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# Driftwood

The community newspaper of the University of New Orleans



## New President Kathy Johnson Getting to Know UNO

By Seth Charpentier, Daniel Abadie and Madison Mollere

UNO President Kathy Johnson holds bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in psychology, and long focused her academic career on laboratory research regarding language development.

But a tour of duty in the provost's office at her former institution, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), exposed her to the opportunities of administrative work. Many of these lessons, she believes, are applicable to her new post working at the University of New Orleans, also an urban public research institution.

For example, Johnson says she is inspired by her IUPUI work in her desire to found a new Honors College at UNO.

However, since she took over the top spot at UNO from former President John Nicklow in the 2023-2024 academic year, Johnson has had to focus much of her energy on representing the university to the public in a changing legislative and budgetary environment.

"A really important thing that presidents do," she says "is that they embody the mission of the university especially when they're off campus and also to make sure that that we are advo-

cating for ourselves as effectively as we can to legislators. The outward facing work is really important."

Johnson has also focused on building her administrative team. "I think the most important thing that a president does is pick a really great team and make sure that that team is leaning into opportunities. They [need to be] strategic and opportunistic, that there's people in the team are working together and that the team is being held accountable to hold others accountable."

Johnson sees both the university and the student body as facing significant challenges.

"I think especially since COVID, our [student] retention is not where it needs to be," Johnson says. "I personally believe that to every student that we admit, it's our moral duty or obligation even to ensure that students are able to receive whatever support they need, be it financial or academic or social."



Students Daniel Abadie, Seth Charpentier and Madison Mollere interview UNO President Johnson in the Administration Building.

Johnson stresses that the university must make its primary goal the successful graduation of its students. She believes that UNO's first priority should be to limit debt as much as possible by helping students to graduate on time.

She also hopes to attract students from beyond New Orleans and the state of Louisiana, even looking beyond the borders of the US for possible new students. "New Orleans is an international city," she notes. "People say it's in many ways...a Caribbean city, but attached to the land mass of the United States."

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## UNO Privateers vs. New Orleans Weather

By Nathan Williams

After three consecutive days of storms and almost five inches of rain, the third week of the fall semester wrapped up on a soggy note on the Lakeshore campus.

Students soon learned that the end of the following week would be worse.

On Tuesday, Sept. 10, with Tropical Storm Francine on the move in the Gulf, an 8:47am email from UNO President Kathy Johnson cited anticipated "high winds, heavy rains and potential street flooding" as reasons for closing campus early on Tuesday, cancelling classes on Wednesday and shifting to remote learning the following day.

The Office of Residential Life also sent out an email at 1:20pm on Tuesday to further inform students of the situation.

"Our area will be impacted, so it is paramount that you prepare now... This email is to help our department prepare for those leaving or choosing to shelter in place at Pontchartrain Halls and Laffite Village." The email went on to state the adjusted dining hours, power outage protocol, and numbers to call in case of emergency, and reminded students to stay informed, stay safe, and get alerts.

It was left up to the students living on campus whether they chose to stay on campus during the pending weather event.

As Hurricane Francine took aim the next day, the UNO administration cancelled Thursday classes as well.

Some students expressed confidence in UNO's



efforts as the storm approached.

"Most of my classes are in person, and most of my professors have cancelled class and postponed assignments. So, it hasn't affected my classwork much," Freshman Ryan Taylor said. "I don't believe I have everything I need, but they [The University] are providing for us, so

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## Now more UNO News for you!

On hiatus since 2020, UNO's student-led newspaper has returned, and we're thrilled to be back!

Both in print and online, our mission is to amplify the voices of our diverse student body and to foster a strong sense of community by covering the stories that matter most to UNO's students, faculty, staff and alumni. Look forward to reading here about campus events, sports, student organizations, Greek life, educational opportunities and the rich cultural tapestry of the city UNO calls home.

Supported by student fees and ad revenues, Driftwood will seek to expand the reach of its monthly editions through its online presence as well as podcasts and social media. We welcome students with interests in writing, reporting, cartooning, podcasting, advertising, photography, and graphic design. No prior journalism or publication experience is required -- this is a great opportunity to gain valuable experience, make new friends, and build professional connections.

Join us for the next staff meeting on Monday, September 30 a 5:00pm in the University Center. For more information, email Editor Sara Clawson at seclawso@uno.edu.

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that makes me feel a little safer.”

“I’m not that worried about it.” Sophomore Ezra Guyton said. “The Galley has food, and we have water. I feel prepared as I really need to be... all I’m really preparing for is power outages and not being able to drive anywhere for a little bit, but I feel like I’m going to make it through this perfectly fine.”

Others noted family concerns. “I know that my fiancé is a little bit worried. My family is all the way in Hawaii right now, so the only evacuation plan I have is with Residential Life,” Freshman Carina Smith said. “I feel generally prepared, I don’t have a first aid kit at all, but I have some Band-Aids and some snacks, and I have everything I need if I need to leave.”

Some New Orleans natives agreed that people here see hurricane season differently.

“Outside of New Orleans, my family is very concerned, but in New Orleans? None of them are worried about it.” Freshman Carmen Simmons said. “Right now, the only plan is to stay sheltered in place. We have water and food, so we’re good as long as the power stays on. We do have evacuation plans if that happens.”

## Why Student Journalism Matters

*Opinion by Frederick Quinn*

One of the greatest strengths humans possess is the power to connect by simply telling a story. Even though through this art the artist is the amplifier, the end goal isn’t just to push a narrative out. The beauty in storytelling can be found in how it can unite people even when we don’t know each other.

The funny thing about society can be found in our divisions, despite being so similar. No matter the insecurities, doubts, fears, injustices, pain, trauma, grief, and aspirations for change, we are all the same. The same in our vulnerability and in our triumph. When we dedicate ourselves to communities, the world starts to take notice. Which is why it is important that the Driftwood and student journalism are back at UNO!

Student journalists themselves know they can both connect with and empower people.

“This platform will help me to interview people and connect with the community,” says my

fellow new Driftwood member Kamille Isom. “If I could use Driftwood to express my knowledge about what goes on on campus, then I’d be happy to do that,” she continued.

“Me being a student myself and working with different organizations and different clubs and having a job on campus I know a lot more about campus than the average student...I hate seeing people complain when there are things going on and I know there is something to be done. I just want to share that information with them,” says Isom.

Because storytelling and student journalism are not just about what happened and why. It is about connecting people and giving them the information and power to change the scope for the next generation. That is why student journalists matter, that is why we matter. Watch us as we give the voice back to the voiceless.

Sometimes just one voice can scream louder than a big rig on the I-10! Get ready for the movement because Driftwood is back, baby!

*Johnson, Continued from p. 1*

However Johnson also acknowledges that there are obstacles that the university faces in rebuilding enrollment. One of these obstacles is the lack of upkeep regarding campus facilities and other space questions.

Coming from a smaller college locked in a corner of a heavily urbanized city center, Johnson says she knows the challenges of having a small campus footprint. UNO is different, but it faces its own space challenges.

“My prior institution, we would often say quite literally that space is the final frontier. There just wasn’t enough of it. We were just so crammed into this little teeny corner of our city. And the opposite is true here. I think the physical footprint was built to accommodate a greater number of people in this area. And for various reasons, over time, the number of people has shrunk.”

This past spring, Johnson’s administration began a “decommissioning” process, through which campus buildings would be considered for closure due to declining enrollment.

“What I keep hearing is that we could be doing a lot better job maintaining the facilities that we have. But honestly, with such a sprawling physical footprint, it’s hard for any group.”

She also acknowledged that with the problem of declining enrollment, a new way of thinking or master plan is needed in the future so that the usage of space around the campus can be utilized to its fullest extent. Officials may look to UNO’s Department of Urban Planning for input on this, including gathering student-based perspectives through a group called the Crescent City Shapers. They have offered their assistance in helping her rethink the future of the campus

and provide a student perspective so that the concerns of the student body will be heard.

When not focusing on such challenges or the day-to-day tasks of an administrator, Johnson has come to realize how its unique brand that makes UNO distinctive in the Greater New Orleans area and compared to other schools in the city and in the state.

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“This is such an amazingly diverse campus,” Johnson says. “...I don’t think that’s true on other campuses in Louisiana.”

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“This is such an amazingly diverse campus. Our student body truly reflects just such a really impressive array of backgrounds. And I don’t think that’s true on other campuses in Louisiana.”

“[When] you throw in affordability and proximity to the city, a short drive downtown, I just think it’s an amazing experience. But for the right students. I mean, if you want to not work while you go to school and spend every weekend at football games, tailgating, you know, those are not necessarily the experiences that you have here.”

Adaptability and looking to the future of higher education is something that Johnson says she is focused on. She has a deeply rooted passion and interest in higher education, and she wants to push the benefits of what a college degree can do for someone. Johnson wants students to do more than just come to class and follow a routine schedule, and take away something from their college



*UNO President Kathy Johnson is the first woman to lead the university since its founding in 1958.*

experience. The economy of the country and the world are shifting, with higher education institutions being somewhat replaced by trade schools. Johnson wants to focus on the student as a whole and what the college experience can do for them.

“I like to think that if a student derives the best experience possible from their university years they’re going to be great in the workforce but they’re also going to be engaged citizens,” she says. “They’re going to be able to act with civility and respect and be able to enter into dialogue with others that might have different views as they do. They’re going to be able to adapt to new circumstances. They’re going to be able to find problems as well as solve problems. All of those things are I think really, really important elements of what higher education does.”

**To join the *Driftwood* or access electronic copies:**

Contact Editor Sara Clawson for more information:  
seclawso@uno.edu

