

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

# SILVER & BLUE

SPRING 2019

Novelist  
Maurice Ruffin:

A  
DAZZLING  
DEBUT







LOUISIANA STATE CAPITOL

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
LOUISIANA



# FIRST LOOK





## DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS:

I WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE ALL OF OUR RECENT ALUMNI; YOU ARE NOW part of a global network of Privateers that is more than 80,000 strong. I encourage you to take full advantage of your new status by connecting with fellow University of New Orleans alumni throughout your professional journey. The successes of our graduates actually enhance the value of a degree from the University. As a university community, we are always stronger together.

We spent last year celebrating the University's 60th anniversary. It gave me occasion to reflect on what this institution has accomplished and what it has meant to our city and its people. I hope we continue to make you UNO Proud. Last fall, we grew our overall enrollment and welcomed one of the largest and most talented freshman classes in years.

Interest in the University is accelerating. We have received 25 percent more freshman applications than this same time last year. In-state applications are on the rise, and we have seen a surge in applications from students in a number of different states across the country. On the research front, our contract and grant expenditures continue an upward trajectory. We are engaging in new and exciting partnerships around the metro area and the state. Also, if you have not been back to your alma mater recently—please stop by. Campus looks terrific!

These milestones and achievements represent momentum that I feel every day when I am on campus and in the community. They are also laying the foundation for our future. I believe it is incumbent upon the leadership of the University to translate our momentum into a bold new vision that will transform our university into something even greater. To accomplish that, we are working on three major initiatives: a new 10-year strategic plan, a master plan that will create a road map for our physical campus, and a comprehensive fundraising campaign. As alumni and supporters of the University, your involvement will be a catalyst for our success. I have never been more excited about what we will accomplish together.

Sincerely,

**John Nicklow**  
PRESIDENT

 @UNOPresidentJN  @unopresident

# SILVER & BLUE

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# CAMPUS SCENE

HEADLINES AND HAPPENINGS



## FALL COMMENCEMENT

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards was the principal speaker at the University of New Orleans fall commencement ceremony on Dec. 14. He told graduates that they have been equipped with the tools to change the world and that their achievements would propel the state forward.

“Graduates in the class of 2018, you are a brilliant, diverse community, filled with a thousand points of light,” Edwards said. “Just look at the fellow graduates seated around you ... This is what the American dream looks like. This is what Louisiana looks like and you’re a huge part of the reason I am so excited about the future of our great state.”







## CAREER FAIR

*From college degree to career professional: The University of New Orleans Office of Career Services Career Fair in October attracted national and international companies like GE, Chevron and Nike, as well as local employers who recruited for internships, part-time work and full-time positions. The industries represented ranged from hospitality, retail and food service to insurance, real estate, financial services, nonprofits, utilities and government agencies.*



## FIRST-GENERATION LUNCHEON

*Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education Kim Hunter Reed was at the University of New Orleans in September to facilitate a panel discussion during a luncheon with current first-generation college students.*

*Reed designated Oct. 1 as First-Generation Day in Louisiana to honor students who are the first in their family to attend college.*

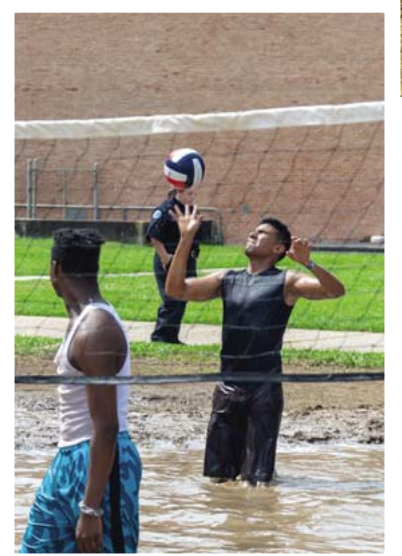
*At UNO, 41 percent of the University's undergraduates are first-generation college students, President John Nicklow told the group.*





## SWAMPBALL

*There's nothing better than getting dirty for a good cause! Teams of students, alumni, and local residents battle for the golden volleyball trophy and bragging rights, while raising money for student scholarships. Did we mention the volleyball games are played in water-filled pits? The event is sponsored by the UNO Ambassadors and is held each fall in the quad.*



## HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR WORKSHOP

*Prominent Hollywood writer and director Robert Spera conducted a workshop in November for film students enrolled at the University of New Orleans School of the Arts. Spera, who serves on the faculty of the AFI Conservatory, has an extensive background in film, television and theatre.*

*He directed the 2016 feature film "The Sweet Life" starring Chris Messina and Abigail Spencer, and has directed a substantial number of episodes within the "Criminal Minds" series franchise, one of which featured the Academy Award-winning Forest Whitaker.*





## ENGINEERING WEEK

On Feb. 20, the University of New Orleans celebrated the value of engineering studies with a daylong event for area middle and high school students. In honor of National Engineers Week, about 600 students from several parishes in the metro New Orleans area visited campus to enjoy dozens of interactive exhibits that included an underwater remote-operated vehicle, table-top robots, a hydraulic can crusher, a NASA observatory and star dome.

The University of New Orleans offers the only civil, electrical, mechanical, and naval architecture and marine engineering programs in the metro area, making it an ideal host for such an event, says President John Nicklow.



## CARNIVAL AT UNO

They walked, they rode, and yes, they "floated" as the Krewe of UNO rolled through the University of New Orleans campus on Feb. 26, celebrating its 2019 theme of "Hollywood on Parade." Parade-goers were treated to a healthy dash of Privateer-flavored throws that included swords, silver and blue beads, cups, balls and T-shirts.

President John Nicklow and Stacy Nicklow led the processional of nearly 30 organizations while tossing beads, cups and other trinkets from atop a privateer ship.



# NEWS & EVENTS



## PRESIDENT NICKLOW'S STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS HIGHLIGHTS MOMENTUM; UNVEILS THREE NEW INITIATIVES

THE NUMBER OF FRESHMAN applications for the fall at the University of New Orleans has already surpassed the final number of freshman applications received last year, President John Nicklow said during his biannual State of the University address in March.

"Right now we are just about to cross the 5,000 freshman application mark," Nicklow said. "That's an increase of 25 percent compared to this same time last year."

Nicklow, who has made growing student enrollment his main priority, said the number of freshman applications is up 62 percent compared to the same time two years ago and is 92 percent ahead of the same time three years ago.

"Think about that; because of our enrollment team and your efforts, we have nearly doubled the number of students interested in and who applied to our campus in three years," Nicklow told the faculty and staff who filled the University Center's ballroom.

In addition, Nicklow said enrollment for the spring semester is up 2.6 percent compared to spring 2018 and that the University's fall 2018 to spring 2019 retention is up 1.6 percent.

That retention increase often translates "very positively for fall enrollment," Nicklow said, which drew applause.

Nicklow said a lot of the application growth is coming from out-of-state-students,

particularly from Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and Texas.

"We believe that's in large part due to the Gulf State Promise, which offers in-state tuition to students from the Gulf states," Nicklow said.

Spikes in applications from California, Colorado, Illinois and New York are attributed to the University's outreach, paired with digital advertising and traditional print mailers in those same areas.

"Based on these increases it is fair to say that the University of New Orleans is building its out-of-state name recognition and improving national perceptions about the institution," Nicklow said.

Applications from local students are also on the rise, Nicklow said, as the University

continues to target them as well in recruiting.

On the research front, Nicklow said the University's commitment to supporting faculty research remains strong. He used a chart to illustrate the upward trajectory of the University's grant and contract expenditures.

"In fiscal year 2016, we were at \$19.3 million. That figure has climbed to \$23 million and then \$31.5 last fiscal year, and it is projected to exceed the \$32 million mark in the current fiscal year," Nicklow said. "We have a ways to go, but that is terrific progress and I think it shows our renewed commitment to expanding our research portfolio and supporting our faculty researchers."

## ONLINE HOSPITALITY MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM EARNS "BEST" RANKING

THE ONLINE MASTER'S degree program in hotel and tourism management at the University of New Orleans has been selected as one of the best among similar programs by OnlineMasters.com, a private

educational research firm.

The firm released in October its "Top 10 Master's in Hospitality Management Programs for 2018."

The award recognizes the Lester E. Kabacoff School of

Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Administration's program as best particularly for careers in tourism management.

OnlineMasters ranked UNO's program ninth out of 50 programs that it determined

to be "the best in the nation to advance your hospitality management career."

The program was evaluated based on methodology that included academic quality, student success and affordability.





## THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS AND DELGADO SIGN STUDENT TRANSFER AGREEMENT

UNDER A NEW STUDENT transfer agreement, eligible Delgado Community College students will have a seamless path to a four-year degree at the University of New Orleans. Delgado students also will have access to new financial aid opportunities and UNO admissions counselors who can admit transfer students on Delgado's campuses.

UNO President John Nicklow and Delgado Community College Interim Chancellor William Wainwright took part in a signing ceremony Jan. 24 on Delgado's City Park campus.

Here are some of the highlights of the newly signed student transfer agreement:

- Delgado students with 24 or more hours of transferable, college-level coursework, including the completion of a college-level math and English,

and an overall GPA of 2.25 or higher receive guaranteed admission to UNO.

- UNO admissions counselors will hold a number of "quick admit" days on Delgado's City Park and West Bank campuses. UNO will waive the application fee, and eligible Delgado students will be admitted to UNO on the spot.

- For students seeking admission before the completion of an associate degree, they may participate in a financial aid consortium. Students may take classes at Delgado and UNO but use financial aid through UNO to fund their education at both institutions.

- UNO will participate in a reverse transfer agreement with Delgado. Under this agreement, transcripts of students who apply and attend UNO for at least one

academic year at UNO will be sent back to Delgado for articulation and possible award of an associate degree.

- All students interested in transferring to UNO will have weekly access to pre-admission advising through a transfer admission counselor in a dedicated on-campus Delgado location.

"The agreement represents a major step forward as we seek to work more closely with our partners at Delgado Community College," Nicklow said. "This will provide Delgado students who are interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree with a clear and predictable path to achieving that objective. We hope this leads to more degree completion."

"Strengthened collaborations between Delgado Community College and the University of

*(l-r) Mahyar Amouzegar, UNO provost and senior VP academic affairs; UNO President John Nicklow; Delgado Interim Chancellor William Wainwright; and Mostofa Sarwar, Delgado interim vice chancellor of academic affairs and provost, at the Jan. 24 ceremony.*

New Orleans represent unity centered on student success, and this agreement represents a commitment by our institutions to expand opportunities for qualified Delgado students to achieve a baccalaureate degree by making the transfer rules and requirements seamless and supportive of achieving their goals," Wainwright said. "Special thanks to our UNO partners for their work to create this enhanced pathway for Delgado students."

## UNO RANKED #1 ETHNICALLY DIVERSE COLLEGE IN LOUISIANA

The University of New Orleans is the most ethnically diverse college in Louisiana, according to College Factual, a data analytics company that focuses on higher education outcomes.

It is the second year in a row that the University ranked No.1 out of 30 Louisiana colleges analyzed by the company.

"The ethnic diversity of our student body serves to enrich the educational experiences of

all of our students," says UNO President John Nicklow. "A wide variety of experiences and viewpoints helps foster more understanding and an expanded world view. Our differences are among our institution's greatest attributes, and they are worth celebrating."

To create the ranking, College Factual analyzed the ethnicity of each school's student population. The greater the variety, the higher a college will rank.





## BUCKS FOR DUCKS FUNDRAISER FILL PRIVATEER FOOD PANTRY

THE OFFICE OF STUDENT Affairs has found a creative way to fill its on-campus food pantry by hawking rubber ducks. Privateer Pantry donation stations were set up around campus to accept cash—or “bucks for ducks”—that was used to purchase supplies for the pantry.

For each college that raised \$250, a campus “celebrity” represented the college on top of a giant rubber duck that floated in the fountain at the Robert Merrick/Latter & Blum Patio.

While the Nov. 20 fundraiser was designed to be fun, the issue it attempts to address is a serious matter: food insecurity.

“The Fill the Fountain event is the culmination of two weeks of tabling and crowdfunding to raise money and awareness about the Privateer Pantry, food insecurity experienced on our

campus and to stock our shelves with the goal of opening the pantry on a regular basis,” says Reagan Laiche, student affairs operations manager.

The pantry, which opened in 2017, aims to help University of New Orleans students in need of food. As long as students have a valid UNO ID, they can access the pantry, Laiche says.

The pantry is in the Office of Student Affairs in the University Center, and is stocked with nonperishable food items.

The idea for the pantry grew out of informal talks among staff about conversations overheard between students about skipped meals, Laiche says. A student survey confirmed that food insecurity was a concern for many students.

“About 200 students completed surveys with 180



of those reporting that they would absolutely be in need of food assistance on campus,” Laiche says.

Last year the pantry offered “pop-up” services, trying to bridge the gap for students when campus food service is not at full service. This fall the goal is to have a set schedule for students to access the pantry, she says.

“The pantry is still operating in pop-up mode, but a set schedule is the driver behind the Fill the Fountain fundraiser,” Laiche says.

Donations of unexpired food items can be dropped off at the Student Affairs office during regular University hours

throughout the year.

“Because the majority of students who utilize the pantry thus far live in the residence halls, we are asking for items that are microwavable,” she says.

If ideas for donations are needed, the pantry has an Amazon wish list, Laiche says.

The celebrity floaters were: College of Sciences, Dean Steve Johnson; College of Engineering, Interim Dean Norma Jean Mattei; College of Liberal Arts, Education and Human Development, Rachael Smith; College of Business, Rebecca Chaiban; Interdisciplinary Studies, Cap'n Horace Pembroke III and First Mate Rose; and Student Government Association President Kenady Hills.

## BOARD OF REGENTS APPROVES NEW PROFESSIONAL PILOT BACHELOR'S DEGREE

THE LOUISIANA BOARD of Regents has approved a new professional pilot bachelor of science program at the University of New Orleans. The program, which still requires approval from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), will prepare students for a career in the field of aviation.

The program will be conducted in collaboration with New Orleans Aerial Tours & Flight Training, which is located at the Lakefront Airport, a five-minute drive from the UNO campus. The University will take the lead on certifying the faculty

while New Orleans Aerial Tours & Flight Training will provide the technical instruction.

“Our professional pilot program will provide a diverse air space system environment that will expose our students to a wide variety of real world challenges, resulting in highly sought-after graduates,” says John Williams, dean of the College of Business Administration, which will be the academic home for the program. “The program will extend the vision of the University of New Orleans as an engine of economic development of the region.”

The professional pilot program will be accredited by the Federal Aviation Administration and will blend flight training with rigorous academic study that will provide a foundation for a career in the aviation industry. During the 120 credit-hour program, students will engage in technology-enhanced classrooms, as well as actual flight training. Students who complete the program will meet FAA commercial and private pilot standards, with instrument and multi-engine ratings.

A predicted global growth in aviation and the decrease

in the number of trainees, both civilian and military, are creating a looming shortage of pilots, Williams says. In Louisiana, the 10-year growth projection for commercial pilots is 320 jobs with an annual total of 80 openings per year from jobs in the occupation and as a result of retirement or turnover.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the mean annual salary for commercial pilots in 2016 was \$86,260.

The University will begin accepting applications only after the degree program has been approved by SACS, the University's regional accrediting body.



## FORMER SAINT MARQUES COLSTON TALKS BUSINESS

FORMER NEW ORLEANS Saints star receiver Marques Colston has a philosophy that he calls “irrational confidence” that has propelled his success on the football field and in boardrooms. It is the belief that if you put in the hard work and preparation, you can achieve success despite the odds, Colston said during a speech at the University of New Orleans.

“Don’t be afraid to fail,” said Colston, the founder and managing partner of Dynasty Innovation, a strategy and execution firm focused on marketing, branding, sports and education, as he recalled a very “public and painful” moment of dropping a pass in front of 70,000 football fans.

However, the former NFL star said he also has a Super Bowl ring, remains the Saints all-time leader in receptions and total touchdowns, and has a business degree that has allowed him to transfer some of his gridiron skills into the business world.

Colston, who retired from professional football in 2015 after 10 years with the Saints,

talked about the business failure of four of his companies, and how that led him to create other better companies that were more sustainable.

“Failures are only failures if you allow them to be,” Colston told a packed auditorium filled with students. “Being able to translate very public failures . . . and move forward is a key aspect of entrepreneurship and management.”

Colston gave the keynote address in March as part of the University of New Orleans Management Week, which features visits by business leaders from across the region to classes in the College of Business Administration to share their stories and insights with students.

Colston’s topic, “Striking a Balance: Life as a Serial Operator,” explored the different roles he plays in a number of his varied business ventures that are located all over the country.

One of those business ventures is Main Squeeze Juice Co., a New Orleans-based fast-casual juice and smoothie

bar that has several franchise locations. Colston and his wife Emily, who is an alumna, are partners in the venture. Colston is director of business development.

Statistically speaking, Colston, who was a seventh-round draft pick from off-the-football-radar Hofstra University, wasn’t supposed to have a professional football career, he said.

“As a seventh-round pick you’ve got maybe a 3 or 4 percent chance of becoming a starter at some point in your career, and even when you do make the team your staying power is 3 ½ years,” Colston said.

His “irrational confidence” bespoke another reality, he said. One in which he flipped the script and wrote his own success story. That same philosophy translates into the way he handles



*Former New Orleans Saints star receiver Marques Colston gave keynote address for the University of New Orleans’ Management Week.*

his business ventures, he said.

“Understanding that if there’s a 1 percent chance that somebody’s going to make it—you’re the 1 percent,” Colston said. “And the way you become that 1 percent is your approach, your work ethic and literally getting yourself in a position where there’s nobody in the world that’s going to outwork you and take what’s yours. You plant your flag early on.”

## TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE AWARDED \$150,000 GRANT FOR STATEWIDE PASSENGER AND FREIGHT RAIL ANALYSIS

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans is set to play a major role in setting the course for the future of rail transportation infrastructure across Louisiana. Bethany Stich, director of the University of New Orleans Transportation Institute, was awarded \$150,000 by the Louisiana Transportation Research Center (LTRC) to conduct an analysis of passenger and freight rail systems that will be used to guide future investments.

“Understanding how to best incorporate rail infrastructure into the state’s multi-modal transportation system requires a unified vision with common goals. This research will ascertain the current state of rail in Louisiana and offer benefit/cost analyses of system expansion,” Stich explains. “The study will inform the work of state transportation planners by exploring economic development opportunities and identifying

key corridors for investment. It will also show us where we should focus on mitigating safety concerns and rail traffic congestion.”

Louisiana’s freight rail transportation services provide essential support for the petrochemical industry and others, generating a total economic output of \$13 billion.

According to Stich, more rail transport availability can provide cost and logistical advantages to Louisiana firms

and enable the state to increase its competitiveness in the global marketplace.

In rural areas, she says, potential growth in manufacturing, agriculture and local industries can be realized through a connection by railroads to major urban areas.

The Louisiana Transportation Research Center will use the system analysis to develop a plan to expand transportation efficiency, cost effectiveness, accessibility and capacity.



## UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS PLANNING & URBAN STUDIES CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans Department of Planning and Urban Studies has left its mark on the city of New Orleans and the surrounding metro area over the course of five decades. Since its founding in 1968, the department has been involved in the research and creation of land use studies to guide municipal officials, provided expertise in planning commercial corridors and helped to build and rebuild neighborhoods through the volunteer work of its students and faculty.

UNO officials marked the Department of Planning and Urban Studies, or PLUS, 50th anniversary with a luncheon and panel discussion in November.

“At UNO one of our jewels is PLUS, both in terms of the kind of research they do on this campus, the faculty we have and the students we produce that go out in the world and do greater things for society,” said Mahyar Amouzegar, provost and senior vice president of academic affairs, during the luncheon that celebrated the milestone. “It is very unique and special.”

The department is comprised of five independent, yet related academic program areas: Bachelor of Science in urban studies and planning, Master of Science in transportation, Master of Science in urban and regional planning, Master of Science in urban studies and the Ph.D. in urban studies.

New Orleans City Councilwoman for District C, Kristin Gisleson Palmer, presented a proclamation in recognition of the accomplishments she

says the department has achieved because of its focus on community service and partnerships with neighborhood groups.

She also credited the department with helping shape legislation that has made New Orleans a more pedestrian and cyclist-friendly city.

“I hope in the next 50 years this program becomes a true hallmark because we’re learning lessons here that

we need to share with the rest of the country and the world in terms of what we’re doing,” Palmer said.

Laura Bryan, transportation director for New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell and an alumna, presented a certificate of excellence on behalf of Cantrell.

“This program was really important to me,” said Bryan, who earned a master’s in urban and regional planning. “It provides such an important service to this city. The students are really engaged, you get to learn a lot about what’s happening in your community.”

The luncheon also included a panel of five founding faculty members—Jane Brooks, Tim Joder, Ralph Thayer, Fritz Wagner, and Bob Whelan—who talked about the department’s work and its impact.

“What I’m most proud of over the years are all of the studies that we did, predomi-



nately neighborhoods, many of them in New Orleans, but also in Jefferson Parish as well,” Brooks said. “This tradition has continued among the faculty that have come after and working in the neighborhoods. I think that is a very important thing that we have done.”

The students get great experience in working with real clients, neighborhood clients, parish government or city government and also we do some really great work that is helpful in moving the communities forward.”

*Planning & Urban Studies celebrated its 50th anniversary in November with a luncheon and a faculty founders roundtable, attended by five founding faculty members. Pictured on the front row from left to right, Fritz Wagner; Bethany Stich, department chair; Kim Martin Long, dean; and Jane Brooks, back row, left to right, Bob Whelan, Tim Joder, Mahyar Amouzegar, provost; and Raph Thayer.*



## INNOVATE UNO SYMPOSIUM SHOWCASES STUDENTS SCHOLARLY RESEARCH AND CREATIVE DESIGNS

FROM STUDENTS IN THE Lester E. Kabacoff School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Administration creating hot, fruit-filled crepes and sharing cooking tips with an appreciative audience to a mechanical engineering student explaining how to reduce emissions by “tweaking” the thermal energy cycle, Innovate UNO offers a platform broad enough to hold those endeavors and many more.

On Nov. 7-8, the fourth floor of the Earl K. Long Library was the epicenter for the University of New Orleans’s seventh independent showcase in which students were able to present their independent research, scholarly or creative activities to the campus community.

“Quite frankly I think it gets people involved on campus and it allows people to think outside the box,” says business administration major Jeffrey Brown, whose research focused on ways to reduce pet surrenders after adoptions. “It gives students, faculty, everybody a chance to come together.”

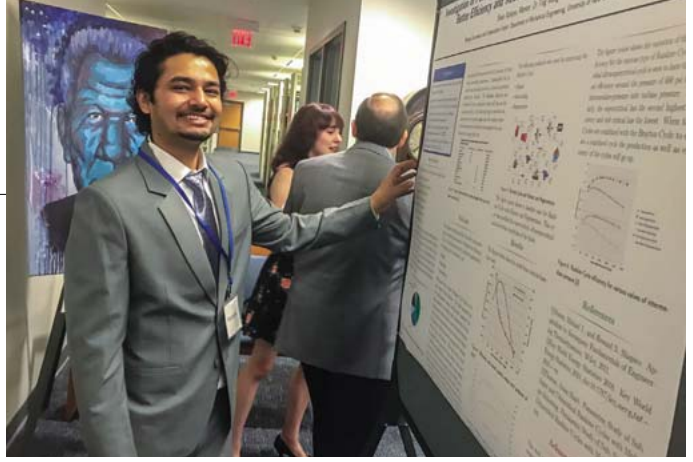
Brown’s group project was among 200 entries in a variety of categories presented in poster sessions, oral presentations, artwork, music, performances and exhibits. The presenters were on-hand to explain their entries and answer questions from judges and visitors.

The Office of Research, the Graduate School, and the Earl K. Long Library host the annual research symposium, which is sponsored in part by the Oscar J. Tolmas Charitable Trust.

Matt Tarr, vice president for research and economic development, stated goals for Innovate UNO are simple:

“I want the presenters to feel an achievement and an accomplishment of ‘Hey, I did this, and I told the world about it,’” Tarr says. “The second part is that I want the world to know what our people are doing.”

As visitors weaved through the aisles that contained artwork and posters filled with graphics, pictures and research summaries, participants were not shy about sharing their projects.



A framed painting on an easel contained Alexis Chivatero’s project called “The Next Generation.” What appears to be an octopus is visible from afar. A closer viewing, however, brings a startling discovery that the octopus resides within a circle of twisted human bodies upon which a raven is perched.

It’s a “semi-satirical” look at what could happen if humans destroy the earth and other intelligent species rise to the top of the order, Chivatero explains.

“I think art is a really good way to get people to realize that humans are very destructive towards the earth so creating sort of satirical pieces like this is a good way of getting people interested in learning about the environment,” she says.

A few rows over, Shisir Acharya, a mechanical engineering student, enthusiastically explained how to reduce power plant emissions. His research targets carbon dioxide, nitrogen and sulfur—pollutants

*Shisir Acharya, a mechanical engineering student, enthusiastically explains how to reduce power plant emissions.*

that can cause smog, acid rain and which some scientists have attributed to causing global warming—by improving the efficiency of the thermodynamic energy cycle using a combination of steam and gas to generate the same amount of power.

After compiling “a lot of data” and using a computer program to run simulations that “tweaked” various components in the power producing cycle, Acharya reached his conclusion.

“Increasing the efficiency in the thermodynamic cycle will result in a better efficient hydro-power system which will ultimately contribute towards reducing the emissions,” he says.

“Less emissions; it’s better for the environment and that’s how I save earth,” Acharya says with a laugh.

## MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAM NAMED BEST BY ONLINEMASTERS.COM

ONLINEMASTERS.COM, A research organization seeking to provide data-driven analysis to prospective graduate students, named the University of New Orleans master’s degree program in higher education as the best degree program of its kind available in a hybrid format. In a hybrid degree program, students can complete much of the coursework online but can also attend classes in person to meet with professors, network with peers or get additional

academic support.

In addition to recognition for the best hybrid format of the degree program, the University of New Orleans was ranked 28th overall among higher education master’s degree programs offered exclusively online.

According to OnlineMasters.com, its analysis included every higher education master’s degree program in the U.S. available online from an accredited nonprofit institution. Data

collected from current students and alumni through interviews and surveys as well as insights from human resources professionals informed the rankings. Selection criteria included curriculum quality, program flexibility, affordability and graduate outcomes.

The higher education master’s degree program at the University of New Orleans is designed for both recent college graduates and mid-career

professionals seeking a program of study focused on multiple areas of educational leadership.

All classes meet in the evening, drawing students who bring a diversity of professional perspectives and experiences to the classroom. Graduates of the program typically work as administrators at colleges and universities in areas such as admissions and retention, residential life, career services, multicultural affairs, financial aid or student affairs.



## ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT TAKES CENTER STAGE AT 2018 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI GALA

A STANDING-ROOM CROWD of more than 500 people celebrated the achievements of University of New Orleans graduates at the Distinguished Alumni Gala held Nov. 1 at The National WWII Museum. Former insurance executive William Chauvin was honored as the 2018 Homer Hitt Distinguished Alumnus of the Year and Son of a Saint founder and executive director Bivian “Sonny” Lee was honored as the 2018 Homer Hitt Distinguished Young Alumnus of the Year.

Chauvin is currently chair of a Vistage CEO peer support group. He previously served as senior vice president of finance and treasurer for XL Catlin, Inc., a global insurance and reinsurance company. He also was an executive with Global Special Risks, Inc. and Southern Marine & Aviation Underwriters, Inc. Chauvin began his career as an accountant for Price Waterhouse & Co. in New Orleans. He is the 35th honoree to receive the Homer Hitt Distinguished Alumni Award.

Lee is the president and executive director of Son of a Saint, a nonprofit that inspires mentorship and enhances the lives of fatherless boys. He founded the organization in 2011 in honor of his father, former Saints player Bivian Lee Jr., who died of a heart attack at the age of 36. Son of a Saint provides emotional support, life skills development and exposure to constructive experiences to its mentees. Lee was named New Orleanian of the Year by Gambit in 2016.

The University’s academic colleges and the interdisciplinary



(L-R) Lute Maleki, Jules Schneider, Bob Duvernie (accepting on behalf of son-in-law Major Gen. Chad Franks), Sonny Lee, President John Nicklow, Bill Chauvin, Angie Gates and Phillip May

studies program also honored their own distinguished alumni.

The College of Sciences honored Lute Maleki as its 2018 Distinguished Alumnus. Maleki, who earned a doctorate in physics from UNO in 1975, is senior distinguished engineer and executive in charge of LiDAR Development for Cruise Automation, the self-driving unit of General Motors. He previously worked as a scientist at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, Calif. The College of Engineering honored Jules Schneider. Schneider, who earned a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from UNO in 1984, has spent 33 years working for Lockheed Martin Space Systems. He’s director of assembly, test and launch operations, making him responsible for all of the final assembly, integration and testing of the Orion Spacecraft at the Kennedy Space Center.

The College of Business

Administration honored Philip May, who earned his MBA from UNO in 1992. May is the president and chief executive officer of Entergy Louisiana, LLC, which serves more than one million electric customers in the state. He is responsible for the company’s electric transmission and distribution systems, customer service, regulatory and public affairs, economic development programs and charitable contributions, as well as its financial performance.

The College of Liberal Arts, Education and Human Development honored Angie Gates, who earned a bachelor’s degree in communications and a master’s degree in arts administration from UNO. She is the director of the Office of Cable Television, Film, Music and Entertainment for the District of Columbia and interim director of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities. Gates

currently serves as a governor of the Recording Academy, Washington, D.C. chapter (The Grammys).

Interdisciplinary studies honored Major Gen. Chad Franks who graduated from UNO in 1990. Gen. Franks is the deputy commander, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, U.S. Central Command. He oversees joint and coalition operations, intelligence and plans in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Additionally, he is the commander, 9th Air Expeditionary Task Force-Levant, U.S. Air Forces Central Command. Gen. Frank is deployed overseas so his father-in-law, Bob Duvernie, accepted the award on his behalf.

Proceeds from the Distinguished Alumni Gala increase funding for student scholarships and support the UNO Alumni Association’s programming to ensure student success and alumni engagement.



## UNO AWARDS OVER \$400,000 FOR RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY ENDEAVORS

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans awarded more than \$400,000 in research grants and awards to 24 faculty members and 75 undergraduate students on Jan. 23 during its annual Achievements in Research, Creativity and Scholarship awards ceremony held in the University Center's ballroom.

The awards presentation, hosted by the Office of Research, underscored the power of research and the opportunities that exist for UNO scholars at all levels and areas of the campus, Matt Tarr, vice president for research and economic development, said.

Easels were placed around the ballroom that held posters highlighting some of the endeavors over the past year by

faculty, staff and students.

"We're here to support those activities—research, creativity and scholarship—across the entire campus, whether that's faculty members, staff members or students, both graduates and undergraduates," Tarr says.

In total, the awards amounted to \$403,083 invested in promising research and scholarship being conducted by UNO students and faculty.

President John Nicklow says Tarr's office is helping the University build on its rich heritage of research.

"Today's event is extremely befitting our status as the only public research university in New Orleans and one of only two Carnegie R2 institutions in the entire state," Nicklow says.



"For more than six decades now this institution has had a strong heritage of research and that legacy, that heritage, is going to be a strong part of our future."

He also applauded award winners for their dedication.

"Research makes professors better teachers, it improves student engagement and elevates the success of the entire institution," Nicklow says. "I'm grateful for your dedication to both your discipline and this

*Matt Tarr (far left), vice president for research and economic development, stands with award winners Stephen Ware, Tara Tolford, Shaikh Arifuzzaman, and Mark Trudell during the annual Achievements in Research, Creativity and Scholarship awards ceremony.*

institution. Each of you play an integral role in helping the university fulfill its research mission."

## SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AWARDED \$100K FOR VISITING ARTIST PROGRAM

THE NEW ORLEANS THEATRE Association (NOTA) awarded \$100,000 to the University of New Orleans School of the Arts for a guest residency program that will bring to the campus professional artists from around the country who will teach master classes in visual arts, theatre, film and music. With this award, NOTA is the sole sponsor of the guest residency program.

According to Charles Taylor, director of the University of New Orleans School of the Arts, visiting artists will complement the expertise of the permanent School of the Arts faculty and at the same time offer students exposure to the lives and experiences of working professional artists.

"Our primary mission is preparing our students to succeed in a competitive professional world," Taylor says. "While there are many professional artists in New Orleans, it is essential for students to develop a broader conception of artistry and artistic success. This guest residency program ensures that our students will have the benefit of instruction and interaction with successful professional artists from a variety of disciplines, backgrounds, viewpoints and locations.

"We are grateful to the New Orleans Theatre Association for its generous investment in the UNO School of the Arts and the future of our region's cultural economy," Taylor adds.

The University hopes to

attract a different artist or group of artists each year. The length of stay for each visiting artist will vary depending the artist's availability and the University's needs at that time. Over the five-year grant period, each arts discipline—visual arts, theatre, film and music—will be represented at least once.

The New Orleans Theatre Association is a presenter of touring Broadway productions and other live performances. As a nonprofit organization, NOTA channels all proceeds back into the local arts community in the form of grants and other support. Previous support from NOTA for University of New Orleans projects includes the New Orleans Jazz Celebration's

sponsorship of the Jazz at the Sandbar performance series and an endowed professorship in theatrical arts.

The University of New Orleans School of the Arts ranks among the leading cultural and arts education centers in the Gulf South. Offering instruction in music, film, theatre, visual arts and arts administration, the School of the Arts nurtures creative and intellectual development, fosters collaboration among disciplines, embraces diversity and encourages community engagement. It also serves the public as a regional center of cultural and intellectual activity with performances, exhibitions, lectures and workshops by students, faculty and guest artists in its galleries and performance spaces.



# FACULTY FOCUS

## TASKIN KOCAK APPOINTED COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING DEAN

TASKIN KOCAK, THE new dean of the College of Engineering, embraces an educational philosophy that includes practical work experience and equipping future engineers with soft skills such as leadership, communications and team building.

“I believe in working and education at the same time because it gives you practicality and experience, even before you finish your degree,” says Kocak who worked at Mitsubishi Electric Semiconductor in Raleigh-Durham, N.C. while pursuing his degrees.

Kocak, who joined the University of New Orleans in January, succeeds civil and environmental engineering professor Norma Jean Mattei, who served as the interim dean.

Kocak says he wants to explore the creation of study abroad engineering programs to offer students a “global experience.” He established such programs in Germany, Italy and Hong Kong while at Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, Turkey.

Prior to coming to UNO, Kocak, who was born and raised in Turkey, spent eight years as a professor, department chair and dean of the College

of Engineering and Natural Sciences at Bahcesehir University. He holds a doctorate in electrical and computer engineering from Duke University and has previously worked at Duke, the University of Bristol in England and the University of Central Florida.

Kocak says he avidly consumes current affairs news about the U.S., Turkey and England, a byproduct of his working in those countries.

“My wife tells me ‘Normal people don’t do that! What are you going to do with all that?’” Kocak says with a laugh. “I’m a news junkie.”

He also likes computers, which is what first attracted him to engineering and an eventual master’s degree in electrical and computer engineering.

As he settles into his new role at the University, Kocak says he wants to ensure that students have the opportunity for internships both foreign and domestic. In addition, Kocak wants to explore partnerships with local companies that will allow industry leaders to share their expertise with students, possibly as adjunct faculty members or through new elective courses.

“I think we have a lot



of different manufacturing and others, like information technology companies, moving into the New Orleans area, so I think there’s a great chance to partner with them because they will need the workforce,” Kocak says.

The industry partnerships is part of what Kocak lists under his “enhance undergraduate experience” goal, one of four overall goals he presented to the University community as part of his interview for the position. His other focus points for UNO are to grow graduate and research programs, develop faculty and to engage the community and industry, he says.

He’s quick to add that it was not one single factor that helped BAU’s engineering department to experience a 30 percent growth in student enrollment during his eight-year tenure. The strategy also included the

*Taskin Kocak, the new dean of the College of Engineering*

offering of new programs, hiring more research-capable faculty and increasing recruitment efforts and marketing, particularly at high schools.

“You have to visit high schools,” Kocak says.

Kocak says he will create a five-year plan that includes end goals of increasing the college’s national ranking, increasing student enrollment by 50 percent, increasing research funding by 100 percent and increasing faculty hires by 50 percent. Kocak says faculty mentoring would play a key role in those goals.

“The College of Engineering has a lot of potential,” says Kocak, noting that the college ranks within the top 200 in the country. “Based on this potential, I think we can develop this college further.”



## COMPUTER SCIENCE FACULTY MEMBER AWARDED \$100,000 TO HELP NASA'S STENNIS SPACE CENTER

NASA'S STENNIS SPACE Center has tapped University of New Orleans computer science associate professor Md Tamjidul Hoque to help the agency improve the way it manages and markets intellectual property. The agency awarded \$100,000 to Hoque to enhance and expand an initial version of technology he has already developed for the space center.

In the course of carrying out its mission, NASA routinely develops new technology and often elects to protect its intel-

lectual property by securing patents for its innovations. Patents allow NASA to share its technology through external partnerships related to the NASA mission or licensing to the public for commercial and social benefit.

Hoque's work aims to improve the centralized system used by NASA for organization and navigation of patent data and related documents so that marketing efforts based on opportunities for business partnerships and technology

licensing become more efficient and effective.

With a previous grant, Hoque applied an advanced machine-learning tool to NASA's intellectual property management system to sort and classify patent documents. A machine-learning approach uses software to perform the decision-making process of categorizing and naming each new innovation without the need for human oversight. The current award will fund the next phase of developing this



*Md Tamjidul Hoque*

technology, which involves fully automating the classification process on the document side and adding metadata to records to improve search results on the user side.

Hoque, who earned a doctorate from Monash University in Australia, researches machine learning, bioinformatics and optimization.

## COMPUTER SCIENCE PROFESSOR WINS NSF GRANT TO DEVELOP UNIVERSAL DATA LANGUAGE

TELEVISION CRIME dramas have made "forensics" a household word. University of New Orleans computer science professor Vassil Roussev is working to give forensics investigators a universal language—a data query language, that is.

Roussev has been awarded a nearly \$300,000 National Science Foundation Grant to develop the language called "nugget," that he says seeks to make digital forensic investigations quicker for analysts.

"What this work does is create a uniform language to describe what you're doing," to arrive at specific results or conclusions, Roussev says. "And the reason this is useful and important is that it documents it exactly, in effective computer code that is understandable to the analyst."

Digital forensics is the science of tracing or tracking evidence from any digital system or source, such as a computer's hard drive, a video, an audio file, cell phone or email. As the volume of data from these digital sources continues to grow, the need becomes greater for investigators to be able to sift quickly and efficiently through mounds of data to find potential evidence, Roussev says.

"When people talk about forensic analysis, they essentially figure out what happened," he says. "Forensics is basically analysis after the fact or when you suspect something has happened."

Currently, investigator notes are the main source for helping guide analysts in reproducing information gleaned from another colleagues' data search.

However, many of the forensic tools are proprietary and are not designed to be used across different software tools or systems, Roussev says. Having to manually cull through another investigator's notes to determine how they arrived at a particular conclusion slows the investigatory process, he says.

"Nugget," an idea that originated with Roussev and is being executed by Christopher Stelly, a UNO doctoral research student, is designed as an open source project that would operate regardless of the software the analysts uses.

As it relates to usability and performance requirements in digital forensics and incident response investigations, nugget seeks to: provide investigators with the means to easily and completely specify the data



*Vassil Roussev*

flow of a forensic inquiry from data source to final results; allow the fully automatic—and optimized—execution of the forensic computation; and provide a complete, formal and auditable log of the inquiry.

The investigation process not only has to be understandable, but also reproducible which is a key component in science and the legal arena of court cases, Roussev says.

"If (the results) can't be reproduced, it's not science," says Roussev, referencing a basic tenet of scientific research methods.



## FREEDOM ON THE MOVE LAUNCHES DATABASE OF FUGITIVES FROM AMERICAN SLAVERY

UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans history professor Mary Niall Mitchell is a lead historian for an online project called Freedom on the Move that is devoted to creating a searchable database about fugitives from slavery in North America.

Project coordinators are enlisting the public to help create the database for tens of thousands of advertisements placed throughout the years by enslavers who wanted to recapture Africans and African Americans who fled the forced bondage of slavery.

“In the broadest sense, this project is retrieving detailed stories about tens of thousands of enslaved people who liberated themselves before the Civil War,” Mitchell says. “These advertisements—placed by both enslavers and jailers—have been scattered in local newspapers and hard to study as a group until now.”

By digitizing and crowd-sourcing these ads, researchers can begin to ask larger questions about those enslaved people, such things as mobility, resistance, family relationships, linguistic ability, skills, gender and racial classifications, Mitchell says.

“It is exciting to think that we cannot even predict all of the different uses people will find for these ads,” she says. “But just as important, we are able to retrieve detailed accounts of individual men, women, and children who endured slavery, and in some cases escaped it.”

The project originated at Cornell University several years

ago and since then a core group of historians, programmers, and librarians has been working on developing the crowd sourcing site and gathering ads from newspapers and smaller existing collections of ads, Mitchell says.

Within the past three years, the project has secured major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Archives, which has made the very expensive process of building an interactive site from the ground up possible, she says.

The site launched on Feb. 14 with around 12,000 ads already uploaded, Mitchell says. University of New Orleans students have steadily been collecting ads from New Orleans newspapers and so far have contributed some 8,000 that will be uploaded, she says.

There should be at least 50,000 ads on the site within the next year or so with an expanded geographical area, Mitchell says.

The ads were placed in newspapers both by enslavers trying to locate fugitives and jailers wanting to return captured fugitives to the enslavers who claimed them as “property.”

The ads offered monetary rewards and included a wealth of personal details about the fugitives’ appearance, mannerisms, clothing, speech, family members, places of origin and destinations.

The insights the ads provide into the experiences of enslaved Africans and African American people are especially valuable

because so little information about them as individuals has been preserved, project coordinators say.

“It is hard to know how many of them succeeded, but because they ran we have these advertisements that describe them and tell something of their personal stories—what their personalities were like, what skills they had, their physical features, health or disabilities, recent histories of sale, family ties,” Mitchell says. “They are truly remarkable documents. And there are thousands of them.”

The free, open-source site has been designed to be accessible to the public. Users can quickly set up an account and begin working with digitized versions of the advertisements, whether for research, for a class, or personal interest.

Users transcribe the text of an advertisement and then answer questions about the ad and the person it describes. They can choose to transcribe ads from a particular state or specific time period, depending on their areas of interest.

The output of this crowd-sourced project will be an ever-growing database of thousands of individuals, and the places and people associated with them, according to project coordinators. This in turn will be an invaluable research aid, pedagogical tool, and resource



*University of New Orleans history professor Mary Niall Mitchell*

for genealogists, they say.

“Our immediate goal is to collect all fugitive slave ads placed in North American newspapers from the colonial era through the Civil War and emancipation. We estimate that there are well over 100,000 such ads, quite possibly many more,” Mitchell says. “With the help of crowd sourcers, these will be transcribed and mined for details about those who ran and the people and places associated with them. “This information will create the metadata for the database, which will be free and open source. We are also developing a portal for educators to make it easier for them to use FOTM in the classroom and a kiosk that can be placed in both large and small museums.”

The hope long-term is that this material will expand what is known about slavery and enslaved people in North America, Mitchell says.

“Eventually we would like to pursue collaborations with scholars in the Caribbean and Latin America as well,” she says.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS 2018 MEDALLION AWARD WINNERS NAMED

THREE RECIPIENTS OF the University of New Orleans annual medallion awards were announced in October as part of President John Nicklow's State of the University address given to faculty and staff in the University Center's Sen. Ted Hickey Ballroom.

The recipients of the three medallion awards are:

- Peter Schock, professor and chair of the Department of English and Foreign Languages, awarded the Cooper R. Mackin Medallion. The Mackin Medallion was established to honor the third Chancellor of the University of New Orleans and was first presented in 1998. It is awarded to a faculty or staff member who has made outstanding contributions in support of the University's

mission.

"Not only has Dr. Schock shown exemplary leadership as department chair, but he has taken a keen interest in working to increase enrollment, retention and the overall student experience," Nicklow says. "His committee work and his passion across the University have been tireless."

- M. Kabir Hassan, professor of economics and finance, awarded the Gordon H. "Nick" Mueller International Leadership Medallion. It is presented in recognition of the contributions that were made to the University by Mueller, who spent 33 years at UNO as a professor, dean, vice chancellor, the founding president of the UNO Research & Technology Park and co-founder of The



National World War II Museum. It is awarded to an individual who has provided significant leadership toward the internationalization of the University.

"Dr. Hassan is an internationally renowned scholar in his field," Nicklow says. "He has presented more than 300 research papers and participated in more than 100 seminars, panel discussions and conferences around the world, helping to raise the global profile of the University of New Orleans."

- Kim Jovanovich, interim associate dean of the College of Engineering, received the Presidential Staff Medallion. It is awarded to the staff

*President John Nicklow with the recipients of the University's three annual awards (l-r) Peter Schock, M. Kabir Hassan, and Kim Jovanovich*

member who has demonstrated outstanding service to the University community.

"In addition to his roles as interim associate dean, Kim teaches and he is the most enthusiastic ambassador for the profession of engineering and the College of Engineering that we have," Nicklow says. "His one-man-show on the wonders of engineering has built a reputation around the state."

## NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION FUNDS QUANTUM RESEARCH BY MATHEMATICIAN

THE NATIONAL SCIENCE Foundation (NSF) awarded \$162,000 to Peter Bierhorst, assistant professor of mathematics at the University of New Orleans, to take his research into quantum nonlocality to the next plane. Bierhorst's expertise is addressing practical problems in secure communication and cryptography through quantum physics.

Less than three years ago, Bierhorst was a member of an experimental team at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in Boulder, Colo., working to demonstrate the phenomenon of quantum nonlocality, which is what Einstein described as "spooky action at a distance." The phrase describes the curious

phenomenon of quantum entanglement, whereby two microscopic particles such as photons or electrons, can appear to act in concert instantaneously even when tested miles apart, Bierhorst says.

For Bierhorst and his colleagues at NIST, the demonstration of quantum nonlocality came in the form of a random number generator constructed to make online passwords more secure. Because of the random nature of quantum mechanics, there is no predictable pattern to the numerical sequence. The device and experiment that led to its creation was featured in stories on NPR radio, WIRED magazine and in the April 2018 issue of the nature research journal Nature.

The experiments Bierhorst participated in at NIST were significant because they ruled out all potential explanations of the data that didn't involve the concept quantum nonlocality. These experiments, according to Bierhorst, were "a big step in demonstrating quantum 'weirdness' experimentally."

Those experiments, though, were quite large, requiring separations of about 100 yards to ensure that separate measuring stations wouldn't influence each other. With the award from NSF, Bierhorst will now prepare to attempt the experiment in a single room.

"For the single-room experiment, the process will require speeding everything up to continue to ensure that

separated parts of the experiment are not influencing each other," Bierhorst says. "We will develop a new high-speed all-optical switch as a key experimental component to make this possible. It will be easy to turn this switch "on and off" much faster than previous methods, and the switch will also have applications to many experiments beyond quantum nonlocality tests.

"The basic idea is that the output of this experiment in nonlocality generates true quantum randomness and cannot be predicted. Given the demand for passwords and cryptographic protocols, there is value in developing a system that can ensure the standard generation of random numbers." 🐾



# Dazzling Debut

Alumnus Maurice Ruffin  
takes the literary world by  
storm with his debut novel  
“We Cast a Shadow”

BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD  
PHOTOS BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER





A GAUZY HAZE BATHES THE AREA, PERHAPS THE CREATION of the bright stage lights meshing with the dark room at The Ace Hotel. Maurice Ruffin, dressed in black, is holding court center stage, preparing to read an excerpt from his debut novel “We Cast a Shadow.”

A standing-room-only crowd has packed the lower room and the upstairs balcony, prompting Ruffin to joke that contrary to what must have been advertised, there would be no “free money.”

He turns serious, thanking the crowd and his family for their show of support. It has been a long journey. He started writing the book seven years ago.

“Seeing y’all here is very important to me, because when I started I didn’t know if I would finish the book,” Ruffin says. “All I can say is that community helped me do this, there are so many people in this room right now who have pulled me over the finish line.”

It has been quite a finish but, perhaps, only the beginning.

The superlatives are flying from coast to coast and all points in between about the University of New Orleans double alumnus and

his first novel. Ruffin, who earned a bachelor’s degree in English and a Master of Fine Arts from the University’s Creative Writing Workshop (CWW), is being touted as a rising literary star and a “writer to watch.”

He was among 32 writers featured last fall by *The New York Times* in an article about impactful literature created by African American men. Fellow UNO alumnus Jericho Brown also was featured in the article.

Ruffin’s novel, released Jan. 29 by One World/Random House, has been characterized as a “must-read” on various book lists, including reviews by *The Los Angeles Times*, *Publishers Weekly* and *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

“I’m humbled,” Ruffin says regarding the media attention his novel has drawn. “I worked on the book for years and only a small circle of friends knew anything about it. Now, I’m seeing positive reviews from NPR and *The Boston Globe*! It’s a true blessing!”

Ruffin’s popularity from the buzz that his novel has generated is increasingly apparent. Walking down Chartres Street one February afternoon, he is accosted by the words of a passer-by.

“Congratulations! I can’t wait to read your book,” the man says as he passes.

Ruffin, pleasantly startled and a bit bemused, stops walking and sticks out his hand.

“I’m Maurice,” he tells the man unnecessarily.

They both laugh as the man shakes Ruffin’s hand and introduces himself as well before continuing down the sidewalk.

Ruffin, an attorney with the Social Security Administration, is married and lives in New Orleans, where he was born and raised. He calls his wife, Tanzanika, “the executive producer of my entire life.” She also is an attorney and the two started dating in high school.

“I couldn’t have accomplished any of this without her,” Ruffin says.

He started writing as a youngster, and Ruffin feels fortunate to have people around him who encouraged him to pursue his writing. Growing up in New Orleans East, he chose to attend the University of New Orleans because it’s “home,” he says.

“I’m from here, my family is here,” Ruffin says. “I’ve lived here my whole life and whenever I wanted to advance myself and gain new skills I just looked right across the city and said, ‘That’s my spot, I’ll go there.’”

After earning a law degree, a fellow writer encouraged him to apply to UNO’s Creative Writing Workshop program.

During the book signing, Ruffin shares his writing insecurities and how then-CWW director Rick Barton responded.

“I told him I was an amateur, I don’t have any previous writing degrees,” Ruffin recalls. “He told me ‘We’re going to accelerate you by 10 years.’ And sure enough, by the time I got to the next director, I was like ‘Neal, I’m sorry, I’m a better writer than you!’”

The audience—including UNO’s CWW director M.O. “Neal” Walsh – laughs and applauds loudly in response to the story.



## THE BOOK

Ruffin's novel is set in an unnamed southern city about 50 years in the future where walls separate the rich and the poor and police violence against people of color is a common occurrence. Ruffin says New Orleans "informs the setting," and readers will recognize some familiar sights.

Like the city, the narrator's name is not given. "My name doesn't matter," is the opening sentence in a novel some reviewers have compared to Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man."

In simple terms, Ruffin says the novel is "a story about a family." However, the novel's themes of love and racism, of social conditioning and stereotypes, add layers of provocative complexity.

The narrator father is an African American attorney who is trying to protect his biracial son from the dangers that many young black men face in America, Ruffin says.

"He wants to protect his son from racism. He wants to save his son so that he can have the same opportunity as any other American ... His son is very light-skinned and he's sort of pushing his son to pass as white. The son is resisting it and the mother can't quite understand why the dad is so insistent," Ruffin explains.

The son has a very dark birthmark on his face that's getting bigger as he gets older, which adds a sense of urgency. The father wants the birthmark removed via a skin lightening or demelanization process that would in effect allow his son to look more white and less like a target for a hate crime.

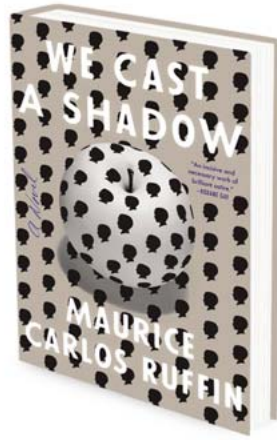
The novel is an outgrowth of news stories that were prevalent several years ago, Ruffin says. Such stories included the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black Florida teenager who was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch captain; the racially tinged political struggles of President Barack Obama and several high-profile police-involved fatal shootings of unarmed black people, he says.

The job of a writer is to reflect what he sees, Ruffin says. Writing "We Cast a Shadow," was his way of processing some of those events, he says.

"I was trying to understand what I was seeing on television, the internet and in real life. Why were people being incarcerated, beaten or killed mainly because of their skin color," he says.

For his readers, Ruffin says he'd like them to read the book with an open mind.

"I want them to understand that most of the easy answers we get from politicians and media personalities are not answers. I



**"I want them to understand that most of the easy answers we get from politicians and media personalities are not answers. I hope readers come to understand that they should educate themselves on the history of racism in America and dig deeper than the typical stories we repeatedly hear. Mostly, I hope they share the book with their loved ones and have conversations about the book!"**

yourself to be a better writer than you are at the moment."

And, never give up on yourself, Ruffin says.

"You have to walk on faith," he says. "It doesn't matter how dark the path seems ... keep walking that path, you're going to find someone who is going to want to hold your hand, hold a flashlight and say, 'I got you, come on.' So, don't ever, ever give up." 🍌

hope readers come to understand that they should educate themselves on the history of racism in America and dig deeper than the typical stories we repeatedly hear," he says. "Mostly, I hope they share the book with their loved ones and have conversations about the book!"

## THE CALL

When Ruffin began writing, "We Cast a Shadow," he had three goals: Finish the book, be proud of it and get it published.

He finished writing the book in 2016 and was proud of it. In early 2017, while shopping in Walmart with his mother, he received a phone call from his literary agent: You are wanted in New York.

That trip to meet with publishers secured that final goal.

"Trying to publish a book is one of the most difficult things a writer can do," Ruffin says. "There are hundreds of thousands of talented people just trying to get their book in the world."

He met with four publishers; the last meeting was with One World.

"The second I met Victory, I said this person understood what I was trying to do," Ruffin says regarding his book editor Victory Matsui.

For nearly two years, Ruffin and Matsui worked to polish the book, including cutting some 15,000 words.

"The first time she said cut a chapter, I was like 'Cut a chapter? Are you crazy, that was a six-month chapter!'" Ruffin recalls with a laugh.

He appreciates the constructive criticism, and calls Matsui "a genius."

"Every cut was the right cut. The book is better because of the cuts that Victory made," Ruffin says.

Ruffin also credits his "writing tribe" for helping bring the book to fruition. He and fellow UNO writing workshop alumnus Tad Bartlett, started the Peauxdunque Writers Alliance more than a decade ago.

He urges all writers—neophytes and professionals—to find a supportive writing community.

"My advice for writers in general and budding writers, you need to find people who are trying to do what you are trying to do," he says. "You need to find a way to train yourself to be a better writer than you are at the moment."



Justin  
Champion  
is on  
cruise  
control





UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS GRADUATE JUSTIN Champion's career has him sailing through life and around the globe. Champion, who earned a bachelor's degree in naval architecture and marine engineering in 2012, is a project manager for Foreship, LLC and is responsible for designing and overseeing multi-million dollar renovations of popular cruise ships.

His career has taken him around Europe, the Middle East and the Caribbean, among other places.

"I'm enjoying it, definitely!" Champion, 28, says of his travel-centric career.

Foreship is a privately owned naval architecture and marine engineering company that specializes in building and remodeling cruise ships. Its main office is in Helsinki, Finland, which is where Champion landed just three months after graduating from UNO.

His acceptance into the company's training program, which included a part-time job while pursuing a master's degree, came via email the morning of his graduation, Champion says.

"With Foreship I worked part-time and then on the side I was getting a master's degree in naval architecture," he says. "They funded my master's degree and the whole time I was working with them, so it was an awesome opportunity."

After completing the two-year program, Champion was hired full-time as a project engineer. In 2017, he was promoted to a project manager.

His work is exclusively with cruise ship design, focusing on ships that are being renovated, Champion said. Many of his projects have involved Royal Caribbean Cruise Ships, he says. "It's my job to prepare drawings for the cruise line and travel to the cruise ships to ensure that everything is built as it should be," Champion says.

One of his first projects for the company was helping with a redesign of the "Oasis of the Seas," one of the world's largest ships, he says.

"I got to spend a month on board of that ship; I got to learn a lot," Champion says. "We sailed from Miami to Spain, and then I stayed a month on the ship in Spain to watch the transformation."

Champion recently moved to Seattle from Finland as part of a team tasked with opening a new office there. He had lived in Europe since his graduation.

"I'd never been to Europe before in my life; the first time was on my flight there," Champion says.

Now, traveling around the country has become second nature. Every design project he works on requires an onsite visit. His team typically starts design work about a year before the actual renovation or building starts, Champion says.

In January, he headed to the Bahamas to oversee a \$115 million project, and spent nearly two months aboard the dry-docked vessel.

"That's why I love what I do because I spend a lot of time on the design and then I get to see it be built," he says. "So I'm always traveling to the ship to watch what I

design get built."

Champion grew up in North Carolina around the Great Smoky Mountains. A family cruise out of New Orleans when he was 5-years-old sparked an interest in cruise ships that never crested, he says.

In high school, he told his friends he was going to school in New Orleans to pursue a shipbuilding career. They laughed.

"They kind of made fun of me," Champion says. "They would joke, 'What are you expecting to do? Design cruise ships one day?'"

Champion got the last laugh when he recently attended his 10-year high school reunion.

"They couldn't believe I ended up doing that!"

Champion says the University of New Orleans was his first choice for college because of the strong naval architecture and marine engineering program and its "value for money."

"UNO prepared me extremely well. The NAME program was comprehensive and hands-on," he says. "Even though I chose a career in a very specific field (cruise industry), all of the basics were covered so that I had a smooth transition from school to employment."

Extracurricular activities and student leadership positions, such as being a UNO Ambassador, equipped him with additional professional and social skills valued by his employer, Champion says.

"I think it is important to use your time at UNO for more than educational development," he says. "As someone who is now hiring new employees for our new office in Seattle, I can attest that social and leadership skills are equally if not more important than a GPA. Especially in a surrounding like mine, teamwork is everything." 🍷

*FACING PAGE: Justin Champion in Freeport, Bahamas for the refurbishment of "Navigator of the Seas." It's a \$115 million dollar project that lasted nearly two months. BELOW: Champion at sea onboard the cruise ship "Norwegian Getaway," sailing from Miami to Jamaica.*







*Sibling restaurateurs  
Ashwin and Pranita Vilku.*





# SAFFRON NOLA

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Popular Uptown restaurant  
is led by two University of  
New Orleans graduates

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BY LITTICE BACON-BLOOD  
PHOTOS BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER





SAFFRON IS A POPULAR AND FLAVORFUL SPICE, SO delicate that it must be harvested by hand. Saffron also is the name chosen for one of New Orleans' most well regarded and nationally recognized restaurants: Saffron NOLA.

The chic Magazine Street restaurant—where reservations are not required, but are recommended by food critics—is co-owned and managed by University of New Orleans alumni siblings Ashwin Vilkhru and Pranita Vilkhru, along with their parents.

The restaurant is an outgrowth of their parents' catering and "pop-up" eatery that operated with the same name for more than 20 years in Jefferson Parish.

Ashwin, however, a double alumnus who earned an undergraduate and graduate degree in business administration, had visions of something larger and grander.

On Christmas day in 2015, he approached his parents with an idea. Indeed, he gift-wrapped the notion.

"I wrote a thesis, essentially of what Saffron is now and what it could be, and that's kind of where everything changed," Ashwin says. "I gave it to mom and dad as a Christmas gift when I was graduating. I wrapped it up in a box, and said 'This is what we should be doing.'"

Less than a year after it opened, Saffron NOLA was named a semifinalist in the "Best New Restaurant" category by the James Beard Foundation.

"This is what I'd envisioned," Ashwin says, indicating the restaurant's elegantly adorned dining room.

It is a long way from the restaurant's one-night only dinner genesis in a West Bank strip mall in Gretna. The family would serve dinner once a week on Fridays to accommodate their catering customers who wanted a sit-down meal.

In addition, it took a huge leap of faith to make such a transition, Ashwin recalls.

His parents, Arvinder and Pardeep Vilkhru, immigrated to the United States about 35 years ago with little money, and were near retirement when their son pushed the idea of a full-fledged restaurant.

They, understandably, were hesitant, Ashwin says. Restaurants are a risky proposition, he knows.

The Vilkhru took their son's plans under advisement, but were not quite ready to act on it. In hindsight, Ashwin says their waiting paid off.

"I had been saying this for the last 10 years, that Saffron should be doing something different, but I didn't know if the city was ready for it yet," Ashwin says. "High-end ethnic food wasn't a thing, and I don't know if it would have been accepted right away. So, it was all about timing."

Then, the city's culinary landscape started shifting. New ethnic restaurants such as Shaya, also on Magazine Street, and Compere Lapin opened, and were doing extremely well serving Israeli and Caribbean-inspired food, respectively.

Those owners had taken their familial roots and meshed them



into the flavor of New Orleans, making it their own, Ashwin says. Those successes renewed a desire to do something similar with his family's Indian culture and tradition.

His parents and sister were on board, so they started searching for a location. They searched for more than a year.

"I found this place," says Pranita, who lives in the commercially revitalized neighborhood.

Once ensconced in the Uptown location, the family set out on a journey to illustrate "the evolution" of Indian cuisine, as the restaurant's website boasts.

The restaurant's name, while "phonetically pretty," as Pranita describes it, is also a bit symbolic of the food served inside.

"Saffron's an international spice and very exotic," Pranita says. "And it's not just used in Indian cuisine, but used in a lot of Italian fare, French cuisine, Spanish ... We don't just stick to one type of cuisine we kind of form this medley of flavors and techniques."

The menu melds local and global flavors that are inspired by their father's grandmother, and influenced by the traditions of New Orleans, France, Thailand, Singapore and China.

"It is great to see the Indian cooking techniques being transferred to our cooks and chefs here," Pranita says. "It's a cool thing to see."

In March the family headed to New York City as the invited restaurant to cook at the Beard House, a private fundraising dining event by the James Beard Foundation. The event was billed as "India Meets Mardi Gras."

The five-course dining experience showcased Saffron's menu staples such as crusted gulf shrimp with tomato-ginger remoulade, curried seafood gumbo with Louisiana lump crab, Gulf shrimp and basmati rice and a dessert that included fig-date praline ice cream.

#### **A FAMILY AFFAIR**


Prior to starting his own catering business, Arvinder Vilku worked decades in the hospitality industry, learning the ins and outs of the fickle field. Those skills often were displayed during family gatherings at their home, Ashwin says, recalling how it seems his parents moved about their home sharing food on platters and mingling as if working a restaurant dining room.

"We grew up having theme nights," Ashwin recalls. "Dad was a real student of the arts. We'd have Italian night, French night, American nights, Indian nights, so we got exposed to so much fare."

The same care their parents used to serve guests in their home is the same hospitality displayed at the restaurant, the siblings say.

"That's the big take-away. Humble home, humble setting, but they had so much grace and elegance," Ashwin says. "We got to see all this and we got to translate all of that into the restaurant."

As in most businesses, there are divisions of labor at the restaurant. Moreover, as is typical in many family-run businesses, there are some overlapping of duties.

Arvinder Vilku is the president, executive chef and the "godfather" of the operation. 





“He comes in, shakes a few hands, kisses a few babies, and then goes into the kitchen,” Ashwin says laughing as Pranita nods. “He checks the lines and sometimes he works the stations in the kitchens.”

Their mother, Pardeep, is vice president, director of operations and the executive production chef. She oversees the prep work and handles the catering events.

Pranita, who holds an MBA from UNO, and works a full-time job outside the restaurant as an internal auditor, is the operations

“I sort of do a lot of different things inside the restaurant, honestly because I love it,” he says. “If somebody falls out, I want to be able to fall right in. That’s just what we were taught. My dad’s a jack-of-all-trades, he can work the front of the house and the back of the house.”

#### THE SAFFRON EXPERIENCE

The goal, Ashwin says, was for Saffron to change the stereotypical expectations of Indian food that he believes many diners had formulated.

Since the 1970s and 80s, Indian food had been relegated to either being seen as buffet dining or as a low-end curry house with a hundred page menu offering food from every state in India, he says.

“There’s no real experience about it,” Ashwin says. “I want people to experience the purity of our food, and the hospitality that is shown in the restaurant because it all stems from our home.”

“When people enter this building, no matter how beautiful or how sophisticated, I still want it to feel like you’re walking into your home, and that’s really what we do.”

Saffron is “dialed into the details,” of hospitality and service, Ashwin says, because that is what was demonstrated inside their home.

When the restaurant opened in August 2017, they were scheduled to have several “soft opening” events.

“They weren’t soft openings, they were like full-on dinners with hundreds of people,” Ashwin recalls. “I think it said something. It

**“I want people to experience the purity of our food, and the hospitality that is shown in the restaurant because it all stems from our home.”**

manager. She handles all of the human resources responsibilities and financials—and pitches in on weekends in the kitchen.

“When we had the place on the West Bank, it was me and my friends that were the servers so I have that experience as well,” she says laughing. “So, if I ever have to step out there I’m ready!”

Ashwin is the general manager and beverage director. Like his father, Ashwin can be found in the dining room mingling with guests, in the kitchen cooking or stationed behind the bar. He worked for nearly a decade marketing beverages, and created a beverage menu for the restaurant.



said that the city was ready for a sort of different cuisine, they were open and they embraced it. And they are still embracing it and it's getting national attention, which is awesome!"

In February 2018, the restaurant was among 18 semifinalists nominated for the prestigious James Beard culinary award. Despite the fanfare that accompanied Saffron's opening just mere months before, Ashwin and Pranita say they were thrilled, but shocked at making the shortlist of the best new restaurants in the country.

"I didn't even think that we would," Pranita says, citing the fact the restaurant literally had opened only months before the December nomination deadline.

While their parents greeted the possibility of an award nonchalantly, not quite grasping the culinary magnitude of being nominated for such an award, Ashwin says he was anxious.

The night before the Beard Foundation was to release the names of its semifinalists, Ashwin says he could not sleep.

He had pushed the family to take on the risk of opening a full-fledged restaurant, and knew that even a consideration for a James Beard award was like culinary gold.

The next day, his cell phone was exploding with congratulatory calls and texts.

"It was great to be a part of that," he says. "To see mom and dad's hard work of so many years, of them being in a little strip mall doing catering and then all of a sudden be recognized nationally on the biggest stage, that felt good." 🍷

*ABOVE: Ashwin Vilku works in many aspects of the restaurant. "If somebody falls out, I want to be able to fall right in. That's just what we were taught." BELOW: Ashwin Vilku and his younger sister Pranita Vilku, along with their parents, Arvinder and Pardeep Vilku.*





# MFA Writing Workshop Students



TAKE A SWARM OF MOSQUITOES IN A SOUTH LOUISIANA bayou, add a bit of humidity and a dose of humanity in slow moving kayaks to arrive—figuratively speaking—at the production of philosophical prose. The journey down the bayou is real, and is the idea of University of New Orleans English professor Richard Goodman.

The day trip is part of a writing assignment for students in Goodman's creative nonfiction Master of Fine Arts workshop. It is an exercise in ecological awareness intended to stretch writers' imaginations by requiring them to produce a reflective essay on their experience.

"In nonfiction a lot of the students write about themselves, memoirs," Goodman says. "I'm alright with that, but I would like for them to learn to write about other things because you can't make a career out of writing just about yourself."

The annual coastal excursion provides context and substance that help students to explore themes beyond themselves, Goodman says. The resulting essays have taken a variety of perspectives and many forms, including one graphic artist telling her story via illustrations, he says.

"So when you're exposed to new, you just refresh your brain. You reboot your brain in a way," Goodman says. "Also a lot of

times if they do write about themselves, it's reflected through this environment."

Those writing assignments, which Goodman posted on a website designed for writers, recently caught the attention of editors at ViaNolaVie, a New Orleans-based website that focuses on Louisiana culture. They liked what they were reading.

"ViaNolaVie spotlights the eclectic and unique arts, culture, and educational landscape in Louisiana and, wouldn't you know it, the writers in Richard Goodman's MFA writing workshop are writing about most, if not all, of these life forces in their reflections on their time down the bayou," says Kelley Crawford, managing editor at ViaNolaVie.

ViaNolaVie asked for permission to include all of the student essays from past and future trips in their publication, offering the chance for many of Goodman's students their first professional byline.

The first of the down the bayou trip stories appeared in September, and a new one was published every week thereafter.

"I think a lot of them are excited about it," Goodman says. "When you're a student so many times you just want to get published." Crawford commends Goodman's workshop for providing



# Head Down the Bayou



*Kayaking Shell Bank Bayou*

students with an artistic outlet and for sharing information on some of Louisiana's unique landscapes.

"Goodman's workshop offers writers a space to create their individual art while also reflecting on either their personal culture or the culture of what surrounds them," Crawford says, "and of course there is the pedagogical connection to not only make the assignment engaging but also a public good. People can now vicariously kayak down the bayou with these writers, and we have an archive of what the bayou was like on that given day."

Goodman isn't quite sure where the idea for the group kayak day trip came from nearly three years ago, only that a former colleague had taken him out once and he'd enjoyed the trip immensely.

Goodman hires an environmental tour guide who leads the group of writers, typically eight to 10 of them, through a coastal Louisiana waterway via kayaks. Previous trips have been along the Blind River and Lake Maurepas in St. James Parish and Shell Bank Bayou in St. John the Baptist Parish, both spots about an hour west of New Orleans.

In its fourth year, Goodman says students have yet to balk at the idea of a day spent on an isolated bayou. The trip is on a weekend, typically in late October or early November.

"I introduce this the first day of the workshop," Goodman says. "Every single time everyone has wanted to do it."

Goodman crowdfunds the expense of renting kayaks and hiring a guide from Lost Lands Environmental Tours, a company co-owned by Marie Gould and her husband, environmental reporter Bob Marshall, who is the former outdoors editor for *The Times-Picayune*.

Prior to the students heading into the bayou, Marshall gives them about an hour-long talk on the precarious state of Louisiana's coastal wetlands and the importance of coastal restoration.

"Once on the bayou, the guide will explain a few things along the way, but a lot of it is really them just taking it all in," Goodman says. "A lot of the students don't know what a bayou is, or they've never been on a bayou and sometimes never been in a kayak."

It's not unusual for the group to see alligators, egrets, woodpeckers, and owls, and to have to contend with annoying insects and clingy hyacinth that tangles up many a paddle. In fact, during one trip, the vegetation was so thick that the kayakers had an extremely difficult time paddling through, Goodman recalls.

"We got stuck in that and it was sort of a hard day, and so I say, 'This is a great metaphor for life—adversity! Use it!'" Goodman says with a laugh. "And so they did." 🐾



## Alumnus Lute Maleki's Research Helps Drive



## The Automated Vehicle (R)Evolution

WHEN GENERAL MOTORS UNVEILS ITS fleet of fully automated, “self-driving” vehicles this year, they will include technology developed by University of New Orleans alumnus Lute Maleki.

Maleki’s micro lidar sensor technology, which he developed at his startup company Strobe, is a key component that is helping propel GM’s Cruise Automation to the front of the rapidly evolving autonomous vehicle industry.

Maleki is a senior distinguished engineer at Cruise Automation. He is considered a leading researcher and expert in lidar.

Lidar technology is similar to radar but uses laser light instead of radio frequency to survey and measure distances to objects. Lidar systems equip vehicles with the sensor ability to distinguish trees from shadows, Maleki says.

“Lidar is like the eyes of the car to see where to navigate, what to avoid, how to move, all of that,” says Maleki, who grew up in Iran and came to the United States to attend college. He earned a master’s degree and a doctorate in physics from UNO.

Lidar technology has been around for years; however, Maleki’s company, Strobe, was able to create a market-friendly version that allows the automotive industry to reproduce it less expensively, he says.

“The requirement for autonomous vehicles are a number of parameters, like seeing how far it can see and how well it can tell objects apart; and yet have a sensor that is small and can be produced low-cost,” Maleki says. “Ours is a technology that can meet those requirements.”

General Motors bought Maleki’s Pasadena, Calif.-based company in 2017. Cruise, will use Strobe’s lidar laser sensors as part of its automated driving system. In October, Honda announced it was investing \$2.7 billion in a partnership with GM to develop a fleet of autonomous vehicles that are expected to debut in 2019.

Although GM is expected to bring self-driving cars to market this year, buying one from a local dealership is probably still years away, according to the federal Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which oversees transportation standards.

Many vehicles sold today—and being driven daily—has some level of “automated” assistance, such as a “ding” to remind us to buckle our seat belt, rearview cameras, blinkers to let us know a

vehicle is passing or lane keeping system in which a system automatically takes steps to ensure a vehicle stays in the correct lane.

The vehicles that GM is looking to mass-produce would be fully automated in which there are no steering wheels, or pedals or human driver. This, according to the NHTSA, amounts to a Level 5 automation.

NHTSA, based on a similar standard developed by the Society of Automotive Engineers, describes the levels of automation from Level 0, where a human does all the driving to a Level 5 in which humans are simply passengers and the driving is performed by an automated system.

GM is piloting the use of such cars in several cities, including San Francisco, Maleki says.

“If you come to San Francisco, we will put you in a car which is autonomous, that is self-driving,” he says.

GM has declared its mission for developing self-driving vehicles as a way to reduce traffic congestion by decreasing the number of vehicles on the road. The automotive giant has said it plans to use the fully automated vehicles as part of an on-demand service, similar to Uber or Lyft.

Maleki first began researching Lidar technology while working at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California from 1979 to 2007. In 2000, he founded OEwaves, a technology company that further developed the radar and communications research undertaken by scientists at the NASA lab.

Maleki was president and CEO of OEwaves when he was awarded the C.B. Sawyer Memorial Award by the tech organization IEEE in 2013. The award is given in recognition of entrepreneurship or leadership in the frequency control community; or outstanding contributions in the development, production or characterization of resonator materials or structures.

Maleki thinks the autonomous vehicle will have an impact far beyond the car industry. He foresees it changing the way society plans and operates in such areas as land development.

“Right now your car is not used 92 percent of the time, it’s just sitting there taking up parking spaces,” he says. “Once we have autonomous vehicles, we can literally turn parking spaces into parks and things like that.”

# Alumna Camille James Harman Lands Role in “Vice” movie



regarding her attraction to acting. “I really love acting in period pieces. Acting makes me feel present and creative. It expands who I am, and makes me feel alive.”

In 1991, Harman returned to Louisiana to pursue a theatre degree at UNO.

“I sent UNO an audition videotape with my application, and they offered me a student teaching assistantship,” she says. “UNO also encouraged us to have an agent and audition for film and TV roles while in school. They didn’t mind if we missed a class or two for a good role.”

When she graduated, Harman says she had film and TV credits “and my SAG

card to go with my MFA.”

THE DICK CHENEY-INSPIRED BIOPIC “VICE” WAS nominated for dozens of awards, including eight Academy Awards and six Golden Globes. If that’s not incentive enough to persuade you to see the movie, there is a local reason: University of New Orleans alumna Camille James Harman plays the role of Republican political strategist Mary Matalin.

The movie, which opened in theaters nationwide in December, stars Christian Bale as former vice president Cheney who served under President George W. Bush.

“‘Vice’ is winning lots of awards and being nominated for more each week, so I’m going to parties and other events to build my network,” Harman says. “I am sure that being in this award-winning film will get me more audition opportunities.”

Harman, who grew up in Lafayette and graduated with a master’s degree in drama and communications from the University of New Orleans, answered a call for a Matalin “look-alike” and headed for the audition after doing a bit of research on her.

“I had researched Mary Matalin’s look online, dressed the part and got my hair cut,” says Harman, who found out the next day she’d gotten the part. “I was thrilled! I didn’t have an agent at the time, so I was proud of myself for scoring such a win on my own. I loved Adam McKay’s film “The Big Short,” also starring Christian Bale and Steve Carell. I knew ‘Vice’ would be amazing.”

Bale won a Golden Globe award for best actor, comedy or musical category.

Harman says she was bitten by the acting bug while working behind the scenes as a college student at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. After graduation, she moved to Richmond, Va., and continued performing in community productions.

“I love storytelling. I love using my imagination in conjunction with the team of professionals who contribute to the whole illusion,” Harman says

(From L to R) Camille Harman as Mary Matalin, Don McManus as David Addington, Eddie Marsan as Paul Wolfowitz, and Steve Carell as Donald Rumsfeld in Adam McKay’s “Vice,” an Annapurna Pictures release.

card to go with my MFA.”

In 1995, she moved to Los Angeles where she currently lives with her husband and son, who is an actor.

Harman says the internet has “revolutionized auditioning,” and she encourages aspiring performers to use social media to network and submit auditions. Harman says she was recently offered a role from a director she had met on Facebook.

“You can audition for things all over the country using self-tapes uploaded through the casting websites,” she says. “Take classes, network, and find a great flexible job to support yourself between acting jobs. Act for free for a while, and get yourself a good reel of several clips. Put it up on your acting profiles like Actors Access and on social media.”

It’s OK, Harman says, if you need to take a break from acting.

“I took a long break when we moved to Arizona for a while to raise our son Aidan,” she says. “I came back to it when he was about eight. We moved back to Los Angeles in 2015, and now he’s a teen SAG/AFTRA actor in Los Angeles.”

Harman says she’s ready to ride the wave of publicity “Vice” is garnering.

“I plan to be very busy this year acting. Perhaps I’ll book a job in New Orleans,” she says. “I’m available as a local hire. I can stay with friends. My passport is ready if I need to work out of the country. I’m ready for adventure.”





# Biology Student Dayana Frazer's Next Focus Is Medical School



DAYANA FRAZER, A SENIOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW Orleans, could very well be “focus” personified. The biology major, who counts studying among the ways she de-stresses, will graduate in May and currently has nearly a 4.0 grade point average.

“I really love school, I like learning,” Frazer says. “So, that’s my idea of relaxing.”

Following a gap year spent working in a research lab; Frazer’s next major focus will be medical school. She’s leaning toward an M.D./Ph.D. program.

“Dayana is an incredibly smart person who is driven to succeed,” says Steve Johnson, dean of the College of Sciences. “She

is very passionate about her classwork as well as her research.”

Johnson met Frazer during her sophomore year when she enrolled in his course, Population Genetics, Ecology, and Evolution. Her studious nature later prompted him to write a recommendation letter for a summer research internship in which he noted her academic drive and accomplishments—including her high grade point average.

“She received an A in the course and was in the top 5 percent of students in this very difficult biology course. In both lecture and lab, Dayana was extremely dedicated to her work,” Johnson wrote. “She is a very intelligent student with a strong work ethic.”



While acknowledging compliments for her achievements, Frazer also self-consciously shrugs them off. As the first in her immediate family to graduate high school and now college, being focused is a driving force; failure is just not an option.

“My mom is really excited,” Frazer says. “She’s worked hard her entire life to give me a better life.”

When Frazer was 3-years-old, her mother moved to the United States from Honduras, leaving Frazer to be raised by her grandmother for nearly a decade. Frazer, who grew up in Honduras, joined her mother in the U.S. when she was 12.

The transition wasn’t an easy one, Frazer says.

“I did go to a bilingual school (in Honduras) so I learned English, but I never really spoke it,” Frazer says. “I didn’t have anybody to speak it with, and coming here it was like ‘Oh, I really have to do this now.’”

Frazer learned to speak English fluently and she and her mother became naturalized citizens in 2017.

“She pushed me to do the citizenship and we both became citizens the same day,” Frazer says. “It wasn’t really hard for me because I learned it all in school; it was harder for my mom.”

Frazer speaks about her path to UNO and her aspirations with such determination that it seems nearly every high school student could benefit from hearing her tell it.

Her focus is research-based. In her sophomore year at Archbishop Chapelle High School in Metairie, her interest in science was piqued by a biology course. She explored that interest more when given the choice of taking Biology II versus chemistry or another science.

Before starting college, she shadowed a physician to get a feel for whether a career in medicine would suit her, Frazer says.

“I took Biology II, which was like anatomy and physiology, and based on that I thought, ‘I really want to do biology as my major,’” she says. “And to really confirm it I spent like a month at LSU Health Sciences Center shadowing

a doctor ... and that helped me to really know that science is what I really want to do.”

She is specifically interested in women’s health.

“I come from a country where women are not really taught much about sexual education; they either end up with some disease or end up pregnant really young and in a bad situation,” Frazer says. “So I really wanted to see what OB-GYNs do.”

The career shadowing experience fueled a compassion to be able to help people, Frazer says.

As a student at UNO, she’s spent summers in

medical labs conducting research and further laying a foundation for a future medical career. Frazer was one of five UNO undergraduates chosen for a summer research internship at Ochsner Medical Center in 2017.

During the six-week program, the students engaged in work that sought to understand more about liver cancer recurrence, to improve care for babies and children with pulmonary health concerns and to help develop successful cancer therapies that would perform in a patient who has developed drug resistance.

Last year, Frazer participated in a summer undergraduate research program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. She was one of 29 high-achieving students chosen from across the country to attend the 10-week mentored laboratory clinical research program.

Frazer worked in the gene therapy lab of University of New Orleans alumnus Dr. Terence Flotte, the dean of the UMass Medical School.

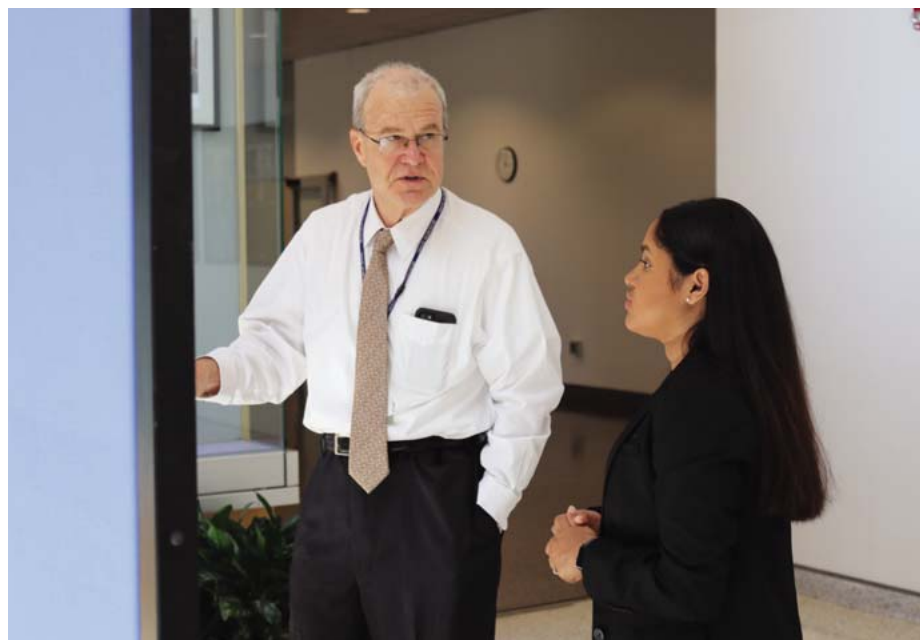
Frazer says her summer research has left her learning toward an M.D./Ph.D. program that would allow her to translate her medical research into patient care.

“With the medical (degree) you’re pretty much using what the scientists have discovered to treat your patients,” she says. “But when you get an M.D./Ph.D. you get to do your own research and apply it to your patients. So, it’s a lot longer, but I think it’s worth it. You can have an M.D. and run a lab!”

As she edges to the finish line of her undergraduate degree, Frazer credits the University of New Orleans and its faculty for preparing her for her next career step, and for exposing her to research opportunities that allowed her to broaden those pursuits.

“I think UNO in general gives you a lot of opportunities,” Frazer says. “I’ve gotten to know my teachers and they kind of push you to do things. They are always trying to help you, and I really appreciate that from UNO because I feel like maybe a larger school wouldn’t have given me that opportunity. Here, it’s like you’re able to engage with your teachers a lot more. I can definitely tell they care for you and, academically, it’s prepared me well.” 🍷

*FACING PAGE: University of New Orleans student Dayana Frazer says the University has helped her lay the groundwork for a career in medicine. BELOW: She spent part of her summer at the UMass Medical School working with UNO alumnus Dr. Terence Flotte, the medical school dean.*





# Model United Nations Students Travel to China

By James Mokhiber,  
*DIRECTOR, UNO INTERNATIONAL STUDIES PROGRAM  
AND MODEL UNITED NATIONS ADVISOR*





IN NOVEMBER 2018, ELEVEN students and two advisors from the University of New Orleans traveled to China to take part in a United Nations simulation and conference sponsored by the US-based National Model United Nations organization and local partner National Polytechnical University.

The students were chosen following a rigorous interview and selection process, and assigned to represent the countries of Poland and Turkey.

These students participated in an extensive training process, primarily under the framework of the International Studies 3060 “Model United Nations” course. Typical preparations include study of assigned countries and international issues/topics, UN procedure, structure and history, and a host of skills, including public speaking, collaborative writing and research. This international conference also required students to prepare for travel and cultural exchange in the host country of China itself.

The students arrived in China on Nov. 16 and briefly toured Beijing and visited

Tiananmen Square, the city’s famed hutong alleys and other sites. The following day, the group traveled a portion of the Great Wall at Mu Tian Yu. On Nov. 18, the group took the China railway high-speed train to Xi’an, China, the site of the conference itself.

Local organizers led the group and approximately 300 other students from nine countries on mandatory tours of the terracotta army of first emperor Shi Huangdi, the Xi’an City Walls, and other local sites, including the Drum and Bell Towers and the Muslim Quarter. In this way students came to understand Xi’an, previously known as Chang’an, as both a former Chinese capital and the cosmopolitan endpoint of the Silk Road. Based at the Xi’an Westin hotel, which sits at the center of the New District, the students were literally witnesses to China’s ambitious urban transformation and economic advance through this city of 8.5 million inhabitants.

Over four days, UNO students attended a host of official ceremonies and participated in many hours of UN

simulations. As members of the UN International Development Organization, the UN Economic and Social Committee, the UN General Assembly, and the UN Security Council, they worked alongside approximately 300 other students from around the world.

Each committee was tasked with debating two key issues, ranging from improving the safety of UN peacekeepers to promoting cultural heritage as part of sustainable development. After committee meetings each day, students met for an additional one to two hours for a group debriefing to review the day’s activity and plan for upcoming sessions.

The official closing ceremony took place outside of Xi’an on the campus of Northwestern Polytechnical University on Friday, Nov. 23. At the ceremony, delegation awards were announced, and UNO won an “Honorable Mention” for its representation of Turkey. Students Daniel Lamplugh and Leah Bordlee were recognized as “Outstanding Delegates” within the Security Council itself. 🇹🇷



*FACING PAGE: “Touring the Great Wall of China, members of the UNO delegation to the 2018 Xi’an National Model United Nations conference include (l-r) Leah Bordlee, International Studies Director James Mokhiber, Rehana Ottallah, Daniel Lamplugh, Amanda Mancilla, Nina Balan, Raquel Valencia, Fatima Chaar, Courtney Duwall, Professor John Hazlett, Kathleen Mendoza and Konstanza Krohn Burgos. Not pictured: David Teagle”*  
*INSET, LEFT: Students representing Turkey, including head delegate Rose Ottallah, won “Honorable Mention” at the closing ceremonies, held at Northwestern Polytechnical University.*



ATHLETICS

# *Thrown a Curve*

*Privateers pitcher Eric Orze eyes a comeback after striking out cancer*

BY RO BROWN





ERIC ORZE WAS A BIG-TIME recruit—the kind of pitcher head coach Blake Dean needed in year-three of his quest to return the luster to the University of New Orleans baseball program.

In 2017, the 6-foot-4 righthander recorded 61 strikeouts in 66 innings at Northwest Florida State Junior College in Niceville, Fla.

“We had high expectations for him. He was our number two pitcher behind Bryan (Warzak, who was drafted last year by the Los Angeles Dodgers),” says UNO pitching coach Rudy Darrow. “He showed exactly who we thought he was. But stuff started changing and we didn’t know what it was.”

It was a mystery to Orze as well. He started the 2018 season with a 0-1 record, allowing 15 earned runs in 16 innings for a bloated earned run average of more than 8. It was not what the coaching staff had expected from the Carol Stream, Ill. native.

Orze played through abdominal pain until it reached a point where he could not stand it.

In May, he went to a doctor who performed tests. The diagnosis was terrifying: testicular cancer.

His initial reaction when hearing the news was laughter. When the enormity of the situation sank in, his hands started shaking.

“I’m not the most emotional person, but I cried like a baby,” Orze says. “It was a tough moment for me, but the hardest part was calling my mom. She heard it, but didn’t understand because you don’t expect a 21-year-old to tell you he has cancer.”

Orze says, at first, the diagnosis did not feel real. Eventually, he chose to handle it like a pitcher who has just given up a home run: accept it and try to figure out how to defeat the next hitter.

“I kind of accepted it pretty quickly and said ‘I understand what we need to do,’” shrugs Orze. “Cancer is a pretty big word, but it was probably harder for my family.”

Orze underwent successful surgery in the spring of 2018 and doctors declared him to be cancer-free.


However, doctors found swollen lymph nodes in his abdomen. As a precaution, they performed a second surgery to remove those lymph nodes. Once again, they found no cancer. Unfortunately, this was not the last entry in Orze’s medical chart.

Back home in Illinois last summer, he had trouble breathing. He went to the hospital and while being examined for shortness of breath, a doctor casually mentioned that Orze had a mole on his back and, perhaps, he should have a dermatologist examine it.

He heeded the doctor’s suggestion and a month later, a dermatologist informed him that he had skin cancer. More surgery.

“I had little sections removed from the neck and back,” Orze says. “However, one was melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer. But now I’ve had another check-up and I’m clear of all of that too.”

That’s a total of two cancer diagnoses and three surgeries during the course of three months. Orze says he is certain he made it through 2018 because of the support he received at the University of New Orleans. The business administration major says he was able to conquer cancer with help from his teammates and coaches.

“I think I was meant to come to UNO because of the people I’m around,” he says. “A lot of the guys on the team” 





*Eric Orze says he was able to conquer cancer with help from his teammates and coaches.*

last year who are not here now are still checking up on me all the time. Their families came and helped out. They made sure they were able to get my family down here (to New Orleans) for that first surgery. That was something I never thought I would need, not being the most emotional person.”

This year is a redshirt-senior season for Orze, who will return to the mound for the Privateers in 2020. And while he is not playing this season, you can still find him in the dugout, proudly wearing his number 37 uniform.

He helps his teammates warm up before games and is part of the grounds crew, which is part of being a college baseball player.

He has dreams of playing the game professionally, but he has a more immediate aspiration at the University of New Orleans.

“Being the Friday starter is what I see,” Orze says. “That pitcher is normally your ace. Last year we knew Bryan Warzak was going to go out on Friday and give us six or seven good innings at a minimum. My goal next year is to be that guy for us.”

Darrow, the pitching coach, says Orze is well on his way to reaching that goal.

“This is the best I’ve seen him look in the two years that I’ve known him,” Darrow says. “If he continues to progress the way he has and continues to get his body in shape, there’s no question he’ll pitch on the weekend.”

Certainly, the Privateers pitching staff won’t find anyone more unconquerable.

“For me this was a real kick in the butt saying if you really want to do this (professional baseball), it can be taken away from you at any point,” Orze says. “It makes you put your priorities in line. The little things you stress out about, you get over pretty quick after something like this.”



## *Ron Maestri Inducted to Louisiana Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame* BY KELVIN QUELIZ

LEGENDARY FORMER NEW Orleans Privateers head baseball coach Ron Maestri was inducted into the Louisiana Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame on Jan. 12. Maestri amassed 543 career wins in two stints as head coach of the Privateers.

From 1972-85, Maestri was instrumental in building a strong New Orleans baseball program. He guided the Privateers to two College World Series appearances: 1974 at the Division II level

and 1984 (Division I). Maestri also guided New Orleans to 40 or more wins in six of his last seven years.

Maestri oversaw the team's transition back to Division I upon returning to the Privateer dugout in 2014. In that first year, the Privateers defeated the Louisiana Ragin' Cajuns who were then ranked in the top five nationally. He brought in current head coach Blake Dean as an assistant. The reins were handed to Dean after Maestri retired

following the 2015 season.

On top of his success on the field, many of Maestri's former players have become mainstays in baseball circles. Brian Snitker is currently managing the Atlanta Braves and was National League Manager of the Year in 2018. Paul Mainieri has guided LSU baseball to five College World Series appearances and a national title.

Randy Bush is assistant general manager of the Chicago Cubs and he coached the Privateers

from 2000-05. Bush played in the Majors for 12 seasons with the Minnesota Twins after being drafted in the second round in 1979.

In all, five Privateers from Maestri's tenure made it to the majors: Bush, Eric Rasmussen, Wally Whitehurst, Roger Erickson, and Mark Higgins.

Maestri was joined in the 2019 Hall of Fame class by Wilbert Ellis, Jeff Schexnaider, Ronnie Coker, David Moreau and Reginald Lambright. 🍷



## New Endowed Scholarship

*Finance professor Tarun Mukherjee establishes scholarship to honor parents, recruit students*

TARUN MUKHERJEE, WHO has spent nearly four decades as a faculty member at the University of New Orleans, has established a scholarship in honor of his parents. The Kali Charan Mukherjee Endowed Scholarship in Finance is a renewable \$1,000 a year scholarship for students majoring in finance.

Mukherjee was one of 10 children born into a middle class family in India. His parents, who are deceased, sacrificed a great deal to see that he and his siblings received the best education that the family could afford, he says.

“They inculcated in all of their children that education was the most valuable asset of all,” Mukherjee says. “The award is a very small way to pay tribute to all the sacrifices they made so that their children are where they are in their lives.”

Mukherjee, whose primary expertise is in corporate finance, says the scholarship is designed as a recruiting tool for the University, specifically the Department of Economics and Finance in the College of Business Administration to attract high-achieving students.

“This particular award is a small but viable way to accomplish this objective,” he says. “Albeit, the process is going to be slow, but it will go a long way if we are able to create, say 100 such awards, all over the campus.”

Mukherjee has been at the

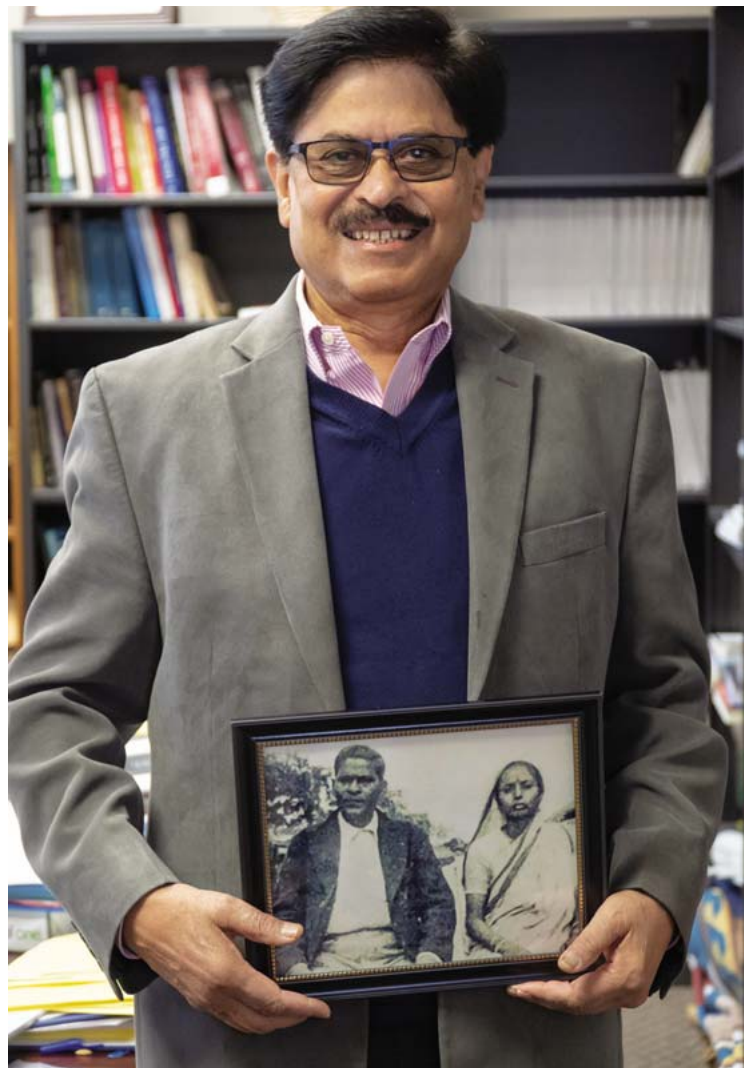
University since 1981, and describes his landing in the finance field as “simply accidental.” He majored in history in India and planned to earn a Ph.D in the subject. However, the university where his oldest brother was teaching didn’t offer a doctorate. He ended up in an MBA program and received a Ph.D in finance from Texas Tech, he says.

“I now realize that finance was always my destiny because I am getting paid for something that I totally enjoy,” Mukherjee says. “Besides, finance is the ultimate bottom line of almost all decisions we make as an individual, business or government”

To be eligible for the scholarship students must be a first-semester freshman who has enrolled full-time at the University and have:

- An ACT score of at least 24 or SAT score of at 1260
- A 3.0 GPA or higher
- First-semester freshman with declared major in finance
- Submit an essay on why they’ve chosen to pursue a degree in finance

The scholarship award of \$500 will be given at the start of the fall and spring semesters and is renewable for eight

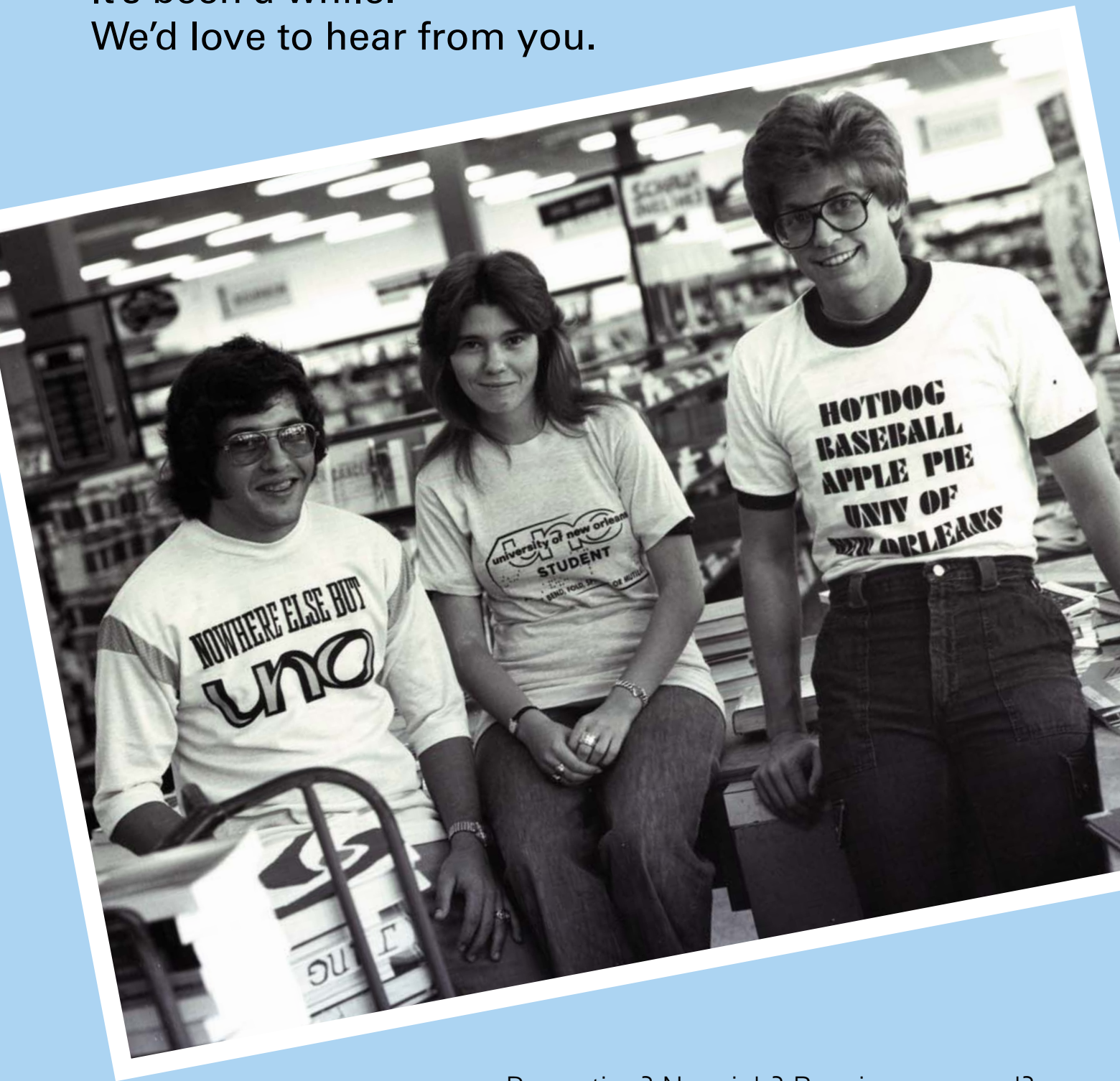


undergraduate semesters, excluding summer sessions. Students must maintain at least a 3.0 GPA and remain a finance major.

The College of Business Administration scholarship selection committee will choose the recipient. 🇮🇳

*Tarun Mukherjee, whose primary expertise is in corporate finance, has established the Kali Charan Mukherjee Endowed Scholarship in Finance for University of New Orleans students. The scholarship is named in honor of his parents, who are deceased. Mukherjee is holding a picture of his parents.*

It's been a while.  
We'd love to hear from you.



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# ALUM NOTES

## Mark Romig (B.S., '78)

*Mark Romig, president and CEO of New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corp. and stadium announcer for the New Orleans Saint at the*

*Mercedes-Benz Superdome, is the recipient of the 2019 Ella Brenna Lifetime Achievement in Hospitality Award made by the New Orleans Wine & Food Experience. Romig, who has been called the unofficial "Ambassador for New Orleans," because of his tireless work in promoting the city of New Orleans, was feted at a gala at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel.*

*Romig is a graduate of Brother Martin High School and holds a bachelor's degree in hotel, restaurant and tourism administration. In 2016, he received the University's Homer L. Hitt Distinguished Alumni Award.*



## Susan Hess (B.A., '67)

Susan Hess of New Orleans was honored by the New Orleans National Council of Jewish Women for her advocacy leadership. She is the recipient of the Hannah G. Solomon Award which is awarded to an individual who demonstrates leadership through activism. Hess's volunteerism includes work with the NCJW, The UNO Foundation, SPCA, City Park and the National World War II Museum. She holds a bachelor's in English from the University of New Orleans.

## Peggy Scott Laborde (B.A., '75)

Peggy Scott Laborde, along with her husband and fellow University of New Orleans alum, Errol Laborde, held a book signing to discuss their book "New Orleans: The First 300 Years." Laborde also produced the television program "New Orleans: The First 300 Years" for WYES and is producing 200 short "Tricentennial Moments" in recognition of the city of New Orleans' 300th-year birthday.

## Charles Venus (B.S., '75, M.B.A., '83)

Charles Venus has been

appointed as vice president of middle market and specialty by Iroquois Group, an insurance agency network. Venus previously was the commercial lines leader for Brown & Brown of Virginia. He holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry and a master's in business from the University of New Orleans.

## Edward Kennedy, Jr. (B.S., '76)

Edward Kennedy, Jr. of Miami, Fla., has retired after 38 years as a commercial lines insurance premium auditor. After traveling with his wife, Elaine, Ed hopes to launch a second career as a teacher/researcher in Latin American political economy. Ed holds a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of New Orleans and an MBA from Florida International University. He is pursuing a second master's degree from FIU in Latin American and Caribbean studies.

## Leon Mathes (B.S., '76, M.S., '84)

Leon Mathes has been appointed chief financial officer for Edward Hynes Charter School in New Orleans. Mathes had served as a vice president for finance at Loyola University since 2017. He began his career with Arthur Andersen & Co. as a staff auditor before serving as director of internal auditing at Loyola from 1982 to 2000.

Mathes earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

## Philip Gunn (B.S., '79)

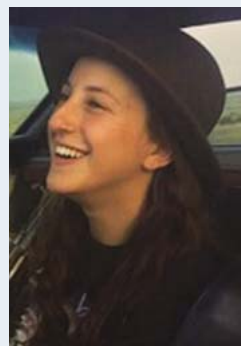
Philip Gunn, managing director at Postlethwaite & Netterville, APAC in New Orleans, was recognized by *New Orleans CityBusiness* as a top financial professional as part of its annual

## UNO FILM GRADS EARN FILM GRANT AWARD

University of New Orleans film program alumni **Bruno Doria** (B.A., '11) and **Lizzie Guitreau** (B.A., '14) created a feature documentary through their production company, Worklight Pictures, about the Cajun music band Lost Bayou Ramblers which won the 2018 French Culture Film Grant from Create Louisiana. The award carried a \$30,000 prize. The film, called "On Va Continuer!" premiered at the 22nd Annual New Orleans French Film Festival on Feb. 17th.



Bruno Doria



Lizzie Guitreau

## UNO ALUMNI-LED SCHOOLS NOMINATED FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION AWARD

Three public high schools in Jefferson Parish are among the six nominated by the Louisiana Department of Education as 2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools. All three are led by alumni of the University of New Orleans' M.Ed. program in Educational Administration.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, which is managed by the U.S. Department of Education, honors schools that are either high-performing or have closed achievement gaps, especially among minority or disadvantaged students.

The high schools, which are considered some of the state's highest performing schools as measured by state assessment tests, are led by **Karla Russo**, (M.Ed., 2010), principal at Haynes Academy; **Jaime Zapico**, (M.Ed., 2004), principal at Patrick Taylor

Science and Technology and **Andrew Vincent**, (M.Ed., 2010), principal at Thomas Jefferson Academy.



Karla Russo



Jaime Zapico



Andrew Vincent

Money Makers class of 2018 and was named to the Money Makers Hall of Fame, which happens after a third year of recognition. Gunn holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

### Gay Polk-Payton-White (B.S., '81)

Gay Polk-Payton-White has been hired as the new municipal judge pro-tem in Hattiesburg, Miss. Polk-Payton-White, who was hired in January, was later sworn into the office by the mayor during a Hattiesburg City Council meeting. She earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

### Errol Laborde (Ph.D., '83)

Errol Laborde, along with his wife and fellow University of New Orleans alum, Peggy Scott Laborde, held a book signing to discuss their book "New Orleans: The First 300 Years." Laborde received a doctorate in political science from the University of New Orleans.

### James Breeden (B.A., '86)

James Breeden's novel, "Painting Angela," won the 2018 Gas Station Pulp Award sponsored by the *North American Review*. The crime novel takes place in New Orleans and will be published by the North American Review Press in 2019. Breeden holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans.

### Hollie Gilbert-Arangio (B.S., '88)

Hollie Gilbert-Arangio has been hired as vice president, field marketing for Hilton Grand Vacations, Inc. She was previously vice president of retail marketing for Bluegreen Vacation Corp in Delray Beach, Fla. Gilbert holds a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of New Orleans.

### Brent Brooks (B.A., '90)

Brent Jeffrey Brooks has been elected chair of the Adams and Reese LLP's executive committee. Brooks holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of New Orleans.

### Amber Howell (M.A., '91)

Amber Howell, a licensed practical nurse, has been hired by Avanti Senior Living of Covington, La. as director of Salize Memory Care. Howell earned a master of arts degree from the University of New Orleans.

### Courtney Millet (M.Ed., '91, Ph.D., '00)

Courtney Millet has been hired as the principal of St. Charles Catholic High School for 2019-2020 school year. Millet holds a bachelor's of science degree in education from Louisiana State University and a master's of education in educational leadership and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from the University of New Orleans.

### Mark Cheek (B.S., '93)

Mark Cheek has been selected to serve on the American Concrete Institute's Board of Direction. The appointment is for three years. Cheek is vice presidents of The Beta Group, Engineering and Construction Services in Gretna, La.; he earned a bachelor's degree in engineering from the University of New Orleans.

### Flozell Daniels, Jr. (B.A., '94)

Flozell Daniels, Jr., has been named chairman of the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority. Daniels holds a bachelor's degree in biological sciences.

### Patrick Gros (B.S., '94)

Patrick Gros, president of Patrick J. Gros, CPA APAC in Covington, La., was recognized by *New Orleans CityBusiness* magazine as a top financial professional as part of its annual Money Makers class of 2018 and was named to the Money Makers Hall of Fame, which happens after a third year of recognition. Gros holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

### Derek Gardes (B.S., '95)

Derek Gardes, chief financial officer at Ryan Gootee General Contractors in Metairie, La., was recognized by *New Orleans CityBusiness* magazine as a top financial professional as part of its annual Money Makers class of 2018 and was named to the Money Makers Hall of Fame, which happens after a third year

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

### Emily Thompson (B.A., '95)

Emily Thompson has joined the Office of Medical Student Education at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis as the director of educational technology and

innovation. She will support the medical program's curriculum renewal process. Thompson earned a bachelor's degree in English from the University of New Orleans.

### Chris Costello (B.S., '00)

Chris Costello, vice president/asset based lending at Capital One N.A., was recognized by *New Orleans CityBusiness* →

## Lowell "Chris" Hazel (B.A., '90)

Lowell "Chris" Hazel, a former Louisiana state representative for District 27, has been elected to the 9th Judicial District Court, Division B in Rapides Parish.

Hazel, who was elected Nov. 6, 2018, will preside over civil, criminal and juvenile proceedings.

Prior to being elected to the judiciary, Hazel spent 11 years as a state representative for

District 27. He resigned that position after being elected district judge.

Hazel earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from the University of New Orleans.





magazine as a top financial professional as part of its annual Money Makers class of 2018 and was named to the Money Makers Hall of Fame, which happens after a third year of recognition.

Costello earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

**Ken Keller (M.B.A., '01)**

Ken Keller has been named the new president and CEO of Dignity Health Memorial Hospital in Bakersfield, Calif. Prior to his promotion Keller was the chief operating officer for the hospital.

Keller also served as vice president of physician and business development at the hospital. In that role he developed and implemented business plans to grow facility volume and revenue, recruited and retained physicians on the medical staff, evaluated and advanced professional relationships to improve hospital profitability, and improved revenue to over \$220 million and income to over \$27 million within a four year period. He also served as the hospital lead on a project to build an 80,000 sq. ft. medical office building.

Keller serves as board chair of the American Heart As-

**Dr. Keith C. Ferdinand (B.S., '72)**

*Dr. Keith Ferdinand, a cardiologist at Tulane University School of Medicine, has been appointed to the Gerald S. Berenson Endowed Chair in Preventive Cardiology.*

*Dr. Ferdinand's focus is on cardiac risk factor evaluation and control, including hypertension and hyperlipidemia, especially in communities of racial and ethnic minorities. Ferdinand has been heavily involved in many national organizations concerned with public health, including the Association of Black Cardiologists, of which he was the former chair and chief science officer, the American Society of Hypertension, and the Healthy Heart Community Prevention Program, a cardiovascular risk program targeting African American and other high-risk populations.*

*He is also past chair of the National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, which provides the leadership and encouragement for collaboration among more than 65 organizations.*

*Ferdinand earned a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of New Orleans.*



**Christina Francis (M.B.A., '93)**

*Christina Francis, has been promoted to president of Magic Johnson Enterprises in Los Angeles, the company founded by former NBA and Lakers playmaker Earvin "Magic" Johnson.*

*Francis, who joined the company in 2014 as senior vice president of marketing and communications, will be responsible for overseeing the daily business operations, including strategy and managing many of the organizations partnerships.*

*Francis had worked with Johnson previously when she led a national advertising and promotional campaigns at UniWorld Group.*

*Her selection to head Johnson Enterprises follows several stints at other high profile companies, such as NFL Players Inc., where she had been vice president of marketing and events, and chief marketing officer for the Orange Bowl Committee.*



sociation and is on the board of directors for Ronald McDonald House Charities Bakersfield. He holds a master's degree in business administration with a focus on health care from the University of New Orleans and a bachelor's in pre-medicine from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

**Vanessa Baughman (M.B.A., '02)**

Vanessa Baughman has been hired as the chief financial officer, VP of Finance, for AgReliant Genetics, and will lead the financial and administration departments. She will be responsible for the overall accounting and finance function of the organization including treasury, tax, related policies and procedures, and financial information systems.

Baughman has a bachelor's in accounting from Our Lady of Holy Cross and a master's in business administration from the University of New Orleans.

**Jericho Brown (M.F.A., '02)**

Jericho Brown, who is an associate professor and the director of the Creative Writing

Program at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., was among the 32 writers highlighted by *The New York Times* in an article about impactful literature created by black authors. Brown, who earned an MFA in creative writing from the University of New Orleans, is featured in the article "Black Male Writers for Our Time."

The article, which was published Nov. 30, described how the selected group of American writers "and their peers are producing literature that is essential to how we understand our country and its place in the world right now."

Brown has authored three books. His most recent book, "The Tradition," was published in April by Copper Canyon Press.

**Rickie Dufrene (B.S., '02)**

Rickie Dufrene, commercial lender, has joined Gulf Coast Bank's Gretna, La. branch. He has 15 years banking experience and earned a bachelor's degree in marketing and business administration from the University of New Orleans.

**Matt Nani (B.S., '07)**

Matt Nani has been hired as a project engineer by Elliott Bay Design Group (EBDG) to join its naval architects and engineers. He will be responsible for the initiation, management and execution of diverse projects and will be based in Seattle.

Nani, whose technical expertise includes structural design and assessment, hydrodynamic and vessel motions assessments, and stability analyses, holds a bachelor's in naval architecture and marine engineering from the University of New Orleans.

**Gabrielle Reisman (B.A., '08)**

Gabrielle Reisman's production "Flood City," premiered at the The Anacostia Playhouse in Washington, D.C. Reisman,

a playwright and director, is a founding member of Underbelly, a theatre collaborative that stages immersive journey-plays. Her plays have received a Rosa Parks Award from The Kennedy Center. She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of New Orleans and a master's from the University of Texas at Austin.

**Tina Stewart, (B.S., '09)**

Tina Stewart has been appointed treasurer for the Veterans Recovery Resources board of directors in Mobile, Ala. The nonprofit organization serves military veterans and their families. Stewart, a certified public accountant, is a manager with Carr, Riggs & Ingram, LLC and specializes in government and nonprofit public account-

ing. Stewart earned bachelor's degrees in accounting and mathematics from the University of New Orleans.

**Joseph Esposito (B.S., '09)**

Joseph Esposito has joined the Dallas office of the national law firm Polsinelli as an associate in the Corporate and Transactional practice. Esposito has experience representing clients on general corporate and transactional matters, ranging from formation, operation and governance issues to joint venture relationships and private investment vehicles. He earned a J.D. from the Southern Methodist University Dedman Law School and a bachelor's degree in finance from the University of New Orleans.

**Katherine Lemoine (M.Ed., '10)**

Katherine Lemoine, director of development at Nunez Community College in Arabi, La., was awarded the inaugural President's Award for Excellence in Teaching by the Louisiana Community and Technical College System for 2018. The award is given to one educator statewide who represents the best practices for all of the community and technical colleges in Louisiana.

In addition to this prestigious award, Lemoine also was awarded \$5,000 to honor her outstanding service and commitment to her students and community.

Lemoine holds a bachelor's and master's degree in education from the University of New Orleans. She is enrolled in its Ph.D. program for educational administration.

**Kyle S. Youngberg (B.S., '10)**

Kyle S. Youngberg, a certified public accountant, has been promoted to tax manager II at Kushner LaGraize LLC. Youngberg holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.

**Tarani Duncan (B.A., '14)**

Tarani Duncan, who earned a bachelor's degree in planning and urban studies, was featured in a *Forbes* magazine article about how her strategic skills help lead

**Chanel C. Davis (B.S., '96)**

*Chanel Christoff Davis was recognized as a 2018 Power 15 Award honoree presented by Walker's Legacy, a global platform for the professional and entrepreneurial multicultural woman. The Walker's Legacy*

*Dallas Power 15 Awards program was presented in partnership with AARP and the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) to recognize the achievements of notable business*

*women and community leaders.*

*Davis is a founding partner of Davis Davis & Harmon LLC., which specializes in sales tax refund recovery, audit defense, training and legal research. As President/CEO, Davis manages client relations and the daily operations of the firm.*

*Davis, a 2018 WBE Who Rock Award winner and Women's Business Enterprise Rising Star Nominee, also launched an inspirational podcast, "Follow the Leader," that features dynamic women entrepreneurs who share their journeys to becoming a success in business. The private awards dinner program was held in Dallas on November 30, 2018.*

*Davis earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of New Orleans.*



**Robin Martin (B.A., '94, M.Ed., '09)**

*Robin Martin, deputy director of postsecondary success at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and former provost and professor at the University of Cincinnati, has released a new book called "Navigating Courage: A Black Woman's Journey in Athletics and Academia."*

*She is CEO/Founder of Leading Beyond the Post, Inc., a full-service leadership development and executive coaching consulting company aimed at helping leaders and organizations get "unstuck" by translating corporate strategy into individualized leadership development.*

*She has more than 20 years of experience in higher education, including stints as an associate provost for diversity and inclusion at the University of Cincinnati. Martin earned a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in education from the University of New Orleans, and a doctorate in urban education and leadership from the University of Cincinnati.*



ride-share giant Uber to acquire a bike-share company. Duncan, whose focus at the University of New Orleans was transportation and geographic information systems, currently splits her time between Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, where she is the product manager of logistics at Mapbox, a provider of online custom maps.

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

Bryan Washington, a graduate from the University of New Orleans' Creative Writing Workshop (CWW), has published his debut book, "Lot," and has been named one of *Publishers Weekly*

"Writers to Watch Spring 2019."

Washington's book, published by Riverhead Publishing in March, is a collection of short stories set in his hometown of Houston, Texas. *Entertainment Weekly* and LitHub both named "Lot" to its list of anticipated books of 2019.

Washington's fiction and essays have appeared in a variety of publications, including *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *BuzzFeed*, *Vulture*, *The Paris Review*, *Boston Review*, and *Catapult*, where he wrote a column called "Bayou Diaries." 🐾



## FRITZ DOHSE, FOUNDING DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

FRITZ DOHSE, THE founding dean of the University of New Orleans College of Engineering, passed away at his home near Freiburg, Germany on Aug. 12, 2018 at the age of 93.

Dohse arrived on campus in the spring of 1960. The campus was primarily composed of buildings inherited from the old naval air base. He was one of two instructors responsible for teaching courses in the engineering technology curriculum. From this humble beginning, Dohse worked tirelessly for the next 24 years to build the University's College of Engineering.

Dohse was born in Göttingen, Germany on Feb. 2, 1925. He grew up during difficult times ex-

periencing Nazi rule and the war. Shortly after being drafted into the German Army in 1943, he caught



Fritz Dohse

typhoid fever and later developed tuberculosis. In 1945 he was a prisoner in the Russian-occupied sector of Germany, but managed to escape to the West. He survived the next few years despite chronic food shortages and severe poverty.

In 1950, through the generosity of an American friend, Waldo Dunnington, Dohse was given the opportunity to study in the United States. After completing his master's degree at LSU, he accepted a teaching position at the Baton Rouge campus, and was among the first faculty to teach on the New Orleans campus. He later took time off to earn a doctoral degree from

the University of Illinois before returning to New Orleans.

He helped design a bachelor's degree program in engineering sciences, which the school implemented in 1965. The program was administered through the Department of Engineering Sciences within the College of Sciences; in 1971, a master of science was offered. The department was elevated to a School of Engineering in 1973 and, in 1980, the school became a fully accredited College of Engineering with three different degree options serving 600 students. In 1981, a new program in naval architecture and marine engineering joined the mechanical, electrical and civil engineering degree programs in the College of Engineering.

Dohse worked with local businesses to ensure that the

program remained relevant to their needs, and he helped develop cooperative agreements with minority-serving colleges of the region to build educational pathways so that more students could earn engineering degrees. His final achievement was to help secure the funds for the engineering building that still stands prominently on the campus.

Dohse is survived by his wife, Helga Dohse, his three sons and their wives: Till and Michele Dohse, Hans and Monika Dohse, and Dirk and Renate Dohse; and six grandchildren: Sonja, Katja, Stefan, Lukas, Nils and Mirko.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks for donations to the "Founding Dean's Award Endowment," a scholarship that supports African-American students pursuing engineering.

## PROFESSOR J. STEPHEN HANK, THE 'FATHER OF THE FILM PROGRAM'

JAMES STEPHEN HANK, whose influence on film students at the University of New Orleans spanned four decades, died Oct. 5, 2018, at the age of 72. Hank arrived at UNO in 1978 and helped build the University's highly regarded film program before retiring in 2011.

"He was the father of the film program here at UNO and he taught hundreds if not thousands of alumni while a professor for over 30 years," said professor Hamp Overton, director of the film program at UNO.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, Hank graduated with a degree in history from Miami University of Ohio; then joined the United States Peace Corps. He served for two years in Swaziland in southern Africa, building schools and water supply systems. He made

his first movie, "Bingelela", for the Peace Corps to introduce new volunteers to the country.



J. Stephen Hank

When he returned to the U.S., he became a commercial still photographer, and then earned an MFA in film production and theory from Ohio University. He came to New Orleans in 1978 to teach at the University of New Or-

leans, fell in love with the city and never left. He was a professor of film production at UNO until his retirement in 2011.

Hank was instrumental in building the nationally recognized program in filmmaking at UNO that has produced countless film industry professionals and independent filmmakers. He also inspired many of his students to become accomplished teachers themselves. A screenwriter, cinematographer, director, editor

and producer, Hank made more than two dozen short films, most of them crewed by his students at UNO, and won awards at national and international film festivals.

His narrative films include "The Limner" (Best Southern Dramatic Film at the IMAGE Film Festival in Atlanta in 1986) and "The Widow Paris" (Teddy Solomon Award for Best Southern Film at the New Orleans Film Festival in 1992).

He made promotional films for nonprofits including "One to One" for United Cerebral Palsy of Louisiana, "Kumbuka" for the Kumbuka African Drum and Dance Collective (selected for "Louisiana: A Filmmaker's Paradise" by the Louisiana Division of the Arts in 1995) and "Touch the Earth" for the Dayton Museum of Natural History. He also created "The Hold-Up", an educational film and editing exercise that is used by film schools around the

country. Hank received the UNO Alumni Association Excellence in Teaching Award in 2008.

"Steve was the consummate filmmaker," said Kevin Graves, senior associate dean in the College of Liberal Arts, Education and Human Development, and professor of film and theatre. "He greatly influenced and mentored hundreds of students over the years. He held his students' work in the highest regard and, in some cases, above his own."

Hank is survived by his wife Lista Christopher Hank; brother John L. Hank (Jean); sister Vickie Kreider (Nick); sister-in-law Donna Christopher; brothers-in-law Irvin Christopher (Yuan Tian) and Keith Christopher (Christine Sauer); nieces Zoe Christopher, Ariel Christopher and Rachael Kreider; nephews Jason Kreider, Alex Kreider and Jessie Kreider; and his beagle, Charlie.

# Homer L. Hitt Society

Since its beginning, the University of New Orleans' mission has been to provide excellent and accessible education to a diverse student body. Our success has been due to those who guided the University from its humble origin in 1958 to the dynamic institution it is today.

The first chancellor of the University of New Orleans, Homer L. Hitt, was a true visionary. His impact on the institution is unequalled and his name is now reserved to recognize those individuals who annually give to the University at the \$10K+ level. As members of the Homer L. Hitt Society, donors demonstrate their exceptional vision and significant investment in the University of New Orleans as they continue to honor Dr. Hitt's legacy. Visit [unoalumni.com/thank-you](http://unoalumni.com/thank-you) to see a current list of Homer L. Hitt Society donors.

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# THEN AND NOW



## Trunk Show

IN THE LATE 1970S MAZIAR PARTO was studying civil engineering at the University of New Orleans and, as students are wont to do, he posed for a picture, casually leaning on a tree with the University Center as a backdrop.

In October 2018, Parto, now living in Toronto, Canada, returned for a campus visit. And as alumni are wont to do, he posed for a picture.

The two photos, taken in the same spot four decades apart, provide a snapshot in time from which we can see the University's growth reflected in the circumference of that one tree.





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