going to risk it" when he accepted a UNO position. In fact, the decision came easily. Teaching posts were scarce in 1959, and his other offers were from Northwestern State in Natchitoches and a small Maryland college.

New Orleans seemed a far more enticing place to live, and Johnson embraced the city and

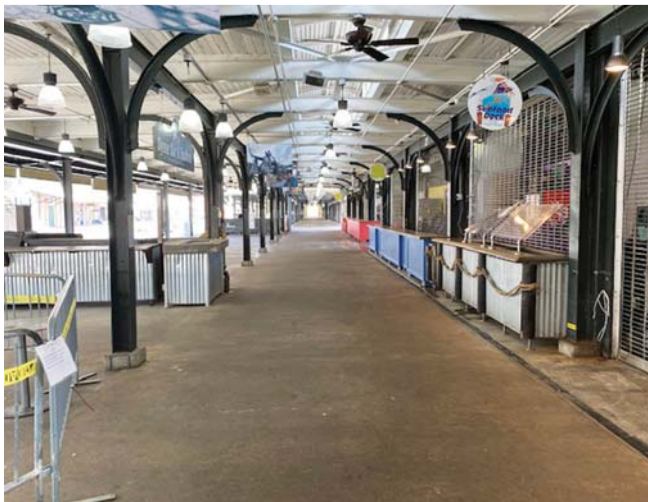
its history. He wrote pioneering articles on African American culture in Congo Square and the French influence in early New Orleans.

A *Driftwood* article at the time of his retirement quoted Johnson's opinion of his adopted city. "Why on earth live anywhere else, unless it is smack dab in the middle of lower Manhattan or the Left Bank of Paris, and both would require far too much money?"

UNO history professor emeritus Gerry Bodet was a longtime colleague of Johnson's and recalls,

"A department meeting where Jerah held forth was an event to be looked forward to. True, the mundane matters of policy were on the agenda, but inevitably these would morph into questions of philosophical truth, or the lack thereof, with a wry humor peppering the discussion."

Johnson retired from UNO in 2003. He died in 2017 at age 85.



Images from the online archive *Journal of the Plague Year*, a partnership of the University of New Orleans Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, and the New Orleans Jazz Museum.

## MIDLO CENTER COLLABORATING TO CREATE HISTORICAL RECORD OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies, in partnership with the New Orleans Jazz Museum, is joining Arizona State University to build an archival website that chronicles the global impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The online archive is called *Journal of the Plague Year*. The goal is to create a historical record of the pandemic as it unfolds so that future generations will have a record of what people are experiencing in this unprecedented time, Midlo co-director Connie Atkinson says.

To that end, the UNO historians are collecting material—including personal stories, cancellation notices and photographs—that reflect the effect of

COVID-19 in New Orleans.

“We are particularly interested in the experience of those involved in our city’s cultural community—musicians, artists, hospitality workers, family businesses, as history is being made daily,” Atkinson says.

The project is modeled, in part, on pioneering digital archives produced by the late UNO history professor Michael Mizell-Nelson after Hurricane Katrina. Mizell-Nelson had been inspired by the 9/11 Archive, says UNO history professor Mary Niall Mitchell, who is co-director of the Midlo Center.

“Today our digital capacity is even greater,” Mitchell says. “In partnership with ASU, we are eager to preserve what we can from New Orleans’s cultural

community, in particular, and the challenges musicians, artists and hospitality workers are facing right now.

“Perhaps more than any other group, they feed the life of this city and make it a destination for tourists from around the world.”

People are asked to share experiences and impressions of how COVID-19 has affected their lives, from the mundane to the extraordinary.

“With a public digital archive like *Journal of the Plague Year*, we can document their experiences,” Mitchell says. “And as with 9/11 and Katrina, we hope that by preserving blog posts and other digital ephemera the economic and cultural effects of this pandemic will not

be forgotten in the future.”

Types of information to share include:

- Images: photographs, screen captures (including from your phone or laptop) of social media, media, communications, memes, and other expressions of the moment.

- Audio histories
- Video clips--taken of the world, including yourself speaking, or of social media memes
- Links
- Text
- Files: emails, announcements, text messages, scientific documents, and flyers

Mitchell and Atkinson are site curators, with UNO alumna Kathryn O’Dwyer serving as project lead for the Midlo Center.

## FORMER SAINTS STANDOUT MARQUES COLSTON JOINS UNO FACULTY

MARQUES COLSTON—the former New Orleans Saints star receiver turned entrepreneur, speaker and business strategist—has joined the faculty at the University of New Orleans where he is teaching a course in the honors program called “Leadership and Entrepreneurship.”

“I’m excited to welcome Marques to our faculty in the honors program,” says Chris Surprenant, philosophy professor, honors program director and director of UNO’s Urban Entrepreneurship and Policy Institute. “Everyone knows that he was a superstar on the field for the Saints, but not everyone knows the success he has had off the field the past five years as an entrepreneur.”

The live online course covers a variety of topics including learning to redefine personal skills and transfer them to new projects, seeing market opportunities and developing a vision for how to address those opportunities, and foundational skills such as career readiness and financial management.

As part of the course, students will also complete a number of activities to help them better identify their own skills, develop and grow their own brand, and prepare for their lives after college.

“In my first session, I wasn’t sure how the students would receive being taught by a former NFL player,” Colston says. “To break the ice when I introduced myself, I thanked them for welcoming the rookie into the classroom.”

No stranger to transformational education, Colston, who retired from professional football in 2015 after 10 years



with the Saints, is the founder of Marques Colston Enterprises (MCE). He started MCE to empower growth-minded athletes, entrepreneurs and executives to discover, evolve and implement essential tools to better position themselves for sustained success.

In 2018, he partnered with Columbia Business School to create an executive education program for current and former professional athletes seeking the tools to launch ideas into action as entrepreneurs and skills to evaluate venture investment opportunities. Last year, he collaborated with his alma mater, Hofstra University, to create the Marques Colston Fellowship. The fellowship program supports students who are pursuing health careers, providing experiential learning opportunities each year.

Colston also serves as an ambassador for Son of a Saint, the New Orleans-based charitable organization that works to

enhance the lives of fatherless boys. In his role, he facilitates monthly sessions with a group of mentees on topics ranging from leadership, personal development, life skills and personal finance.

“College students are facing some of the most uncertain times of any generation as they graduate and transition into the next phase of their lives,” Colston says. “I designed this course to facilitate a process to help students embrace the change and adversity that accompanies this transition. My hope is that students will leave with tools and insights they can activate as they pursue and develop their careers.”

Another highlight of the course is that all students will participate in an entrepreneurial, experiential learning project. The aim of the project is for the students to identify a problem in the world around them, devise a plan to address

*Former New Orleans Saints star receiver Marques Colston, who has developed several businesses, is teaching an entrepreneurial leadership course this fall at UNO.*

that problem and successfully put that plan into action.

According to Surprenant, the students can start a business, launch a community campaign or otherwise try to make the world a better place. Each student will have access to funding from UNO’s Urban Entrepreneurship & Policy Institute in order to help put their plan into action.

“Our students will have an incredible opportunity, not just to learn from Marques how to transfer the skills they’ve developed as athletes to the world outside of sports and outside of the university, but to apply what they’ve learned in practice,” Surprenant says. “I’m excited just to sit in on this course myself and learn from Marques as well.”



## NEW BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAM IN URBAN CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

BEGINNING IN THE FALL 2020 semester, the University of New Orleans began enrolling students in the state's first bachelor's degree program in urban construction management. The program is focused on urban residential and commercial development, coupled with rehabilitation and restoration of existing infrastructure and historic preservation.

"This program was developed in direct response to the demand from the local construction industry," says Taskin Kocak, dean of the College of Engineering. "As such, the curriculum includes an experiential component through internships, increased soft skills-building courses and modern construction technology embedded into the courses and labs."

Graduates of the program will be able to understand different urban residential and commercial construction techniques; evaluate sustainability principles in planning, design and construction of an urban construction project; manage an urban construction project effectively; and formulate restoration plans and manage the rehabilitation of historic structures.

"GNO, Inc. is thrilled to continue supporting the UNO urban construction management degree program with our regional industry partners. The new offering was created through our GNOu program—GNO, Inc.'s

signature workforce initiative to connect employers with higher education institutions," says Michael Hecht, president and CEO of GNO, Inc. "Utilizing GNOu, nearly 20 construction companies across the region worked with UNO to design a program reflecting their hiring needs and industry trends."

"As a result of this collaborative effort, UNO students will have a pipeline to high-paying jobs with some of the region's largest employers; employers will have a pipeline of talent from a local university; and the region will have a stronger labor base," Hecht says. "This type of 'triple-win' is the goal of GNOu, and we congratulate UNO on their lead role."

Urban construction management becomes the fifth bachelor's degree program offered by UNO's College of Engineering. The University has the only civil and environmental engineering, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering programs in metro New Orleans, and one of a handful of naval architecture and marine engineering programs in the country.

"We are grateful for the collaboration and support of GNO, Inc. and our industry partners who helped us build this in-demand degree program, which will benefit our students and our region," UNO President John Nicklow says.

## \$250,000 Gift to Fund College of Sciences

A \$250,000 gift to the University of New Orleans College of Sciences from Michael and Judith Russell will fund two professorships and improvements to classrooms and labs, as well as bolster an existing scholarship already created in their names.

Michael Russell is the former CEO of Eurofins Scientific, an international bioanalytical testing company with laboratory operations in the UNO Research and Technology Park. Judith Russell earned her bachelor's degree in English from UNO.

"I am thankful for the incredible generosity of Mike and Judi Russell and their long-term support of faculty and students in the College of Sciences," says Steve Johnson, dean of the College of Sciences. "They have provided valuable scholarships to students in the college. The support of two major professorships will be critical in retaining our outstanding faculty and the donation for teaching lab upgrades will enhance our recent renovation of the introductory chemistry labs."

## UNO and Nunez CC Sign 'Link to Success' Agreement

Students who are not yet admitted to the University of New Orleans can take Nunez Community College courses taught on UNO's campus before transferring to UNO under a new partnership. The student transfer agreement, called Link to Success, will expand higher education access and encourage degree completion of both associate and bachelor's degrees, according to administrators from both institutions.

The program targets incoming freshmen and transfer students who may not yet meet UNO's admissions requirements and are ultimately interested in transferring from Nunez into a bachelor's degree program at UNO.

## Counseling Student Awarded \$10,000 Fellowship

Ash M. Bayer, a student in the University of New Orleans master's counseling program, has been awarded a \$10,000 fellowship by the NBCC Foundation. The foundation is an affiliate of the National Board for Certified Counselors.

Bayer was among 30 people selected for the NBCC Minority Fellowship Program-Mental Health Counseling-Master's. The foundation received more than 200 applications for the fellowship opportunity.

## Research & Technology Foundation Announces New President/CEO

The University of New Orleans Research and Technology Foundation has selected Rebecca Conwell as its new president and CEO. Conwell assumed the role on May 1.

Conwell most recently served as the executive director of the New Orleans Recreation Development Foundation. She previously led economic development for the City of New Orleans the last three years of Mayor Mitch Landrieu's administration.

"Rebecca is a recognized leader in government and community relations with extensive experience in higher education and public-private partnerships," says Arnold Kirschman, chairman of the UNO Research and Technology Foundation Board. "The focus of the Research and Technology Park is to create collaborations between UNO and tenants and to serve both as an incubator for up-and-coming businesses and a favorable environment for established businesses. We look forward to supporting Rebecca as she pursues these objectives."

## FREEDOM ON THE MOVE RECEIVES MELLON FOUNDATION GRANT

FREEDOM ON THE MOVE, an online database that seeks to document the lives of fugitives from North American slavery using newspaper ads placed by enslavers, has received a \$150,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to expand on that work.

University of New Orleans history professor Mary Niall Mitchell is a lead historian for the online project that is devoted to creating the searchable database.

“The goal, with the help of this generous funding, is to allow students and researchers to piece together more detailed narratives about enslaved people whose stories have heretofore been fragmented and scattered across the archive,” says Mitchell, co-director of Midlo Center for New Orleans Studies at UNO.

The Mellon Foundation grant will enable researchers to connect separate historical

sources, such as census information, into a main database they call “Freedom’s Loom,” which could offer a deeper look into the lives of those who were enslaved, says Mitchell.

“Our team is very excited about receiving support from the Mellon Foundation to develop this new tool,” Mitchell says. “With Freedom’s Loom, we can build pathways to connect the stories of individual enslaved people who ran away to other historical sources, such as the census, pension files, or legal records.”

Freedom on the Move, housed at Cornell University, is the largest digital collection of newspaper advertisements for people escaping from North American slavery, and is led by a team of historians from Cornell, Ohio State University, University of Alabama, University of Kentucky, and the University of New Orleans. They work

in concert with programmers at the Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research (CISER).

Since its inception in 2014, FOTM has sought to bring stories of resistance against slavery to the public through hands-on engagement. The database includes ads from the time of the first newspapers in the 13 colonies until the fall of Richmond, Virginia, in April 1865, which brought about the end of the Civil War.

The database, which has 27,000 archival ads available, allows users to interact with the ads through crowdsourced transcription. The database is anticipated to have more than 100,000 ads by the time it is

complete.

“UNO students working with me conducting research in local sources will help us build this innovative tool,” Mitchell says. “Especially in today’s context, the work our students do for FOTM underscores the historical and political significance of documenting the lives—and sharing the stories—of Africans and African Americans who suffered and resisted slavery in the U.S.”



## GIFT HELPS CREATE THE NEW ORLEANS SCHOLARS PROGRAM AT UNO

A GIFT FROM A NEW Orleans nonprofit foundation will create the New Orleans Scholars program at the University of New Orleans. The program, which launched in the summer, provides 15 Orleans Parish public high school graduates with the resources and support to thrive at UNO while incurring little to no student debt.

Grants and scholarships will cover all of the students’ tuition, fees, room and board, and books in their first two years at the University. In

their final two years, grants and scholarships will cover those same expenses for TOPS-eligible students. For those students without TOPS, a gap of up to \$5,500 may be filled with Federal Direct Stafford Loans.

“Thanks to the generosity and partnership of this foundation, more UNO students will be relieved of the financial pressures that so many endure, so that they may focus on having a successful and fulfilling college experience,”

says UNO President John Nicklow.

To be eligible, students must be a graduate of an Orleans Parish public high school; have an expected family contribution of \$1,000 or less, as determined by filing a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and meet UNO admissions criteria with a high school grade point average of 2.5 or greater.

New Orleans Scholars will complete a summer bridge program to support their

successful transition to college. They will live in dedicated living-learning community in an on-campus residence hall. Additionally they will receive supplemental instruction in math and English courses as well as mentoring and coaching during their first two years at UNO.

The scholars will be placed in on-campus work-study positions to gain experience and earn spending money. They will also have access to special events and programming.





## Pianist Jake Gold Receives ASCAP Foundation Louis Armstrong Jazz Award

The University of New Orleans music faculty has selected Jake Gold for the 2020 ASCAP Louis Armstrong Foundation Jazz Composition Award. Gold will be recognized during an online Foundation Honors event on Dec. 8 hosted by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers Foundation.

The annual award, which carries a \$3,000 scholarship, is presented to a UNO graduate student in jazz studies who demonstrates excellence in composition, and is supported by the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation.

The foundation, founded and funded by jazz musician Louis Armstrong in 1969, was reportedly his way of giving back to the world some of the goodness he received throughout his lifetime.

Gold, a pianist and composer, said he enrolled in UNO's music program with a goal of developing a deeper understanding of jazz music.

"It feels really uplifting and humbling to have my compositional work recognized, particularly by the incredible jazz studies faculty here at UNO, and by such relevant groups as the ASCAP Association, and by the Louis Armstrong Foundation," Gold says.

"Plus, the monetary aid that this scholarship provides has allowed me to finish my studies at UNO while at the same time finishing my album, which has been in the works for almost two years and features many of my musical compatriots from New Orleans and the Northeast, and has been a real labor of love, time, and money."

Gold plans to graduate next spring and release an album of original music around the same time.

"The music for which was partially written and recorded during my studies here at UNO," Gold says.

Gold, originally from Queens, New York, has called New Orleans home since 2012. His musical life, he said, began at age 5 with a classical piano education, and by age 13, he had started writing and performing with his first rock band.

As an undergraduate student at Wesleyan University, he studied ethnomusicology, performance, and composition while writing and arranging an original musical theater production for a small orchestra.

Over the next decade, Gold wrote for and performed with countless jazz, funk and reggae bands in Boston and Vermont, leading original projects Jupitang, SunDyL and Gold Standard, which were largely influenced by jazz, film soundtracks, pop and ambient music.

Gold has recorded on over 40 releases, several of which have featured his compositions and production. His songs have been featured in a number of short films and radio pieces.

Since moving to New Orleans Gold has become a regular fixture in the local music scene, performing regularly on Frenchmen Street and at the city's festivals with numerous bands in a wide variety of genres.

The ASCAP Foundation Louis Armstrong Fund provides scholarships to jazz composers studying in New York, New Orleans and Los Angeles.

## ALUMNI ABOUND ON GAMBIT'S ANNUAL 'OVERACHIEVER' LIST

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans is well represented on Gambit's 2020 "40 Under Forty" list. The list is composed of 40 people under the age of 40 who are "making a difference in the New Orleans area."

The public was invited to nominate their favorite "overachiever, do-gooder or mover and shaker" for the award.

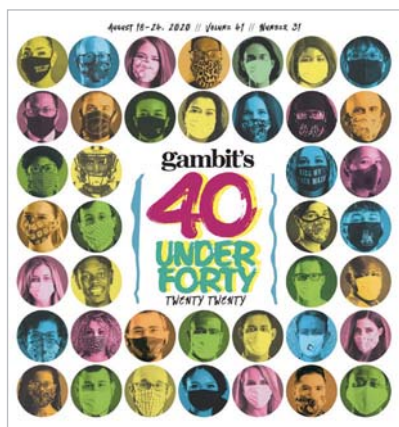
Of the 40 people selected, eight of them, or 20% of the entire list, are UNO graduates. They are:

**Renard Bridgewater – 2010, B.A. Studio Art.** Bridgewater is the musician and community engagement coordinator for the Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans. He develops partnerships for the organization.

**Erica Chomsky-Adelson – 2017, B.S. Urban Studies & Planning.** Founder and executive director of Culture Aid NOLA. The nonprofit distributes meals and groceries twice a week, delivers food to homes and helps connect people with other needed services.

**Michael Gulotta – 1999, B.A. Studio Art.** Executive chef and co-owner, Mopho and Maypop restaurants in New Orleans.

**Kristin Malone Johnson – 2009, B.S. Management.** Owner and creative director, Home Malone. The Mid-City retail shop specializes in selling work from local artists, including artwork, clothing and home décor.



**Kyle Pulphus – 2003, B.A. Communications.** Director of 826 New Orleans, a national writing program. Pulphus works with young children writers to publish books.

**Vivek Shah – 2012, M.S. Urban & Regional Planning.** Shah

is the director of transit planning for the RTA. He is currently working on a network redesign of the New Orleans transit system.

**Paul Thibodeaux – 2010, B.A. Music. Coordinator, Feed the Second Line.**

Thibodeaux, a musician, helps support elderly "cultural bearers," with food deliveries and other services during the pandemic.

**Todd Wackerman – 2014, Master's in secondary education general science.** Director and co-founder, STEM Library Lab. The lab provides school access to special equipment, lesson plans and training via annual memberships. 🌟

# FACULTY FOCUS

## CWW DIRECTOR M.O. WALSH PUBLISHES SECOND NOVEL

M.O. WALSH, DIRECTOR OF the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop, has published his highly anticipated second novel, “The Big Door Prize.” He struck literary gold in 2015 with his debut novel, “My Sunshine Away,” which made *The New York Times* bestseller list.

His second novel has garnered early praise with starred reviews from *Publisher’s Weekly* and *Booklist*. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* also named it one of the most anticipated Southern books of the fall.

Readers might also see the characters and storyline play out on television.

“The book has also been optioned for television by Skydance Media, with David West Read (Schitt’s Creek) as the writer,” Walsh says. “So, fingers crossed that works out!”

The book is set in the small fictional town of Deerfield, La., the type of town where “everybody knows everybody,” Walsh says.

The novel starts with the arrival of a strange new machine at the local grocery store that looks like a photo booth. However, the machine claims

that it can tell a person what their utmost potential would be by analyzing their DNA.

“So, people who have been construction workers for the last 20 years might get a read-out from this machine saying they would actually be a really great chef or tennis player or accountant, if they pursued it,” Walsh says.

“The more people try the machine, the more the town gets engrossed with it as people start trying out some strange new paths.”

Among those trying out the machine is the novel’s main couple, Douglas and Cherilyn, who get very different read-outs that makes them question if they are truly as happy as they’d thought, Walsh says.

“This is not a sci fi novel. It’s a more humorous and heartfelt look at people and how they square themselves with their dreams,” Walsh says. “I think a lot of us are doing this now, in fact, since we’ve been quarantined or lost our jobs this year.

“It’s like we’re all looking around, thinking: ‘Is this who I want to be? How did it get this way? Is this a chance for me to change? And, if so, do I



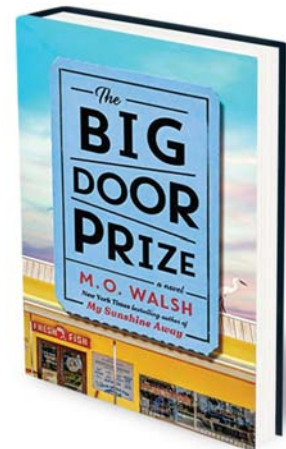
want to?”

Walsh takes the title of his book from a line in the John Prine song, “In Spite of Ourselves” that goes:

*“In spite of ourselves/  
we’ll end up sitting on  
a rainbow/Against all  
odds, honey/We’re the  
big door prize.”*

“It’s a great and funny love song about a couple realizing that, although they are both flawed and strange, they have each other, and that’s the best thing they could ask for in life,” Walsh says.

*“The Big Door Prize,” set in a fictional south Louisiana town, is M.O. Walsh’s second novel.*



## UNO PROFESSOR STEVE MUMFORD LEADS GNOF STUDY ON THE STATE OF NONPROFITS IN SE LOUISIANA DURING COVID-19

A TEAM OF UNIVERSITY OF New Orleans researchers, led by political science professor Steve Mumford, produced a study on the state of nonprofits in southeastern Louisiana that shows many organizations have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, while struggling to continue to provide services to the public.

“We as a society need to better recognize the essential role nonprofits play in many spheres of life. The pandemic has highlighted that fact like so many other disparities,” Mumford says. “At this time, nonprofits—especially those continuing to provide direct services to our communities—are hit twice: once by the surge in demand for their services as people are struggling across the board; and secondly, in terms of finances, as operational costs went up for them at the same time that revenues and donations quickly decrease.”

The “Study on the State of Nonprofits in Southeast Louisiana Amidst COVID-19” was released June 8. It was commissioned by the Greater New Orleans Foundation as a part of its comprehensive response effort to help nonprofits, philanthropy and civic organizations better understand the impact the pandemic has had on the critical nonprofit sector.

“This study shows that 43% of nonprofits in our region are working on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly three-quarters of them have been impacted financially from canceled fundraisers to interruptions in their fee-for-ser-



vice programming,” says Andy Kopplin, President and CEO of the Greater New Orleans Foundation. “As we work our way through this crisis, GNOF believes that maintaining a strong and robust nonprofit sector is critical to our region’s future.

“Our region depends on nonprofits for over 55,000 jobs, as well as for their work addressing urgent needs from health care to homelessness to food security, for educating out-of-school young people, taking care of seniors and providing cultural opportunities that give us inspiration and joy.”

Mumford currently works with the Greater New Orleans Foundation to provide training and coaching in program evaluation to nonprofits throughout the region. He says many of the nonprofits provide essential services, “basically as an arm, or in place, of government.”

“The sector is also incredibly diverse: it includes human service agencies of all kinds, but also arts and culture organizations, community-led advocacy groups, and so on,” Mumford says. “Just think of all the festivals and events canceled in our region this spring—that was critical revenue for our nonprofits to survive.”

Nonprofits employ 12% of the workforce in the New Orleans metro area, Mumford says. Despite the crucial role the organizations play in providing a social safety net, advocating for the region’s most vulnerable residents and enriching our culture, their employees are at risk of losing their jobs and are losing pay, Mumford says.

“Nonprofits need donations for sure and consistently over time. But, they also need more support and trust from govern-

*A study led by UNO political science professor Steve Mumford found nonprofits were hard hit by COVID-19, while struggling to continue to provide services.*

ment and foundation funders, and more people to lend voices to their causes,” Mumford says. “Hopefully this report helps spark some of that interest and awareness.”

Mumford applauded his research team—graduate assistant DeVante Starks and three undergraduate Tolmas Scholars funded through UNO’s Office of Research—Kielee Clement, Ariane Dent and Mckenzie Howell—for helping produce the study.

“This was a collective effort that really showcases the depth of our talent at UNO, and our ability to contribute to our community through expertise,” Mumford says.

## UNO PROFESSORS' RESEARCH TARGETS VIRAL PROTEINS TO STOP COVID-19

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans chemistry professor Steve Rick and computer science professor Chris Summa are part of a global research consortium studying ways to inhibit the virus that causes COVID-19.

The COVID-19 High Performance Computing Consortium is a private-public funding initiative, spearheaded by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, the U.S. Department of Energy and IBM to bring together federal government, industry, and academic leaders, to accelerate research for fighting the novel coronavirus.

Rick and Summa's research is on the viral protein helicase, a promising target against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes COVID-19.

The virus needs the helicase protein in order to replicate and grow inside the body. If researchers can design a drug to attach to that protein, it could inhibit the virus' growth. However,

because of the helicase's highly flexible nature, designing a drug to fit is difficult since you may not really know the structure to target.

Rick and Summa's research seeks to understand how the helicase protein moves and changes structure.

"From the three-dimensional structure of a protein, inhibitors can be designed to hinder replication of a virus, but the flexibility of helicase makes it a challenge for structural-based drug design," Rick says. "We will use high performance computing, on some of the fastest computers in the world, to gain a better understanding of the

flexibility of helicase."

The UNO researchers have been granted use of a super computer—aptly named Comet—at the San Diego Supercomputing Center.

"We are running dynamics of the helicase, a fairly large protein, so we can follow how it moves," Rick says. "The simulations allow us to see how all the atoms move. We can do that with and without a potential drug bound to it."

Those computer simulations will be aided by an enhanced sampling method developed at the University of New Orleans that allows researchers to determine structural changes more quickly. The structures that result will be clustered into different structural groups and shared with the scientific community, so that they can be used for drug design.

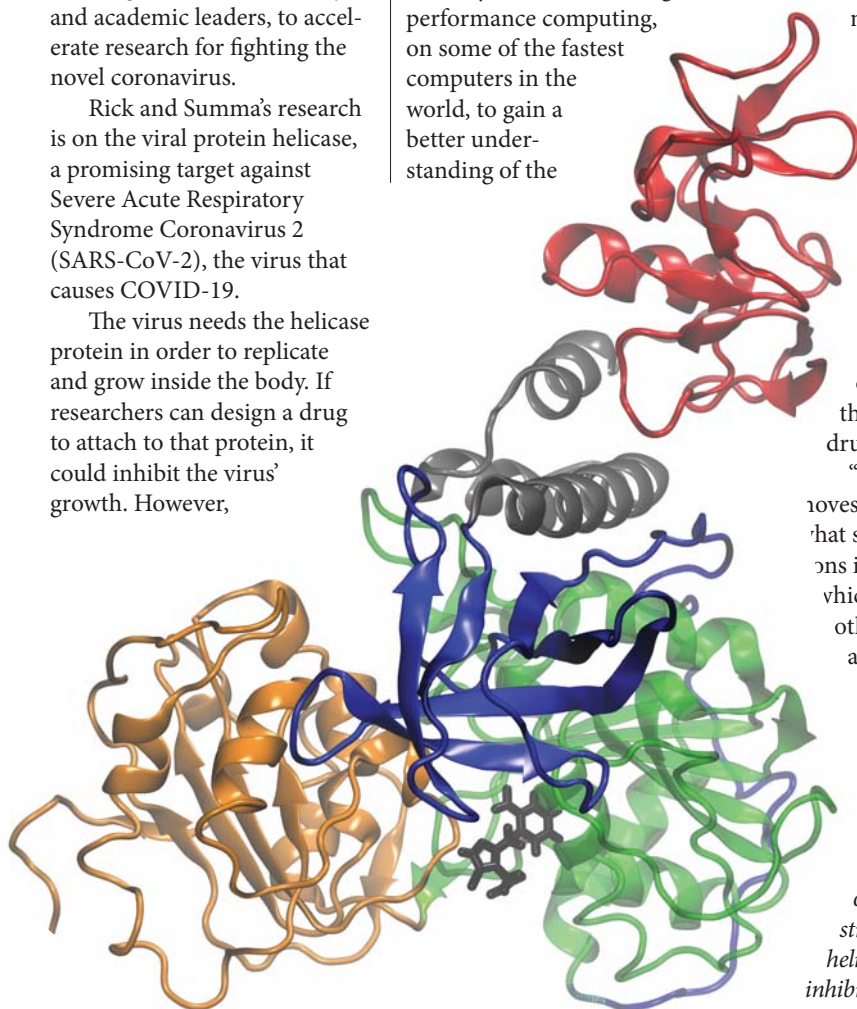
"By studying how it moves, we can figure out what shapes or conformations it's most likely to be in, which we will share with other scientists who are experts in drug design," Summa says.



Steve Rick



Chris Summa



*This is a representation of the three dimensional structure of SARS-CoV-2 helicase with a potential inhibitor in dark grey near the bottom of the structure.*

## UNO PROFESSOR RANDY KEARNS WORKS TO IMPROVE PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY CARE

LOUISIANA HAD THE highest child fatality rate in the United States from 2014 to 2016, the three most recent years that complete federal data is available. While numerous factors contributed to that rate, University of New Orleans professor Randy Kearns' focus is on pediatric emergency care.

With the help of a federal grant, Kearns is leading a consortium of medical personnel and first responders in creating a model for improving pre-hospital emergency care for the state's youngest residents.

"It is imperative that gaps in pediatric care are identified and closed," Kearns says. "The focus is helping paramedics and EMTs build their skills to better care for pediatric patients."

Kearns, a healthcare management professor with an extensive background in healthcare administration, public health, disaster and emergency management, is the project director on a four-year, \$251,000 grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The University of New Orleans is one of only five recipients of a HRSA targeted initiative grant that will provide resources, support networks, education, training and personnel development that can save children's lives, Kearns says.

In 2018, there were 44,884 EMS records of pediatric



encounters in Louisiana. Of the 44,884 pediatric encounters, 11,650 were 911 calls to a scene. Approximately 73% of EMS agencies in Louisiana self-disclose a lack of training with pediatric-specific equipment.

"Whenever an accident occurs, the tip of the spear is that someone dials 911 and the first person to be at the side of the patient is the paramedic," Kearns says. "So, we want to be sure that paramedics have been provided with the training and the equipment to put the

patient in the position for the best outcome."

The project seeks to improve EMS readiness in part by creating a statewide consortium of Pediatric Emergency Care

Coordinators (PECCs) to ensure consistency in care and response, said Kearns, who is a former paramedic. A PECC would be stationed in all emergency management agencies and would help emergency responders build and maintain those specialized pediatric skills.

"It's putting people in a position so that they can do a better job of accurately providing the care and transporting the patient to the most appropriate destination for their injury," Kearns says.

Kearns is collaborating with children hospitals and EMS agencies in the state's three largest metro areas of New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Shreveport to compile data that will be used to design a statewide model.

Key collaborators on the

*Healthcare management professor Randy Kearns is leading a consortium of medical personnel and first responders to create a statewide model for improving emergency care for children..*

project include the program's medical director, Dr. Toni Gross, who is chief of the emergency department at Children's Hospital New Orleans; Amanda Perry, who is the EMS for Children coordinator for the state of Louisiana and Gail Gibson, a nurse representing the Louisiana Department of Health.

"The purpose of the grant is to create a way that we can capture data, put in an improvement plan, monitor the process and then hopefully show improvement," Kearns says.



Randy Kearns



## TRANSPORTATION STUDIES PROFESSOR SEEKS TO REDUCE STATE RAIL CROSSINGS

THERE ARE MORE THAN 3,000 at-grade crossings of public and private roads with railroads in Louisiana, which researchers say contribute to the state being among the top 10 in the nation with the most grade crossing collisions each year.

University of New Orleans transportation studies professor Guang Tian is studying ways to reduce the number of railroad crossings, which could help decrease accidents. A nearly \$50,000 grant from the Louisiana Research Center is funding his yearlong research.

At-grade crossings of public and private roads with railroads create a unique intersection where trains, vehicles and other users meet, Tian says.

According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, an arm of the U.S. Department of Transportation, in 2018 there were 91 grade crossing collisions recorded in Louisiana, including six fatalities. Nationwide there were 2,220 collisions and 273 fatalities that year.

In addition to presenting safety concerns, at-grade crossings also hamper railroad operations and efficiency, Tian says.

“This research will provide recommendations to help efficiently and strategically reduce the number of public and private crossings in Louisiana,” Tian says.

Tian says the research would include statewide surveys and interviews with local and state

*University of New Orleans transportation studies professor Guang Tian is researching ways to reduce the number of railroad crossings in Louisiana, which has one of the highest number of grade crossing collisions in the nation.*

transportation departments and agencies, railroad companies and rail users to understand better the concerns and potential barriers to closure.

The 2015 Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan includes an element that calls for research into incentive programs, Tian says. His research will attempt to identify incentive programs that could be used to entice voluntary closure of public and private crossings, Tian says.



*Guang Tian*

## CYCLING, WALKING INCREASED DURING COVID-19

YOU MIGHT HAVE noticed the evidence anecdotally: the empty bike racks at stores or seemingly more of your neighbors cycling or walking around the block. University of New Orleans Transportation Institute researcher Tara Tolford has data that shows bike riding and walking have increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during the stay-at-home order.

“Count data collected at a bunch of different locations continuously since early March show huge increases in biking and walking during COVID, which aligns with what basically everybody has been finding and seeing,” Tolford says.

The data is part of UNO Transportation Institute’s work on two linked projects that focuses on the collection and application of pedestrian and bicycle count data.

One of the project is sponsored by the Louisiana Transportation Research Center and is aimed at initiating coordinated volume data collection for people walking and bicycling around the state, in order to more accurately assess long-range trends and develop demand models and safety evaluation tools, Tolford says.

The second project is sponsored by People for Bikes, which has partnered with the City of New Orleans to support implementation of the city’s “Moving New Orleans Bikes” plan. UNOTT’s role is to support evaluation by collecting data about changes in use of specific

facilities where infrastructure is being upgraded, as well as to measure overall changes throughout the bikeway network.

A key component of both projects involved the installation of several new permanent, continuous automated count devices on key trails and bikeways in New Orleans, Tolford says.

The counters were installed during the first week of March, shortly before Gov. John Bel Edwards issued a stay-home order in an attempt to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Several of the counters were placed at locations where previous counts had been collected, allowing researchers to compare current patterns to past observations, Tolford says. The sensors use infrared technology to count pedestrians, paired with inductive loops embedded in the trail or road surface or pneumatic tubes

to count bicycles. “What we found is that at all of the facilities monitored, marked increases in usage were observed during the stay-at-home order compared to pre-pandemic, except at one count location in the CBD (Baronne Street) where the impact of a sharp drop off in commuters is evident in reduced volumes,” Tolford says.

Looking at the data through mid-May, when statewide restrictions began to ease, researchers found:

- Walking and bicycling went up 263% on the Wisner

Trail in mid-April compared to pre-pandemic.

- Activity on all other trails measured also increased notably, including the Jeff Davis Trail, Lafitte Greenway, Algiers Point Levee Trail, as did use of the bike lanes on Esplanade Avenue.

- The first few weeks showed the most rapid growth, but the highest days of use were during what would normally have been festival weekends. In many cases, researchers saw record high counts comparable to what they would expect if festivals were still happening.

“In sum, we have observed an extraordinary increase in trail and bikeway use during the pandemic as people sought opportunities to get out of the house, safely,” Tolford says. “This also aligns with what has been reported locally and nationwide about increased use of trails, parks, and bikeways, as well as widespread reports of bike shops selling out of bikes.”

Tolford says it is also important to note that not everyone has equal access to great facilities.

“There are a lot of people who live in neighborhoods who don’t have trails, and may not be able to safely go out with their families on foot or on bike to get exercise and all of the benefits to health and sanity that come along with being active,” she



*A cyclist rides over a counter on Esplanade Avenue in New Orleans. UNO Transportation Institute researcher Tara Tolford has data that shows bike riding and walking have increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

says. “We know we have major health disparities in this city, and inequitable access to active transportation infrastructure is a part of that.

“We hope that this data will help show that it’s more important than ever that we create space on our public streets for people to walk and bike.”



## PROFESSOR PHOEBE ZITO AWARDED EARLY-CAREER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

University of New Orleans chemistry professor Phoebe Zito has been awarded a 2020 Early-Career Research Fellowship by the National Academies' Gulf Research Program.

Zito is one of only 20 scientists to earn the two-year fellowship, which is awarded to emerging scientific leaders who are prepared to work in environmental health, community health and resilience, and offshore energy system safety in the Gulf of Mexico and other U.S. coastal regions.

"It's an honor and a privilege to be selected for this award," Zito says. "I've faced a lot of adversity to get to where I am today, which is living my dream as a professor studying environmental chemistry. I hope to inspire other female scientists to fight through adversity and pursue a career in STEM."

The fellowship, which began Sept. 1, is awarded to tenure-track faculty at colleges,

universities and research institutions. Each fellow receives a \$76,000 financial award, mentoring support, and a built-in community of colleagues who share an interest in the well-being of Gulf Coast communities and ecosystems.

Since the award is not attached to a specific project, fellows are able to use the support to pursue bold, nontraditional research that they otherwise might not be able to conduct, program administrators say.

"The early years of a researcher's career are a critical time. This program gives fellows the independence and flexibility to explore untested ideas and develop lasting collaborations," says Lauren Alexander Augustine, executive director of the Gulf Research Program.

"The 2020 class of fellows are a distinguished group of individuals who have demonstrated superior scholarship, exceptional scientific and

technical skills, and the ability to work across disciplines."

Zito is currently collaborating research efforts with Malay Ghose Hajra, associate professor and chair of UNO's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, to combine knowledge and tools from each of their disciplines to tackle coastal erosion problems around Southeast Louisiana.

"The collaboration with civil and environmental engineering is an exciting opportunity to study contaminants in our own backyard which will give undergraduate and graduate students perspective regarding how a chemists approaches contaminants versus an engineer," Zito says.

Nearly half of the population of Louisiana live on the coast and are in danger of losing their

*University of New Orleans chemistry professor Phoebe Zito (center) has been awarded an early career research fellowship.*

homes due to coastal erosion.

One approach to mitigating against the risks of coastal zone habitation has been to alter coastal environments through placement of dredged material and the modification of natural waterways to provide a larger barrier against inland flooding and to increase the likelihood of floodwater runoff respectively, Zito says.

"Our interdisciplinary collaboration focuses on developing a much needed, better understanding of the chemical and physical interaction between dredged materials, altered waterways and natural environments," Zito says.

## CHEMISTRY PROFESSORS WORK WITH NEW ORLEANS DISTILLERIES MAKING HAND SANITIZERS

ONE OF THE MAJOR weapons in the fight to curb the spread of the coronavirus is the use of hand sanitizers. However, when the demand for the hand cleanser outpaced supply, some New Orleans distilleries filled the void by using their alcohol stock to produce the sanitizer.

University of New Orleans chemistry professors Phoebe Zito and David Podgorski are helping to ensure that the distillery-made sanitizers meet with FDA and World Health Organization

specifications.

The Chemical Analysis and Mass Spectrometry Facility at UNO, under the co-direction of Zito and Podgorski, has partnered with two distilleries that have switched operations from making alcohol to making hand sanitizer for clinics and hospitals in the region.

"David and I are working with PorchJam and distillery to test their hand sanitizer for ethanol content to meet the



Phoebe Zito



David Podgorski

guidelines regulated by the World Health Organization," Zito says.

When soap and water are not available, the Center for Disease

Control recommends using a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to avoid getting sick and spreading germs.

"The CAMS facility provides certificates of analysis for the active ingredients in their hand sanitizers so the distilleries can prove that their products meet specifications," Zito says. "It's such a great opportunity, and we are very glad we are able to contribute and help our community through these crazy times." 🌐



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# DEAR 2020

You are the epic start to the third decade of the 21st Century. You, no doubt, will be described in superlatives by historians, sociologists and others who one day will study in depth your monumental season. ■ They will have much to ruminate on: COVID-19 and the global pandemic; stay-home mandates and protective masks; Black Lives Matter demonstrations; racial reckoning and systemic racism; cultural, gender and ethnic diversity; virtual graduation; presidential politics; a national election; hurricanes with names from the Greek alphabet and raging wildfires on the West Coast, among other topics. ■ For the present, we asked several University of New Orleans students to lend their perspective—using just a word or phrase—that offers a personal glimpse into the epoch-making year.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER



*Sarah Johnson:*  
**Revolutionary**

**My word is revolutionary. Historically, great change has only come through conflict and pain. This year has been a continuous line of tragedies, but people have taken the opportunity to step up against injustice and to show support for their communities. I'm hoping that this year can be the start of a revolution that creates a more just and compassionate world.**



**Michael A Connick:**  
**Crucible**

We currently reside in a crucible, a time of intense anxiety, tension, pressure, and suffering caused by many factors such as a global pandemic, political clashes, racial injustice and ravaging flames. However, just as a scientist uses a crucible to purify chemical compounds, this period of stress and anguish will serve as a watershed, steering us in the direction of acceptance, dialogue, and peace.



**Amaya Felix:**  
**Strength**

My word is strength. It took strength to survive the year 2020 so if you made it this far you have the strength to make it further!

*Josie Oliva:*  
**Change**

Over the course of this pandemic, it has become shockingly clear to me that we are charging into a new era. The way of the world is shifting day by day, and it oftentimes feels as if we will never reach the point of equilibrium, never regain a sense of security.

Yet, in the face of all that has been lost, it's imperative that we recognize all the good that these trying times have brought about—the newfound appreciation of friendship, the strengthening of family, the rise of community leaders, and the realization that each day of our lives is precious.

For our sake, I hope we never regress to what we once called “normal,” but rather progress forward to new possibilities and embrace the winds of change.



*Rashad L. Richardson:*  
**Enouement**

Enouement is the feeling of arriving at the future and not being able to tell your past self about it. I'm only upset because I would've told my younger self that everything would've been OK.





**Julianne Marie Romero:**  
**Fortitude**

The definition of fortitude is "courage in pain and adversity." We have been through so much during 2020 from the pandemic to racial injustices. The fact that we are here working hard through these trying times is all you need to know about us Privateers. #UNOPROUD



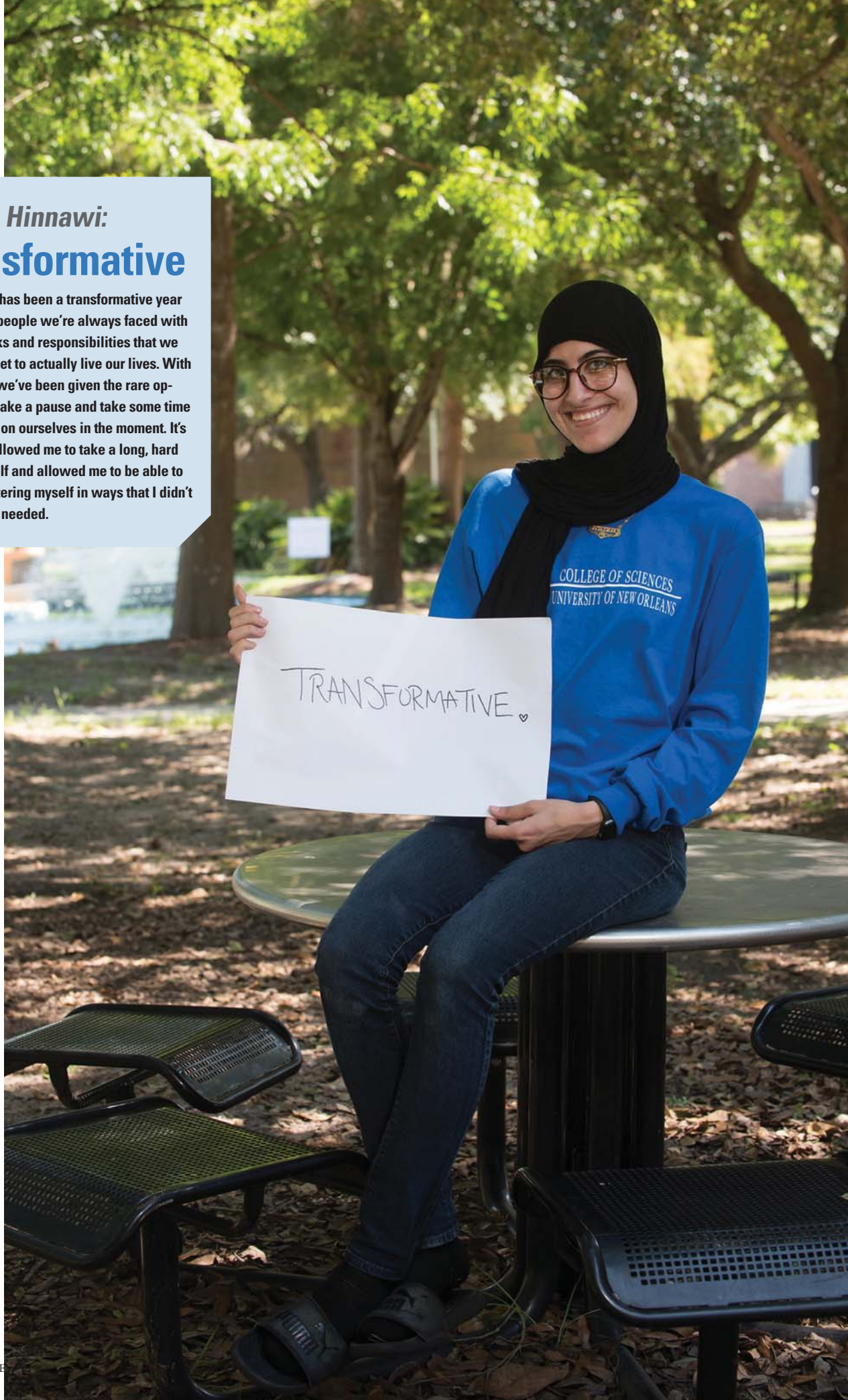
**Alexandra Louis:**  
**Blessing**

I have been given time to rest, reset and recuperate. There was a lot of self-growth and financial blessings that occurred. Family time became a priority, and I became grateful of what I had even when it was counted as a loss. Blessings on blessings.

**Azizah Hinnawi:**

## Transformative

I'd say 2020 has been a transformative year because as people we're always faced with so many tasks and responsibilities that we begin to forget to actually live our lives. With quarantine, we've been given the rare opportunity to take a pause and take some time to just focus on ourselves in the moment. It's personally allowed me to take a long, hard look at myself and allowed me to be able to work on bettering myself in ways that I didn't even know I needed.



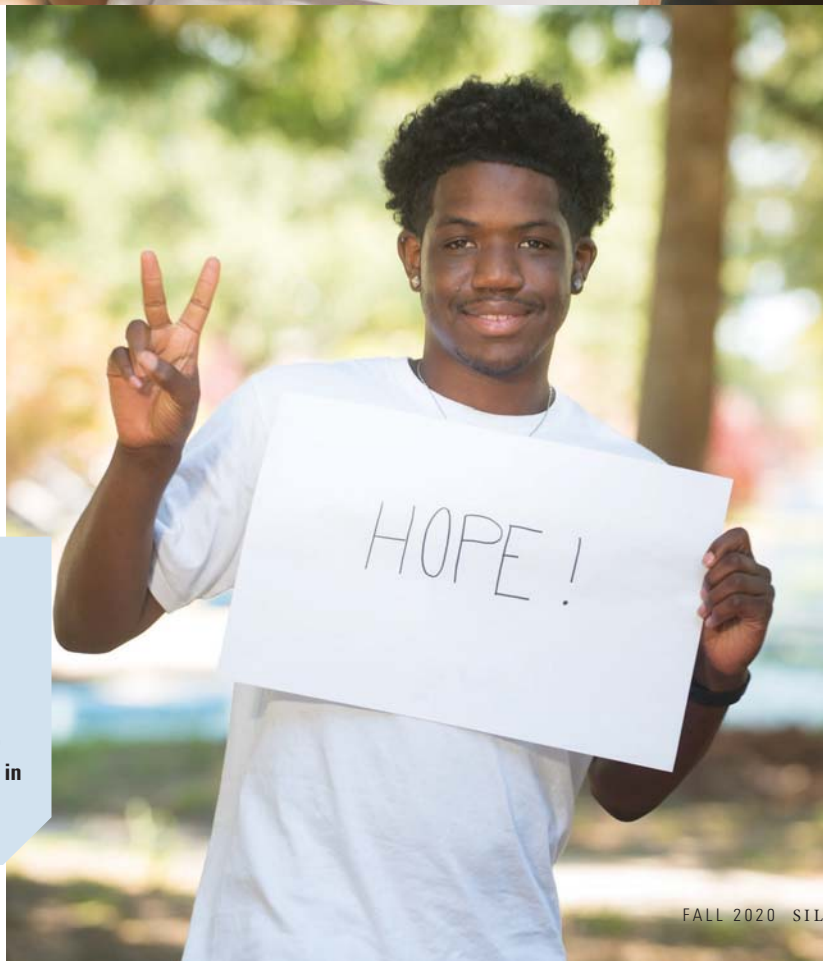
**Gabriella Guzman:**  
**Unpredictable**

2020 has thrown many unexpected curve balls but we have learned to adapt to the new world. I think that 2020 has been a rough year all around for everyone, but on the bright side it has brought new knowledge, new ways to adapt and a new way to view the world. 2020 may have brought many people to their breaking point, but after every storm there is a rainbow!



**Keith Baker:**  
**Hope**

In these trying times all we can do is hope. Hope is the driving force to keep spirits high and elevate belief in a better tomorrow. 🌍



Pulitzer Prize Poet and alumnus Jericho Brown:





# 'What I'm doing now still bears upon what I learned at UNO'


JERICO BROWN RECALLS HIS days of leaving his downtown New Orleans office to navigate the I-10 East traffic toward the University of New Orleans. Brown spent much of his time navigating the political landscape as a speechwriter for then-Mayor Marc Morial before heading to UNO's Creative Writing Workshop.

"By the time I got there and sat down, it would be 5:59," Brown says with a laugh. "I would be just in time for my 6 o'clock class and so I was always glad that they offered those classes!"

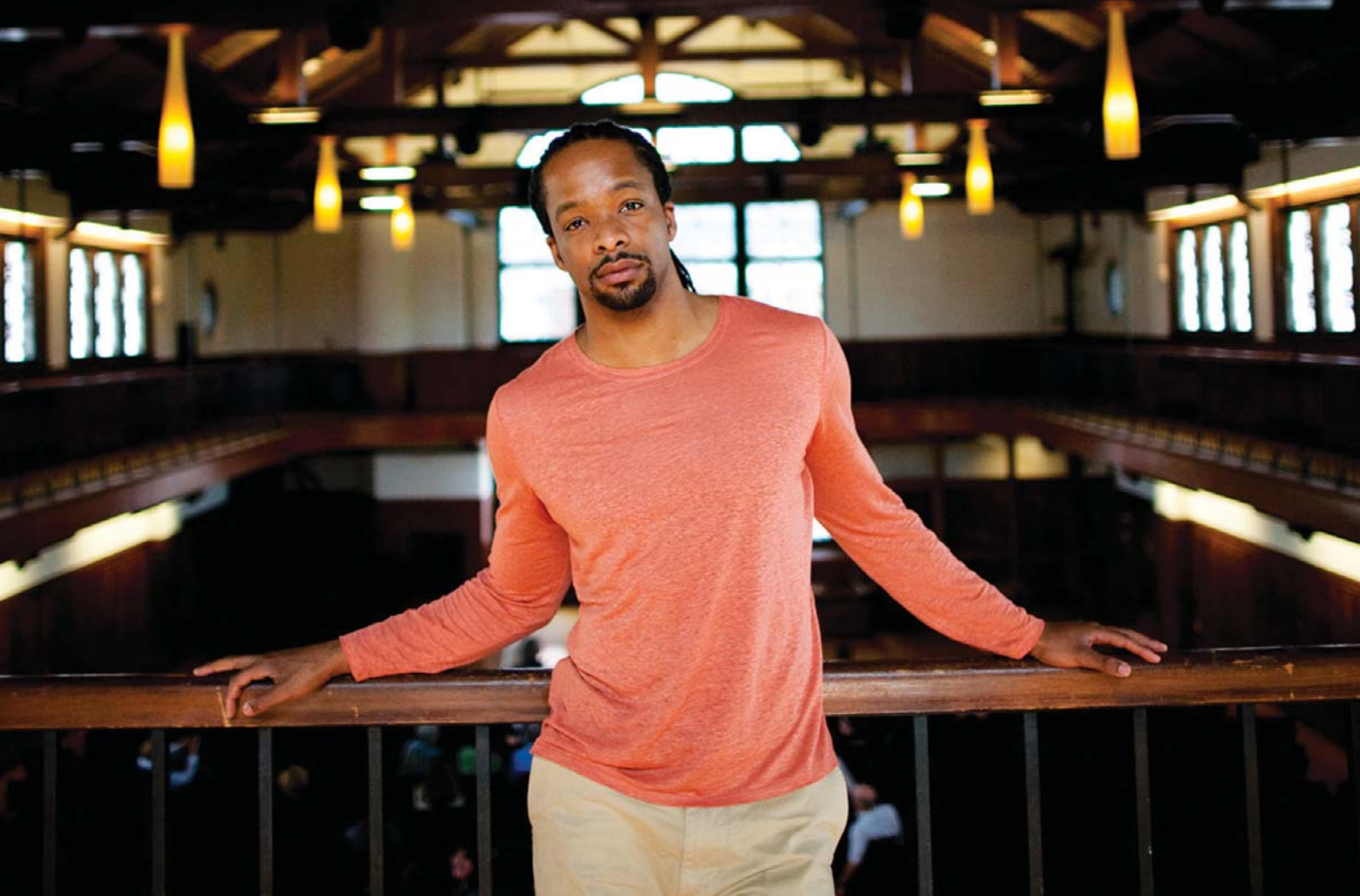
The evening classes allowed

Brown to learn more about poetry and keep his job, he says. It was at UNO that he found a love and appreciation for poetic form under the direction of poetry professors Kay Murphy and John Gery, Brown says.

One of the features included in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, "The Tradition," is a form he invented called the duplex, he says.

"When I was inventing that form, I was doing it having taken those classes with Kay Murphy with learning how form can work in poems," says Brown, who earned an MFA in creative writing 

BY LITTICE BACON - BLOOD



from UNO in 2002. “So what I’m doing now still bears upon what I learned at UNO.”

The courses at UNO also sparked another interest in Brown: teaching.

“Taking the classes at UNO is what really got me thinking more seriously about pedagogy and thinking about how I would run a class,” Brown says.

“John (Gery) had workshops with poems where he had us looking at our own work. But, he always had us doing that in the context of the history of poetry in the United States. So, it’s not just that we were looking at our poems, we were also looking at poems that were possible influences for revisions.”

Brown, who holds a bachelor’s degree from Dillard University in New Orleans, later earned a doctorate in literature and creative writing from the University of Houston. He lives in Atlanta and is an associate professor and the director of the Creative Writing Program at Emory University.

Now, Brown has earned a writer’s pinnacle of recognition—a Pulitzer Prize. Brown received the prestigious honor in May for “The Tradition,” his most recent poetry collection that was published in 2019 by Copper Canyon Press.

“I cried. I think I screamed,” Brown says laughing. “It’s funny, the screams were intermittent. Like I would scream; then I would make a sandwich and I would scream again. Every

once in a while just yelps. Intermittent hollers!”

The 2020 Pulitzer in Poetry is awarded for a distinguished volume of original verse by an American author and carries a \$15,000 prize.

The Pulitzer Prize Board described Brown’s work as a “collection of masterful lyrics that combine delicacy with historical urgency in their loving evocation of bodies vulnerable to hostility and violence.”

Brown has authored three books. His first book, “Please” (New Issues 2008), won the American Book Award. Brown’s second book, “The New Testament” (Copper Canyon 2014), won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. His third collection, “The Tradition,” was a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award.

In his classes at Emory, Brown encourages his students to “feel free to fail.”

“My classroom is one, I hope it is one, where students make all kinds of mistakes and from those mistakes, learn what they want things to actually look like,” Brown says. “I’m trying to get them to tell the truth. All good writing has to tell the truth.”

#### THE TRADITION

Brown takes the title of his book from a poem in the collection with the same name,

“It’s not just that  
I’m looking at this  
dark underside  
of life, I’m also  
looking at how we  
survive in spite of  
the dark underside.”

“The Tradition.”

Published in 2019 and heralded with the Pulitzer Prize on May 4, prior to the world knowing the name “George Floyd,” the poem is both eerily prescient and sadly historical in its content.

Like much of the book, the poem “The Tradition,” is a pastoral poem on its surface. It is about the environment, about the concerns about the natural world, Brown says.

“While that’s at the base of the book, the book doesn’t ignore social justices, social issues that are also going on in that world,” Brown says.

The poem is at first about Black men tending to a garden of flowers. In the end, the last line is: John Crawford. Eric Garner. Mike Brown.

“In that moment, we find that this isn’t just a world of flowers,” Brown says. “It’s also a world where unarmed Black people get murdered by police for doing absolutely nothing wrong.”

“That’s part of why I called the whole book ‘The Tradition.’ That poem is a sonnet. We always think of the sonnet as probably the most traditional of forms.”

The title also alludes to the “normalization” of injustice, Brown says. It underlines how we live through cultural and societal assaults as if they are normal.

“It’s a book about the fact that when someone defiles someone else’s body we say in common parlance, ‘She got raped.’ And in that sentence nobody did the raping; somebody went out and got ‘a rape,’ as if you can buy one at Kroger,” Brown says.

“Part of what the book is about is how, even at the level of sentences as simple as that, we buy into a kind of normalization of evil. I didn’t want to buy into that anymore.”

The book also is about love and joy, Brown says. He hopes readers come away with both perspectives.

“It’s not just that I’m looking at this dark underside of life, I’m also looking at how we survive in spite of the dark underside,” Brown says.

### ‘A DERIVATIVE OF A DERIVATIVE’

When he was 28 and publishing poems professionally, Brown decided to change his name from Nelson Demery III.

“I was the third and when I started having poems published it would say Nelson Demery III and it drove me crazy,” says Brown, who grew up in Shreveport, La. “I wanted my poems to have a name on them that was only mine. I didn’t want to share it with my dad or granddad. I wanted to reinvent myself.”

Brown laughs now at what he described as his “romantic” reasoning for the name change.

“Everybody in my family, everybody in my church and growing up always called me Trey, which literally means three, you know what I mean? I was the third one of myself,” Brown says. “I was like a derivative of a derivative for heaven’s sakes! At least that’s how I saw it.”

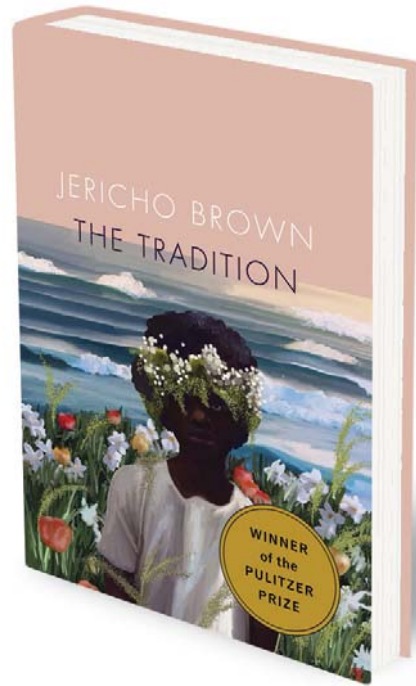
“If I had become a poet later, maybe I would have been old enough to not think so romantically about it.”

Despite his professional name change, Brown is proud of his family name and the strong bonds it represents. He credits his parents’ hardline stance on education excellence for his success.

“I have a sense of discipline and a sense of belief in getting my work done,” Brown says. “I get that from my daddy and mama.”

### THE PULITZER AND GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Brown watched the Pulitzer ceremony as it streamed live, waiting



to see if his name would be called. Atlanta residents, like many others in May, were under a stay-home order because of COVID-19.

“I was by myself in my room, sitting on my bed trying to make sure my computer worked; making sure I hadn’t missed it,” Brown says with a laugh. “When that lady said my name, woo! I was happy!”

Brown could not keep pace with the text, calls and social media congratulatory shout outs, so he just took time to bask in the accomplishment.

“I think I’ve talked to – or maybe texted or emailed – everyone I’ve ever known,” said Brown.

At one point, his phone indicated he had more than 650 texts, he said.

“I gave up because I couldn’t keep up!”

His church family from Shreveport reached out as well, Brown says. He still remembers when he left home for college, how members of the Mt. Canaan Missionary Baptist Church supported and encouraged him.

“When I went off to college there were all these women who’d hand me \$5, and those many \$5 is how I ate my first year in college ... how I had money to do laundry,” Brown says. “Some of those women were calling me on the phone and it just feels really good that their \$5 investment seems to have paid off.”

Asked what the Pulitzer Prize means to him—beyond the obvious universal prestige associated with its bestowal—Brown gets a bit emotional as he talks about the late poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of Brooks being awarded a Pulitzer Prize in poetry for her book, “Annie Allen,” and becoming the first Black person to win a Pulitzer.

“So what it means for me is that I’m becoming a part of the Gwendolyn Brooks tradition of poetry writing, which is to say that I’m trying to make well-crafted and subversive work,” Brown says. “Brooks has always been an idol for me; so having my name on any list near her name is very exciting for me and it makes me emotional.” 🌍

# Treasurer of the Arts

*Alumna Deleen Davidson turns a forced move into a career makeover*

*BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD*



FORCED TO EVACUATE SLIDELL AHEAD OF HURRICANE Katrina in 2005, University of New Orleans alumna Deleen Davidson has turned her tale of woe into a creative enterprise garnering rave reviews in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Davidson, a classically trained soprano whose bachelor's degree in history is accompanied by minor studies in music, fine art and German, founded The Muses Creative Artistry Project in 2007, two years after her emergency move.

Davidson's parents had built a house in Hot Springs with plans to retire there. After Davidson's father died, her mother was going to sell the house, but never got around to it.

"It became the place we evacuated to and ended up staying," Davidson says. "It was a God-thing. We were protected and had a place to come and start over."

The nonprofit arts organization is dedicated to "excellence, inspiration and wellness, preserving classical art and music through performance and education," Davidson says.

It has become the area's only year-round touring performing arts organization, presenting premier productions throughout the state and region. In 2016, the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce nominated Davidson for a "Woman of the Year" award and nominated her company for a community service award for best organization.

## CREATING A PLATFORM

Soon after arriving in Hot Springs, Davidson quickly ascertained that what she had taken for granted in New Orleans—ample and easy access to the myriad performance arts—did not exist in her adopted city.

"I realized that there were no year-round music or arts programs in the area, and that if I were going to perform I would have to create that platform myself," Davidson says. "They had art galleries, and there was interest in classical music, but very little access to live performance and limited education and exposure across all age groups and economic levels."

Davidson began researching the how-to of building a nonprofit organization, networking and accepting singing engagements wherever she was invited. She taught art appreciation at a community college and joined the summer faculty of the Hot Springs Music Festival.

With the help of a local women's group, she raised enough money from a \$50-a-plate luncheon to buy a piano. Her old one perished in the 20-foot storm surge that swamped her Slidell home.

"I began performing small chamber concerts in my home, and in area churches, inviting other talented musicians to join me, and growing a group of supporters who had a desire for high-quality artistic performance," Davidson says.

She was invited to perform at the Arkansas governor's mansion twice under then-Gov. Mike Beebe's administration. The governor and his wife became major supporters of her push to establish performing arts programs, she says.

## 'TREASURER OF THE ARTS'

In 2008, just three years after evacuating Louisiana with her mother, "four cats, one laptop computer and two changes of clothing," Davidson's was named Arkansas' "Treasurer of the Arts," by the Beebe administration.

"It wasn't a functional title, but it indicated that they believed

the arts in the state was of value and that they needed someone to advocate for them and treasure them,” Davidson says. “I would go around as the ‘Treasurer of the Arts’ and talk about the connection between economic vitality and artistic excellence.”

She learned how community leaders used the arts to tout quality of life during the recruitment of businesses, Davidson says, and it became her focus to champion the artists and financial support for the arts.

“They will tell you they have a Friday night art walk and they have music in the park on Sundays and they will play up all of the artistic ... they love to accentuate the arts,” Davidson says. “But how do you support them? I love that the communities want to use the arts as a selling point, but don’t exploit the artists.

“If you’re going to use the arts, pay the artists. So we pay the artists first, we do not exploit the product producer.”

### MUSES TAKES FLIGHT

The Muses project began on a shoestring budget, Davidson says, that allowed for only two to four performers with no costumes, special lighting or sound equipment.

It has blossomed into a regional production company that is housed in its own downtown building, purchased in 2013, that includes a 150-seat performance hall, offices, kitchen and a reception hall.

The organization regularly produces six to 12 new shows each season with casts of 30 paid performers or more.

The shows range in genre and scope, everything from opera, Broadway and jazz to sacred classical choral and chamber salon concerts, and Celtic and world music. They involve multiple artistic disciplines, including vocal and instrumental music, dance, visual art, poetry and drama, Davidson says.

Davidson said Muses, named for the creative and inspirational goddesses in Greek mythology and a nod to her New Orleans roots, also provides on-the-job-training through its Young Artists Program for area college students who previously lacked an outlet for their creative endeavors.

*University of New Orleans alumna Deleen Davidson founded the Hot Springs, Arkansas-based Muses Creative Artistry Project, which promotes the performing arts. BELOW, FAR LEFT: with Gov. Mike Beebe. BELOW MIDDLE AND RIGHT: Casts of “Cabaret” and “The Merry Widow.”*

Many performing arts students were directed to the teaching profession instead of professional performances because there were no local opportunities available to refine those skills, Davidson says.

“Muses became that space between ‘I’ve got my education, I understand it theoretically, but I don’t know how to put it into practice,’” Davidson says. “So they started coming here.”

### ARTISTIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The program started with five students and now has regular rotations of 20 to 25 student performers who are paid for their performances through sponsors.

“I get banks and corporations and insurance companies to realize that this is job training just like any other and these kids have a skill. They have a gift and we need to compensate them for their work,” says Davidson. “And (students) need to learn that their skill has value and is compensated when honed.”

Davidson also is a fierce advocate for the value of a liberal arts degree.

“I love my UNO education, it changed my life,” says Davidson, who says she still relies on choral techniques learned at UNO to direct her church choir. “I was not a trained director, but I had the best choral instructor in the country when I was at UNO. Dr. Ray Sprague taught me everything good I know about choral music.”

Choosing to pursue a career in liberal arts does not “condemn you or your loved one to a life of deprivation and despair,” says Davidson, whose mother was an opera singer. Her father was an engineer.

Both supported her eventual career path to the arts, and she tries to lend that same support through The Muses project.

“Because I have dedicated my life to the arts, and sincerely believe that artistic entrepreneurship can be taught, my favorite thing is working with students who love the arts, but have no idea how to connect the dots, build their program of study or design a potential career,” Davidson says. “Creativity is a commodity of great value, and can be leveraged in many unexpected ways.”

In Davidson’s case, her creativity yielded a thriving nonprofit arts program from a personal ground zero.

“I’m so grateful,” Davidson says “I’m grateful that by my nature, I’m tenacious, I’m curious. I don’t like to quit ... it just seemed logical that this should work here.” 🍷



# FIVE DAYS BEFORE GEORGE FLOYD WAS KILLED

**BY TIM DUNCAN**

*VICE PRESIDENT OF ATHLETICS AND RECREATION,  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS*

FIVE DAYS BEFORE GEORGE FLOYD WAS KILLED, I WAS STOPPED by six police officers, one with a gun drawn, because I fit a profile.

It happened in May in Newton, Massachusetts, seven miles from downtown Boston. Newton is a city that is made up of 13 villages and it has some of the top public schools in the country. The racial make-up of Newton is approximately 80% white, 11% Asian, 4% Hispanic and less than 3% Black.

Due to my profession, my family has moved five times in the past 11 years. Our time in Newton was among the best, both professionally ☞



and personally. My family lived there for two years, and I cannot think of any other day when my wife, Lisa, or our three children had an argument or a mean word directed their way. Our kids had lots of friends of many different races with whom they enjoyed playing sports, walking to the local yogurt shop and hanging out with at the Boys and Girls Club.

### ONE BLOCK FROM HOME

Lisa and I were taking an afternoon walk up Washington Road to Whole Foods to pick up a few items for dinner. It was a beautiful, sunny Wednesday at around 4:30. Less than a block from our house, four cars—driving aggressively—came from several directions. Six officers jumped out of their cars and yelled at me to put my hands in the air and don't move. One officer, the uniform immediately in front of me, had his gun drawn and pointed at me. He had my full attention.

For most people, this once-in-a-lifetime interaction should have scared the crap out of them. Unfortunately, this was not the first time an overaggressive cop had pulled a gun on me. I followed their instructions until they told me to reach in my pocket and grab my identification.

From the time I was a little kid, my parents had given me “the talk”—when stopped by police, be very still, be overly polite and don't make any sudden movements. I also remembered Philando Castile, the Minnesota man who was shot by an officer while reaching for his ID.

So when the officer asked me to provide my ID, I politely declined and asked the officer on my right to reach in my pocket for me. One of them asked me where I lived and I told them the name of my street, literally one block away. The officer who had my ID said that I wasn't the person they were looking for and told the other officers to stand down.

### A TALL BLACK MAN

The officer apologized and a person I assumed was a detective, a plain clothed African American woman with a badge on her waist, told me they were looking for a murder suspect. I asked if the suspect is 6-foot-8, which is how tall I am. All she said is the description was for a tall black man.

After the incident, Lisa and I continued walking to Whole Foods laughing and joking on the way. We shopped, returned home and immediately told our three kids what had happened. We had “the talk” with them again, reminding them of how to handle police interactions. While families of many races and nationalities may have similar talks, we always remind them that, as Black people, the difference in their attitude and compliance is literally life or death. Lisa specifically told our kids that when I was instructed to reach for my identification, I asked the officer to do it for me. She hammered home the point for them to remain calm and think through situations, especially and inevitably when stopped by the police.

When George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis a few days later, a friend whom I had mentioned the incident to said, “Tim, that could have been you.” And that is when it hit me. I had normalized

an incident that should not be a normal experience for anyone.

We had become so desensitized that Lisa and I continued to the store, shopped and walked back home. I began to reflect and ask myself questions. Where was my outrage? Why wasn't I more upset? Is a generic description of a tall, black man enough to be stopped with guns drawn? If the description was a tall, white man, would my neighbor have received the same treatment?

### PRIVATEERS 4 EQUALITY

After I arrived back in New Orleans with my family, I spoke to President Nicklow; Kelvin Queliz, assistant athletic director for communications and marketing; and the other members of my executive team about the experience. They encouraged me to share my story and Kelvin thought a video message to our students would be a great way to make them aware of how incidents like

this can happen to Black men regardless of educational or socioeconomic status.

I held two Zoom sessions with student-athletes and staff, and created a safe space for them to talk and share their thoughts about George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other recent deaths at the hands of police officers. Then I recorded a video about what happened to me in Newton, and I posted in on my social media accounts. And it went viral.

To date, the video, which is now on YouTube, has over 24,000 views. I have received over a 1,000 calls, texts, comments, direct messages of support and dozens of media requests. I have fielded calls from the mayor of Newton, the Massachusetts Attorney General and multiple neighbors from Newton, friends in Boston and from every other city where I have lived and worked. The Newton police chief resigned and stated he thought a new leader was needed to move the community forward.

In the Department of Athletics, our student-athletes have embraced a new vision called Privateers 4 Equality, which has four main pillars: education, civic engagement, community service and

personnel. One of their initial goals is to educate themselves on this year's elections and ensure 100% of the domestic population is registered to vote. I could not be more proud of them for embracing this moment in time and utilizing their collective platforms to make their voices heard.

Lisa and I feel fortunate that our incident ended peacefully, and we are hopeful that all future police interactions will end without violence. There are several lessons that I hope my children and our student-athletes take to heart:

Do not become numb to these types of situations. It's OK to be outraged, upset and scared every time they occur.

Use your voice and your platforms to inspire awareness and change.

Register to vote, vote and encourage your friends, teammates and family members to do the same.

And always remember “the talk”—be very still, be overly polite and don't make any sudden movements. Unfortunately, your life may depend on it. 🗳️

**From the time I was a little kid, my parents had given me “the talk”—when stopped by police, be very still, be overly polite and don't make any sudden movements. I also remembered Philando Castile, the Minnesota man who was shot by an officer while reaching for his ID.**



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to join us *virtually* on  
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to celebrate UNO and  
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Co-Anchor, WWL-TV's  
Eyewitness Morning News



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For all Distinguished Alumni Gala information, visit  
**[uno.edu/gala](http://uno.edu/gala)**



# A conversation on diversity, equity

*Diversity, equity and inclusion are core values at the University of New Orleans that have been woven into its strategic plan. However, the work of empowering all segments of the UNO community requires a collective effort to bring necessary change.*

*Leading the campus efforts are Newtona “Tina” Johnson, associate provost for faculty and diversity affairs, who serves as UNO’s chief diversity officer, and Desirée Anderson, associate dean of student and diversity affairs.*

*Johnson and Anderson offer an overview of the ongoing work aimed at creating a more diverse and inclusive campus community.*

## **How do you define Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)? What do these terms mean in practice versus on paper?**

**JOHNSON:** Diversity is essentially about acknowledging differences among people that significantly shape their lived experiences in society. In our society, these differences include race, ethnicity, ability status, socioeconomic class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and age. Diversity is also about differences in perspectives.

Inclusion is more about belonging. Being a part of and feeling comfortable within a community, whatever that community may be. Often people from historically underrepresented groups join a dominant social group but are alienated, marginalized and/or not treated as an equal member of that group because they are different. They do not feel they belong—or truly included—in the group.

**ANDERSON:** The equity piece is not just that they are there, but that they’re able to adequately participate in the decision-making process in bringing in their lived experiences to influence how we’re creating policies and procedures, so it’s not just like the same three voices dictating how and what we do. It’s not just that I get to sit at the table, but that I feel comfortable being at the table and

# and inclusion



Newtona "Tina" Johnson

sharing my different experiences and opinion.

**JOHNSON:** I think a lot of the work that we focus on has to do with inclusion and equity because it's easy to bring people who are different to the big tent, but it's another work for you to make them feel that they are welcome, that they belong and that they are not marginalized or alienated.

And with equity, the end game is equality of access, equality of resources and whatever it is we can do to provide opportunities to achieve social justice. It is removing barriers and providing opportunities so that all can be equal in a system.

### What makes DEI work difficult?

**ANDERSON:** The buy-in. How do you get the whole campus community to buy-in because there will be people who see what we can identify as very clear issues in our systems and our structures and there will be people who look at that same thing and say, "I don't see it."

And so, how do you get those people to understand how the system may disproportionately impact people ... and that the collective "we" are all participating in the same system, but people hear it as "I'm a bad person." Therefore, they push back and we don't

get that buy-in from people to want to change the system.

### How do you create buy-in?

**JOHNSON:** One way is through training. We need to move away from the blame game. We want to move it to an institutional level. Let's look at policies, let's look at structure, let's look at ways in which we have inculcated certain practices.

**ANDERSON:** Recognizing people who do the good work, rewarding them to showcase how that is part of our institutional value; that we value this type of work.

**JOHNSON:** Any meaningful, sustainable progress in diversity, equity and inclusion requires changing institutional culture, and this change process requires collective action. It's a shared responsibility as it will be a shared success.

### What "collectively" are you working on at UNO?

**JOHNSON:** Here is a partial list of our collective action:

- The creation of the UNO Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Board, made up of faculty, staff, students and community members
- The formulators of our new strategic plan, stakeholders from across the institution, included diversity, equity and inclusion, collectively, as one of four core values
- Annual training of officers of UNO's Department of Public Safety and Security include topics such as civil rights, anti-bias, cultural awareness, hate crimes, generational difference, and racial profiling. Additionally, the training covers de-escalation strategies and emphasis of minimum force
- Faculty and staff hiring practices have been modified to ensure diversity in candidate pools and search committees
- Diversity, equity and inclusion modules have been integrated into our first-year student (UNIV) seminar and new-student orientation
- The Athletic Department and the Student Athlete Advisory Council have launched "Privateers 4 Equality," their 2020-21 Action Plan for diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice.

### What does diversity, equity and inclusion look like at UNO and what is the goal?

**JOHNSON:** Three goals that I can mention: Launching a president's award for diversity and inclusion—again recognizing those people who are doing the work; training and professional development for enhancing what we already have, and starting a series called "Courageous Conversations."

This series provides a forum for the exchange of perspectives and ideas regarding diversity, equity and inclusion at UNO. Such conversations are often difficult and uncomfortable, and for these reasons avoided. But they can be very useful conversations when done in a civil and respectful way as they can generate constructive feedback that could lead to meaningful change.

Our long-term goal is to transform our institutional culture so we can become a truly inclusive and equitable campus community in which all members feel they belong. 🌍

# ATHLETICS



## *New Orleans Ranked No. 1 in NCAA and Southland Conference for Community Service*

BY MATTHEW SCHAEFER

THROUGH VOLUNTEER efforts that include tutoring, mentoring, reading, fundraising for nonprofits and helping out at camps and food banks, New Orleans Athletics led NCAA Division I programs in community service, according to the 2019-20 Helper Helper report.

Additionally, nine University of New Orleans teams finished in the top-10 in the nation in completed hours of community service in their respective sport.

There are over 350 collegiate programs using Helper Helper, which tracks community service hours.

The Privateers, who combined for more than 4,000 hours of community service, are also winners of the Southland Strong Community Service Award for the 2019-20 year.

The Southland Strong Community Service Award is presented to the Southland Conference institution whose

Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) exhibited exceptional community service.

“What an honor for #NOLAsTeam to receive this outstanding recognition from the Southland Conference,” says Tim Duncan, vice president of athletics and recreation. “I’m so proud of our Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, student-athletes, coaches and staff who embody the true spirit of service we preach. We will continue to

*ABOVE: The Privateers created #NOLAsTeam is Blessed to Be a Blessing. Partnering with a local nonprofit (Blessed to be a Blessing), New Orleans packed and donated 504 Blessing Bags to the homeless. The bags contained water, snacks, toiletries, socks and a hand-written inspirational note. Administration, coaches and over 150 student-athletes participated in the community service efforts.*



invest and give back and represent for our university and the New Orleans community.”

Among the Privateer volunteer service was participation in an initiative called “#NOLAsTeam is Blessed to be a Blessing.” SAAC partnered with the local nonprofit organization called Blessed to be a Blessing and pledged to donate 504 “Blessing Bags” to the homeless.

After Hurricane Katrina, homelessness in the city skyrocketed from 2,000 people in 2005 to nearly 12,000 in 2007, according to Unity of Greater New Orleans, a nonprofit designated by the federal government to lead the city’s efforts to provide housing and services to the homeless.

That number has decreased by almost 90% through efforts by the city and community organizations, dropping the number to fewer than 1,200 in 2018, according to statistics provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts. However, there is still significant work to be done to eradicate homelessness in New Orleans.

That is where the University of New Orleans Athletic program stepped in with the creation of “#NOLAsTeam is Blessed to Be a Blessing” campaign. New Orleans student-athletes packed and donated 504 Blessing Bags to the homeless.

SAAC members discussed

and selected the contents of each bag, which included fresh water, snacks, personal toiletries, a new pair of socks and a hand-written note.

The student-athletes coordinated collection of the items, organized bag-packing parties and two downtown delivery dates.

“We came together to pack and distribute 504 bags to those in need,” says Damion Rosser, 2019-20 SAAC vice president. “Why 504? It represents New Orleans.”

The area code for New Orleans is 504.

All 178 members of SAAC, along with various coaches and administrators, contributed to this initiative.

The student-athletes and staff loaded into buses and headed out into the city, finding those in need and handing out the bags and supplies to them. The student-athletes weren’t just there to drop off bags; they spoke with the people they came across, sharing stories along the way.

“You never know where people come from and their story,” 2019-20 SAAC president Nicole Broussard says. “It was humbling to see the appreciation they had for us. I hope it

has a lasting impact on them at this university.”

The UNO SAAC plans to continue its relationship with Blessed to be a Blessing and the New Orleans Mission to continue to help the homeless.

“Our SAAC was rather intentional in selecting and coordinating a project for a cause that was near and dear to the 504,” says Kirsten Elleby, associate athletic director for student-athlete enrichment. “It was powerful for all of our student-athletes, coaches and staff to collaborate with Blessed to Be a Blessing and give back to our local community in such a meaningful and heartfelt way.”

The Privateers won the

Southland Conference Community Service award after the athletic department submitted a video documenting the student-athletes experience during the campaign.

The video, created by Julie Boudwin of Bayou Video Productions, highlighted just one of the ways in which Privateer student-athletes gave back to the community. During 2019-20, New Orleans teams recorded a combined 4,139 hours of community service.

“Witnessing the impact giving back to the community had on our student-athletes was humbling,” says Kelvin Queliz, assistant athletic director for communications and marketing. “Not every 18-22-year-old understands the importance of helping the less fortunate and it speaks to the type of students we have representing #NOLAsTeam.”



*ABOVE , LEFT: Members of the New Orleans women's basketball team set out to deliver Blessing Bags to the homeless. ABOVE , RIGHT: UNO's student athletes lend a helping hand at a local food pantry, one of many community service projects. LEFT: Damion Rosser, 2020 SAAC President, holds the Southland Strong community service award.*



# Award Winning

## Women's basketball head coach Keeshawn Davenport honored with 2020 Eddie Robinson Award

NEW ORLEANS HEAD women's basketball coach Keeshawn Davenport was selected as the 2020 winner of the Eddie Robinson Award, made official by the Greater New Orleans Sports Awards Committee and the All-state Sugar Bowl on June 9.

The award, named after the Grambling State University football coaching legend, is presented annually by the Greater New Orleans Sports Committee to an individual in the state of Louisiana who has demonstrated the qualities most associated with Coach Robinson: outstanding achievement in athletics,

academics, sportsmanship, and citizenship by maximizing the use of limited resources.

"I was totally shocked!" Davenport says when reflecting on getting the call informing her that she won the award. "I definitely didn't think that is what the call was going to be about! My emotions quickly went from shock to this is unbelievable."

"I've said it several times and I mean it from my heart," she adds. "To hear my name mentioned in the same sentence as Eddie Robinson is just humbling. I'm an ordinary person receiving an award name after an extraor-

inary person/coach in Eddie Robinson!"

Davenport was the deserving selection after she wrapped up her ninth season as the head of her alma mater as her team experienced a record-breaking year both on and off the court.

On the hardwood, Davenport led the Privateers to their most wins since 1992-93 as the team recorded a 17-12 record. Included in that mark were 12 Southland victories, the most conference wins for the squad in school history.

New Orleans earned the No. 5 seed in the Southland Confer-

*New Orleans head women's basketball coach Keeshawn Davenport, center, wins 2020 Eddie Robinson Award.*

ence Tournament as the group was set to go on a run before the postseason was canceled minutes before their opening-round game due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

While the success on the court is impressive, it was what the Privateers accomplished off the court that really stood out. Davenport, an all-academic selection back in her playing

days, saw her team record a 3.168 GPA as a unit during the spring semester. To go with the success in the classroom, the Privateers really made their mark with their work in the New Orleans community.

The program ranked third in the nation and tops in the conference in the 2020 NCAA Team Workers Helper Community Service Competition out of all NCAA Division I Women's Basketball programs. Through involvement with organizations such as Second Harvest Food Bank, Einstein Charter Schools, and Children's Hospital, just to name a few, the Privateers recorded 532 hours of community service during the year.

"We are the only school in the city that wears our city name across our chest," Davenport

says. "It's important to not just wear it across our chest but have the city in our hearts. I'm a firm believer that we are blessed to be a blessing to others. It's not about what our city can do for us but what we can do for our great city."

The Privateers have turned into a mainstay in the Southland Conference Tournament but their recent success is one that Davenport has strived for since turning around the program from one of their darkest times in school history.

When Davenport took the helm of the program in 2011, the athletic department was on life support. After a decision to drop from NCAA Division I to Division III, followed by a change in course to return to Division I status, the Privateers were in

limbo and without a conference to play in.

Davenport took on the challenge head-on and started to transform the program. After opening her tenure with just three scholarship players and navigating the team through winless seasons, Davenport has established a winning culture again with the UNO program. In short time, Davenport took a team without a conference or a full roster and transformed it into one that has advanced to the Southland Tournament in each of the past four seasons.

"When I took over the program we were going through a transition," Davenport reflects. "Those years were tough but I never looked at it as the end. We may not have had the budget but we did the best with what

we had."

"And I am not one to make excuses," she adds. "If I have lemons, my job is to make lemonade. So my first few years, I made lemonade. It was a sugar-free lemonade, a little tangy, but we had something to drink. Now, the program is at a place where I now have some lemons and sugar, things are a little sweeter now. We are headed for a championship and when that happens that will be the ice in the lemonade that once started off with no sugar!"

Davenport was honored along with 11 other annual award winners during a Cox Sports Television show. In addition, five people were also inducted into the Greater New Orleans Sports Hall of Fame at the event, including Privateer coaching great Tim Floyd.

## Privateers' Eric Orze selected by the New York Mets in 2020 MLB draft

Eric Orze has become the 91st Privateer to hear his name called in the MLB Draft after he was selected by the New York Mets in the fifth round on June 11. Orze was the 150th overall pick.

The selection also marks the fourth consecutive year a Privateer pitcher has been drafted.

Though it was brief, Orze's final season with the Privateers was dominant and memorable. His dominance is depicted in the numbers: a 3-0 record with a 2.75 ERA and a staff leading 29 strikeouts in 19.2 innings pitched. That included a 12-strikeout performance in his final start of the shortened 2020 season against Nicholls State University.

For that start, Orze also won Louisiana Sports Writers Association Pitcher of the Week honors. He went seven innings and allowed two runs on five hits in a 5-2 Privateer win. Orze also picked up wins against Arkansas State and UConn.

The memorable part is the resilience Orze showed in his return to the mound. A cancer survivor, Orze made his first appearance since his diagnosis and recovery on Opening Night against Southern University.

"Eric is the real life story of overcoming adversity and now having the opportunity to live his childhood dream," says Coach Blake Dean. "He worked relentlessly towards a dream that at one point was almost taken from him. I personally wish him the best and know he will always



be a Privateer."

Orze becomes the second player ever drafted by the Mets. In 2008, a class that featured six Privateers taken, New York drafted Mark McGonigle.

He was also the second Southland student-athlete to be drafted this year. Logan Hofmann of Northwestern State was taken with the 138th overall selection. 🍷

## Alumna Sabrina Farmer, Google VP: 'I want (UNO) to be there for others'

BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD

SABRINA FARMER NEVER planned or even dreamed of attending college, until happenstance brought her to the lakefront campus of the University of New Orleans.

Her sole aim when she accompanied a friend, who was registering for class, was to hang out, she recalled laughing.

"He was like, 'Hey, I got to go register for classes, do you want to hang out at the lakefront?' I was like, 'Yeah, totally! Let's go hang out at the lakefront!'"

However, as Farmer walked into the University Center, something happened. Perhaps, more precisely something happened to her.

"I was so awestruck at all of these young people, there was an energy that was on campus," Farmer says. "It just felt like all of these people were working towards something and I wanted that for myself."

"I walked away that day thinking 'How do I get into UNO?'"

It was not a rhetorical question. Farmer, now a vice president at Google (yes, the tech giant), says she really had no idea about the college admission process.

She jokes that her high school classmates probably would have voted her least likely to attend college.

"I hadn't done anything. No college prep, none of that stuff,"



said Farmer who earned a bachelor's degree in computer science in 1995. "I actually picked up a catalog from the bookstore that day."

Farmer spent the next year taking entrance exams, applying to UNO, considering a major and thinking about how she would pay for a college education.

"I didn't have any money, my family didn't have any money,"

Farmer says.

She applied for financial aid and held a job while attending college.

"I had to take night classes, go in the summer," Farmer says. "It was a good college experience for me; it made higher education accessible."

### SUCCESS REIMAGINED

Growing up in Marrero, La., Farmer assumed after graduat-

ing high school that she would become a secretary. Her mother had raised four girls on her salary as a legal secretary, Farmer says.

Success, as initially imagined by Farmer, was being able to afford her own apartment. Later, as she neared college graduation, she added a number to the equation: make double her mother's salary.

First, she needed to navigate the unfamiliar landscape of higher education and her chosen major: computer science.

She didn't grow up with computers in her home, Farmer says. She recalls fiddling around with a castoff computer that her mother had brought home and being able to create a program that made a little man walk across the screen.

However, she had enjoyed her computer classes in high school.

"Computer science to me seemed like there's got to be lots of different jobs," Farmer recalled thinking.

"At the time you knew it was going to be the future. I didn't know what that future was going to be. I didn't know anything really."

Her early college years were difficult and, at times, she thought of giving up, Farmer says. Often, she was the only woman in her class and she felt isolated and overwhelmed.

"The first day of class I was like, I'm really in over my head,"



Farmer says. “They said the word ‘algorithm’ and that to me was like another language at the time.”

Despite self-doubt, Farmer pressed on by encouraging herself to give it just “one more day.”

“Don’t quit because of fear,” Farmer says. “What I’ve learned, 100% what you feel is your boundary, really isn’t, push through ... learn from it and you are stronger.”

### ON GIVING BACK

Farmer earned a bachelor’s degree in computer science in 1995 and moved to California.

Just a year out of college, she set up a scholarship for women in computer science at the University of New Orleans after starting her first job in Silicon Valley.

The salary for that job was the career-high goal she’d set for herself at the time of graduation, Farmer says. She was being offered that salary a year removed from college.

“I cried when that happened,” she says. “That is when I created this scholarship ... I was like I’ve got to give back because something magical just happened for me.”

Farmer visits the University annually, mentors female computer science students and sponsors travel grants for female technology students to attend technical conferences.

Farmer also recently funded another endowed scholarship in computer science as well as science classroom and lab enhancements.

“I regularly reflect on that girl who went into the University Center that day with no real aspirations and I want UNO to do that for others,” Farmer says. “I want other people to have that opportunity and I thank UNO.”



“I am forever grateful for them and I want it to be there for others.”

### GOOGLE

A decade after graduating from UNO with her computer science degree, Farmer started at Google in 2005. She is now the vice president of site reliability for many of Google’s billion-customer products including Gmail, Google Search, Google Maps, Android and Chrome.

She also oversees reliability of product infrastructure, including Google’s authentication, identity and abuse systems.

“I really like solving problems and that’s my job every day. Like, I never log in and there’s not a problem on my desk,” Farmer says. “If you study computer science there’s a lot of people who go into it for problem solving, and that’s what my job is all day long. I like a challenge.”

Farmer supervises a global team of 750 employees whose jobs include making sure the popular search engine returns

answers to questions literally at a click of a button.

“That is what my team’s job is—to make sure that happens for you,” Farmer says. “If we are not diligent, you would have a very different experience that day and that’s exactly what my team does.”

It is her team’s responsibility to keep the site running. It is a challenge Farmer doesn’t take lightly.

“This is true for a lot of people who work at Google; you really understand the responsibility that you have and literally, I make decisions that affect billions of people, and you get this very strong sense of responsibility to take care of those people,” Farmer says.

“You affect their lives, you affect information that they get, and I really enjoy when we solve problems that affect those people’s lives.”

Take Google Maps for instance. Sure, it’s a great tool that can help navigate drivers from Point A to Point B. However, Farmer’s team created maps

*Sabrina Farmer delivers the commencement address to spring graduates in the UNO Lakefront Arena on May 11, 2018.*

using National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data that allowed people to track the wildfires in California and get alerts about possible safety hazards.

“We had all of these satellite imageries and we could show you where the smoke was blowing and how it was flowing,” Farmer says. “It’s just amazing technology.”

Farmer’s family and friends think Farmer’s journey is equally amazing.

“They don’t even know what I do, but they are incredibly proud,” Farmer says with a laugh. “Everyone is amazed.”

Reflecting on how her journey began and where it has taken her elicits a laugh and an exclamation of wonder even from Farmer.

“I’m just this girl from the West Bank,” says Farmer. 🌍

# ALUM NOTES

## Gene Seroka (B.S., '86, M.B.A., '88)

Gene Seroka is the executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, a job that entails oversight of a \$1.6 billion operating budget. In March, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti named him the city's chief logistics officer to oversee supply efforts for securing personal protection equipment (PPE) and other medical equipment.

Seroka, who earned a bachelor's degree in marketing and a master's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans, is the head of the 20-member team of volunteers called Logistics Victory Los Angeles.

In that role Seroka helps provide and coordinate delivery of critical supplies to first responders and area hospitals that are caring

for COVID-19 patients.

"We need someone with a deep well of experience to get the job done, which is why I've appointed the port of Los Angeles' executive director Gene Seroka," Garcetti says. "His job is to use our purchasing power, our connections at the port with logistics, transportation assets, information technology and manufacturing relationships to secure critical materials that we need in this fight.

"By putting Gene in this role, he will save lives," Garcetti says.



## 1960s

### Miki Pfeffer (B.A., '69, M.A., '06, B.S., '11)

Author Miki Pfeffer of Thibodaux, Louisiana, who has earned three degrees from the University of New Orleans, recently had her second book featured on Literary Ladies, a literary website dedicated to classic women's literature.

Pfeffer's book, published in 2019, is titled, "A New Orleans Author in Mark Twain's Court: Letters from Grace King's New England Sojourns" (LSU Press).

## 1970s

### Terrence Verigan (B.A., '71)

Terrence F. Verigan, executive vice president of Antares Technology Solutions in Metairie, has been presented with the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award by Marquis Who's Who.

Verigan is also the president and co-owner of Enterprise Information Systems, a New Orleans consulting company. He earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans.

### Mart J. Black (M.S., '78)

Mart J. Black has achieved the planning profession's highest honor by being named to the prestigious American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) College of Fellows for his outstanding achievements in urban planning.

Black, of Houma, Louisiana is the coastal restoration director for Terrebonne Parish and has more than 45 years of planning experience. He earned a master's in urban studies from the University of New Orleans.

## 1980s

### Robert W. Rachal (B.S., '81)

Robert W. Rachal, of counsel in the New Orleans law office of Jackson Lewis, is featured in the Chambers USA 2020 Guide, a publication ranking the leading lawyers and law firms across the U.S.

Rachal holds an accounting degree from the University of New Orleans.

### Gerard Franz (B.S., '82)

Gerard Franz has been promoted to vice president, wealth advisor at Wilmington Trust in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

Franz has over 15 years of experience in the wealth management industry. He holds an MBA from Tulane University and a bachelor's degree in business management from the University of New Orleans.

### Beth Arroyo Utterback (B.A., '83)

Beth Arroyo Utterback is the general manager of WWOZ radio in New Orleans and orchestrated a very successful Jazz Festing in Place event in 2020 that drew more than 2 million listeners. The eight-day event was broadcast the same days and hours as the originally scheduled Jazz Fest, which was canceled because of COVID-19.

Utterback earned a bachelor's degree in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans.

### Nettie P. Bauman (B.A., '84)

Nettie P. Bauman, an attorney in West Hartford, Connecticut, has published her first novel "Tiny Righteous Act." The novel features the international exploits of a human rights attorney whose advocacy work on behalf

### **Melonie Johnson (B.S., '83)**

Melonie Johnson has been appointed president and chief operating officer of Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Johnson, who will oversee daily operations and strategic direction at the property, is the first Black woman to be named president of an Atlantic City casino.

"I am very excited to be joining Atlantic City's market-leading resort and look forward to working with some of the industry's most knowledgeable and engaging team members as we further position Borgata for continued growth and success," Johnson says.

Johnson is an industry veteran with nearly 25 years of leadership experience in hospitality and gaming.

Her financial expertise, strategic thinking and experience at regional gaming properties has served her in a number of high-profile positions including, assistant general manager at Hollywood Casino at Charles Town Races in West Virginia and CFO/interim general manager at Hollywood Casino Aurora in Illinois.

Johnson earned a bachelor's in accounting from the University of New Orleans.



### **Angelle Bourgeois**

*(B.S., '09, M.Ed., '12)*

Angelle Bourgeois is the 2021 Louisiana Elementary Teacher of the Year. Bourgeois was selected Sept. 8 during the 14th Annual Cecil J. Picard Educator Excellence Awards Gala, which was held virtually this year.

The Louisiana Department of Education annually recognizes and celebrates some of the state's most exceptional educators through the Teacher and Principal of the Year programs in partnerships with Dream Teachers and the Louisiana Association of Principals.

Bourgeois earned a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies in 2009 and her master's in early childhood education in 2012. She is an educator in the St. Charles Parish Public Schools District and was promoted recently to assistant principal at Allemands Elementary School in Des Allemands, Louisiana.

Prior to her administrative appointment, Bourgeois was a teacher at Norco Elementary School.

"I look forward to continuing to represent and elevate my outstanding alma mater and the educators and students of Louisiana," Bourgeois says.



## 1990s

of abused women makes her a target.

Bauman earned a bachelor's degree in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans.

### **Katherine Nelson-Born (B.A., '87)**

Katherine Nelson-Born of Pensacola, Florida has been selected as the Poet Laureate for Northwest Florida by the West Florida Literary Federation.

The literary federation chooses a Poet Laureate every three years

Nelson-Born holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans, an MFA in Creative Writing and Poetry from Virginia Commonwealth University and a doctorate in English from Georgia State University.

### **Eric Simonson (M.B.A., '88)**

Eric Simonson has joined Hinshaw & Culbertson, a national law firm, as a partner. He is an experienced trial attorney representing companies in the financial, technology, construction, and other industries.

He holds a bachelor's degree in finance from Louisiana State University, a master's in business administration from the University of New Orleans and a J.D. from Loyola University New Orleans School of Law.

### **Vanessa Chatelain (B.A., '96)**

Vanessa Chatelain has been elected the 2020-2021 Toastmasters District 68 Club growth director for Louisiana, Beaumont, Texas and Southwest Mississippi.

Chatelain will play a key role in leading the marketing effort and building an effective team for more than 1,000 members in 70 Toastmasters clubs across the three states.

Chatelain holds a bachelor's degree in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans.

### **David G. Nosacka (BGS, '96)**

David G. Nosacka has been promoted to chief financial officer for Hospital Sisters Health System's Illinois Division. Nosacka, who began his career as an accountant, has served in health care leader-

ship since 2000.

Nosacka earned a bachelor's degree in general studies from the University of New Orleans and lives with his wife Catherine and their three children in the St. Louis metro area.

### **Gary Dressler (B.S., '96)**

Gary Dressler of Metairie is the 2020-21 chair-elect of the Society of Louisiana CPAs (LCPA). He will automatically become chair in June 2021.

Dressler is an associate director with Postlethwaite & Netterville's Tax Services Group in Metairie.

He holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.


### **Richard Heausler (B.S., '97, M.B.A., '04)**

Richard Heausler has been named general manager of LabMar Ferry Services, LLC in New Orleans.

Heausler, who has more than 25 years in the marine vessel industry, holds a master's in business administration and a bachelor's in naval architecture and marine engineering from the University of New Orleans.

### **Michael Gulotta (B.A., '99)**

Michael Gulotta is the executive chef and co-owner of Mopho and Maypop restaurants in New Orleans.

Gulotta, who earned a bachelor's degree in studio art, was named to *Gambit's* "40 Under Forty" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area. 

## Tram Bui (B.S., '99)

Tram Bui has been hired as the vice president of corporate communications and investor relations for Antares Pharma in Ewing, New Jersey.

Bui, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in marketing from UNO, joins Antares with over 15 years of equity research, communications and investor relations experience.

Most recently, she served as senior vice president, investor relations at The Ruth Group, a boutique investor relations and communications firm specializing in life science and medical technology industries.

"I am excited to welcome Tram to Antares to lead our corporate communications and investor relations strategy," Fred M. Powell, executive vice president and chief financial officer of the company says. "We look forward to leveraging her extensive industry experience and strong relationships with the investment community as the Company continues on its growth trajectory."

Prior to The Ruth Group, Bui served as a director at KCSA Strategic Communications, a public and investor relations agency, focused on developing successful investor communications platforms and capital raises for a broad base of public healthcare companies.



## 2000s

### Yasmeen Gumbs-Breakenridge (B.A., '00)

Yasmeen Gumbs-Breakenridge, an attorney and public speaker from Long Island City, New York has been named Mrs. New York America 2020 and will compete in the Mrs. America pageant this fall in Las Vegas.

Gumbs-Breakenridge attended the University of New Orleans on a track and field scholarship and earned a bachelor's degree in political science. She then attended the Appalachian School of Law in Virginia.

Gumbs-Breakenridge is a commercial litigator and an advocate for academic and professional programs for children and young adults who are experiencing economic hardship and homelessness through her platform, #ConfidenceComesFromWithin.

### Ryan Mayer (B.A., '01)

Ryan Mayer's general contracting firm, Mayer Building Company of New Orleans, was named a 2019 *City Business* excellence in construction honoree. Mayer, who earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans, also welcomed a new baby in November 2019, son Jonah Winters Mayer.

### Daniel Hereford (BGS, '02)

Daniel Hereford has been named executive vice president, chief information officer for SmartBank in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He will drive the bank's IT strategy and provide oversight for all the bank's IT services.

Hereford has more than 20 years of experience in creating IT infrastructures, business solutions, and cybersecurity frameworks.

He earned a bachelor's in general studies from the University of New Orleans. Hereford also holds several technical certifications.

### Kyle Pulphus (B.A., '03)

Kyle Pulphus is the director of 826 New Orleans, a national writing program. Pulphus, who earned a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of New Orleans, works with young children writers to publish books.

She was named to *Gambit's* "40 Under Forty" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

### John "Bryan" Ehricht (M.S., '04)

John "Bryan" Ehricht of Hammond, Louisiana has been elected to a two-year term as a member at-large for the Society

of Louisiana Certified Public Accountants. He is an associate director with James, Lambert, Riggs and Associates, Inc., in Hammond.

He holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from Centenary College and a master's in tax accounting from the University of New Orleans.

### Kevin A. Rodrigue (BGS, '05)

Kevin A. Rodrigue, a history teacher in Assumption Parish, has published his first book, "If Only That Tree Could Talk," a historical fiction based in Assumption Parish.

Rodrigue holds a bachelor's degree in general studies from the University of New Orleans.

### Patty Glaser (Ph.D., '08)

Patty Glaser, CEO/Head of School for Kenner Discovery Health Sciences Academy and Dr. John Ochsner Discovery Health Sciences Academy, is the recipient of the 2020 Innovation Award from the Bureau of Governmental Research's annual Excellence in Government Awards.

Glaser, who earned a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from the University of New Orleans, was recognized for her work to secure construction financing for the two academies.

### Greg Booth (M.S., '09)

Greg Booth of Metairie, Louisiana has been elected to a two-year term as a member at-large for the Society of Louisiana Certified Public Accountants. He is a director in the Postlethwaite & Netterville Tax Services Group in Metairie.

Booth holds a master's degree in tax accounting from the University of New Orleans and a bachelor's in accounting from Loyola University.

### Kristin Malone Johnson (B.S., '09)

Kristin Malone Johnson is the owner and creative director of Home Malone, a Mid-City retail shop that specializes in selling work from local artists, including artwork, clothing and home décor.

Johnson, who earned a bachelor's degree in management from UNO, was named to *Gambit's* "40 Under Forty" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

## 2010s

### Renard Bridgewater (B.A., '10)

Renard Bridgewater is the musician and community engagement coordinator for the Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans. He develops partnerships for the organization.

Bridgewater holds a bachelor's degree in studio art from the University of New Orleans, was named to *Gambit's* "40 Under Forty" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

### Paul Thibodeaux (B.A., '10)

Paul Thibodeaux is the coordinator of the nonprofit organization called Feed the Second Line. Thibodeaux, a musician, helps support elderly "cultural bearers," with food deliveries and other services during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Thibodeaux was named to *Gambit's* "40 Under Forty" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

He holds a bachelor's degree in music from the University of New Orleans.

### Ben Matheny (B.A., '11)

Ben Matheny is a producer on a film titled, "Ma Belle, My Beauty," that was one of only 26 selected by the Independent

## Gerald DeBose

(M.Ed., '00)

Gerald DeBose is the new principal at St. Augustine High School in New Orleans after serving as the interim. He previously served as principal for academics and as a math teacher.

"It gives me great pleasure to announce his appointment," St. Augustine president and CEO Kenneth St. Charles says. "I believe he is doing a tremendous job molding our young men into future leaders."

DeBose will be responsible for supporting and enhancing St. Augustine's academic mission and vision, ensuring faculty development and support while working with the president and board of directors.

"I am committed to Catholic education and to making St. Augustine the best possible educational experience for young men to develop in spirit, mind and body," DeBose says.

DeBose is an alumnus of St. Augustine class of 1976. He earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Xavier University of Louisiana, a master's in mathematics teaching from Loyola University New Orleans and a master's in educational administration from the University of New Orleans.



## Brittany Picolo-Ramos

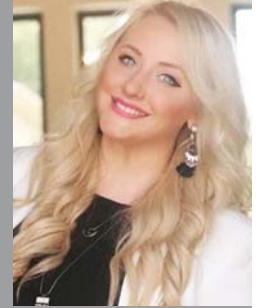
(B.S., '07)

Brittany Picolo-Ramos is the host of a new HGTV real estate series set in New Orleans that's called "Selling the Big Easy."

Picolo-Ramos, a New Orleans realtor, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans, with a minor in business management.

The series, which premiered in September, follows the house hunting experience of Picolo-Ramos' clients as she guides them around the metro New Orleans area in search of their potential new home.

Picolo-Ramos, along with her husband, is owner of the real estate firm, Godwyn & Stone.



Filmmaker Project for its 2020 labs.

Matheny earned a bachelor's degree in film from the University of New Orleans.

### Vivek Shah (M.S., '12)

Vivek Shah is the director of transit planning for the RTA. He is currently working on a network redesign of the New Orleans transit system.

Shah, who earned a master's degree in urban and regional planning from UNO, was named to *Gambit's* "40 Under Forty" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

### Meagan Williams (B.S., '12)

Meagan Williams, stormwater program manager for the city of New Orleans, was named one of CNN's 2020 Champions for Change, innovators, change-makers and pioneers who are challenging the status quo to improve the lives of others. Williams, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in civil and environmental engineering, designed a neighborhood project to help the city handle excess rain and reduce flooding.

### Chris Dier (M.A.T., '13, M.Ed., '18)

Chris Dier, the 2020 Louisiana Teacher of the Year, has been awarded the Louisiana Public Interest Fellowship for the 2020-2021 school year from the Louisiana Department of Education. The program allows recipients to spend a school year advocating for an education initiative of their choosing.

Dier, who teaches AP U.S. History at Benjamin Franklin High in New Orleans, has chosen to work to build equitable, inclusive and culturally responsive content under the direction of the state education department.

Dier holds master's degrees in teaching and educational leadership from the University of New Orleans.

### Eleanor McAuliffe (M.Ed., '14)

Eleanor McAuliffe is the first licensed professional counselor in Louisiana and the state's second clinician to earn the Certified Eating Disorder Specialist designation from the International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals Foundation.

McAuliffe, who earned a master's degree in 2014 in clinical mental health counseling from UNO, is currently pursuing

a doctoral degree in counseling education and supervision from the University.

### Lizzie Guitreau (B.A., '14)

Lizzie Guitreau is a producer on a film titled, "Shapeless," that was one of only 26 selected by the Independent Filmmaker Project for its 2020 labs.

She earned a bachelor's degree in film from the University of New Orleans.

### Sarah Story (M.A., '15)

Sarah Story has been named the executive director of the Mississippi arts agency. The Mississippi Arts Commission Board of Commissioners selected Story after a national search. She previously served as executive director of the UMLAUF Sculpture Garden and Museum in Austin, Texas.

Story earned her master's degree in arts administration from the University of New Orleans.

### Jerry Reyes (M.S., '16)

Jerry Reyes, general manager of Westin Canal Place in New Orleans, has been selected by Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards to be president of the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center's oversight board.

Reyes, who earned a master's degree in hospitality and tourism

management from the University of New Orleans, has 20 years of experience in the hotel business.

### Erica Chomsky-Adelson (B.S., '17)

Erica Chomsky-Adelson is the founder and executive director of Culture Aid NOLA. The nonprofit distributes meals and groceries twice a week, delivers food to homes and helps connect people with other needed services.

Chomsky-Adelson earned a bachelor's degree in urban studies and planning from UNO, and was recently named to *Gambit's* "40 Under Forty" list of people under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the New Orleans area.

### Mike Hoffshire (Ph.D., '17)

Mike Hoffshire, director of student engagement and academic success at Saint Mary's College of California in Moraga,


California, was awarded the 2020 Dr. Shelteese D. McCoy Advocacy Award for significant student or staff advocacy for QITPOC communities on behalf of the American College Personnel Association.

Hoffshire holds a doctorate in educational administration from the University of New Orleans.

### Bryan Washington (M.F.A., '17)

Bryan Washington has been awarded the 2020 Swansea University Dylan Thomas Prize for his debut short story collection, "Lot."

The Dylan Thomas Prize, now in its 15th year, is one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious literary awards, and the largest for writers under age 39.

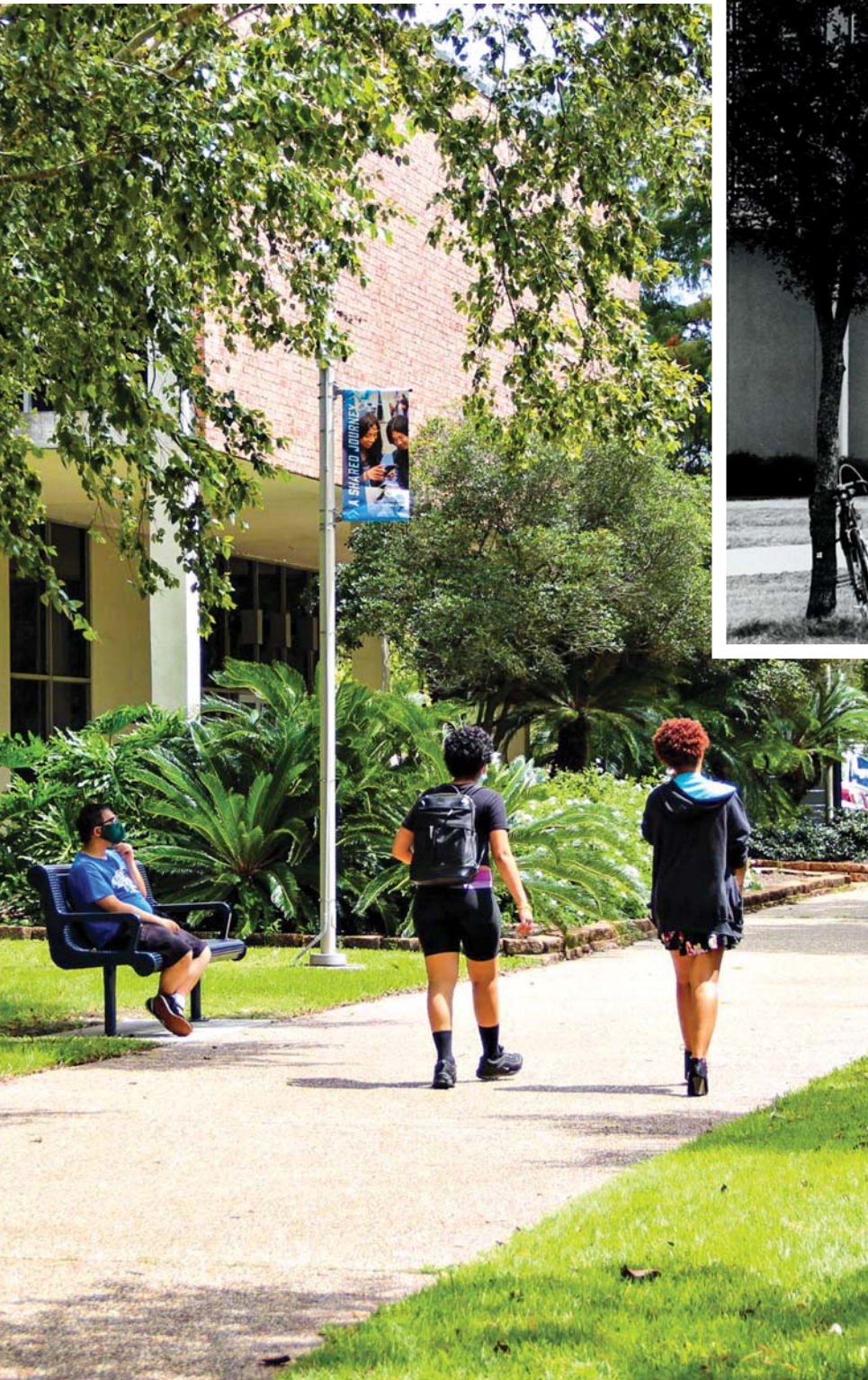
Washington is a graduate of the University of New Orleans' Creative Writing Workshop. 



## TELL US YOUR NEWS!

DID YOU: Get married? Get a new job? Receive an award? Have a baby? Send your alum note to [alumni@uno.edu](mailto:alumni@uno.edu)

# THEN AND NOW



## Administrative Growth

THE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, as has much of the University's campus, has weathered change well! Look at the full foliage in 2020 and the addition of the bench to enjoy the shade compared to decades ago.

And, for posterity's sake, we'll add for the record that mask-wearing was not a fashion fad in 2020!

# PLUG IN to the

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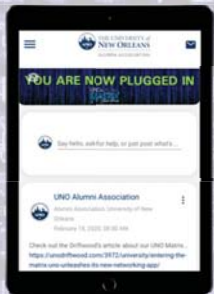
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