

NOCCA  
Board of Directors Meeting  
September 10, 2025 5:00 pm  
NOCCA Library  
Agenda

- I. Call to Order
- II. Roll Call
- III. Approval of May 28, 2025 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes and May 28, 2025 Personnel Committee Meeting Minutes  
– **Action**
- IV. Student Services (Ms. Prinsey Walker)
  - a. Statewide outreach
  - b. Experience NOCCA
  - c. Other
- V. Finance and Operations (Vice Chair Ricks & Ms. Anna Schwab)
  - a. Certificated and Support Staff Stipends - **Action**
  - b. Budget
  - c. Audit update
- VI. Arts and Academics (Dr. Kit Nelson and Ms. Kesha McKey)
  - a. Faculty certification – **Action**
  - b. Other
- VII. NOCCA Foundation
  - a. Introduction of Mr. Adonis Rose, NOCCA Foundation Executive Director
  - b. Report
- VIII. Board Chair
  - a. Other
- IX. President/CEO
  - a. Board of Directors Handbook
  - b. NOCCA's Strategic Plan
  - c. Introduction of Mr. Jay Altman, Center for Sustainable Leadership
  - d. Other
- X. Public Comment
- XI. Remarks/Other Business
- XII. Adjourn

Louisiana Boards and Commissions <https://wwwcfprd.doa.louisiana.gov/boardsandcommissions/home.cfm>

Remaining Meetings 2025-26

November 12, 2025 - 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

January 28, 2026 - 5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

March 25, 2026 - 1:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. (Retreat)

May 13, 2026 - 3:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. (Personnel Committee)

May 13, 2026 - 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

NOCCA  
Board of Directors Meeting  
May 28, 2025

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Dr. Rachel T. Davis-Haley  
Mr. Wood Delahoussaye  
Ms. Janice R. Manuel  
Dr. Joe Ricks  
Mr. Gary Solomon  
Mr. Mark-Anthony Thomas  
Mr. Stephen Weber  
Ms. Robin Williams  
Mr. Carlos Zervigon

EXCUSED:

Ms. Rhenea Carter  
Ms. Beth Scioneaux

EX-OFFICIO:

Mr. Silas Cooper

CALL TO ORDER

Board President, Mr. Gary Solomon, called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll was taken. There were nine members present. A quorum was present.

Mr. Carlos Zervigon made a motion to amend the agenda to add an action item on the Board Chair report dealing with the President/CEO compensation based on the Personnel Committee report. Ms. Janice Manuel seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Wood Delahoussaye moved to approve the NOCCA Board of Directors Meeting Minutes of March 26, 2025. Ms. Manuel seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.

STUDENT SERVICES

Ms. Prinsey Walker, Director of Community Engagement, described the success of Senior Saturday, Homecoming, Graduation and Celebration. The Homecoming event was the first ever. Mr. Blake Coheley, Director of Student Services and Admissions, shared a breakdown of how the required days in the school calendar are calculated, including the built-in margin of days to put back on the calendar if we lose days to weather, etc. Mr. Coheley also provided the 2024-25 EOY Enrollment Statistics showing that NOCCA was able to serve a total of 2,497 students in the following programs: Auditioned Students, 2024 Summer Off Campus Enrollment, Off-Campus Non-Credit Workshop Enrollment, and On Campus Non-Credit Workshop Enrollment. Dr. Joe Ricks asked if the Board could also see the parish-by-parish breakdown of all those programs in future presentations.

#### FINANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Ms. Anna Schwab, Deputy CFO, reported that the budget was on pace for this time of year. Ms. Schwab also spoke of Operations Goals in the newly purchased Chevron Forum such as upgrading security to match the main campus, upgrading hardware and software in the HVAC systems, improvements in Science classrooms venting, and considering roll-down gating.

#### ARTS AND ACADEMICS (Dr. Kit Nelson and Ms. Kesha McKey)

Dr. Kit Nelson and Ms. Kesha McKey presented the Student and Parent Handbook for 2025-26. The Board was guided to the pages with updates from the previously approved handbook for review.

- Discussion ensued regarding wording of the dress code updates. Dr. Nelson and Ms. McKey agreed to update the verbiage being discussed.
- Mr. Solomon asked for the NOCCA Policy on Interactions with Law Enforcement and Immigration Authorities to be sent to the Board.
- Much discussion ensued regarding the updates to the Process for Reentry after a student has been recommended for expulsion. The board asked to revert to the prior, previously approved Process for Reentry to replace the updates, with the understanding that more time was needed to review the process.

Dr. Ricks made a motion to move to Executive Session. Mr. Mark-Anthony Thomas seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried. The Executive Session started at 6:14 p.m. Mr. Delahoussaye motioned to return to Regular Session. Dr. Ricks seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried. The Board moved back to Regular Session at 6:40 p.m.

Mr. Thomas motioned to approve the Student and Parent Handbook for 2025-26 with the following exceptions: 1) Give staff the prerogative to edit the second bullet to clarify the wording, and 2) the Process of Reentry will revert to current version prior to the updates. Ms. Robin Williams seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Dr. Nelson reported 100% graduation rate of NOCCA Academic Studio students and Ms. McKey reported a total of \$47 million in gift aid offers to NOCCA seniors.

#### NOCCA FOUNDATION

Mr. Adonis Rose was unable to attend.

#### BOARD PRESIDENT REPORT

Ms. Janice Manuel reported on the Personnel Committee meeting held just prior to this board meeting. The Committee met with Mr. Cooper to review the annual President/CEO Evaluations. They agreed to continue the conversation into the following year to develop some actionable steps.

Mr. Solomon explained that the President/CEO contract allows for adjustment to the compensation annually at the discretion of the Personnel Committee and the Board. following the President/CEO Evaluation review. The Personnel Committee recommended that Mr. Cooper's salary is increased by 3%,

commensurate with the salary increases of the full time faculty. Ms. Rachel Davis-Haley made a motion to increase Mr. Cooper's salary by 3% effective August 4, 2025. Dr. Ricks seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Mr. Solomon asked for a motion to approve the Board Resolution authorizing NOCCA to enter into a contract with Adams & Reese for legal services. Compensation for these services not to exceed \$50,000 for the period from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026. Mr. Delahoussaye motioned to authorize Mr. Solomon to enter into this contract with Adams & Reese. Ms. Davis-Haley seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

PRESIDENT/CEO

Mr. Cooper spoke of the testimony he and Ms. Schwab made to Senate Finance and House Appropriations that was received very well by these committees. They received much positive feedback after the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Solomon asked for public comment. There was none.

REMARKS/OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Solomon asked for any closing remarks or other business. None was offered.

ADJOURN

Dr. Ricks made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Delahoussaye seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at p.m.

Submitted by:

Reviewed by:

Attest:

Leigh Traylor  
Recording Secretary

Silas Cooper  
Secretary to the Board

Gary Solomon  
President of the Board

Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

NOCCA  
Board of Directors Meeting  
May 28, 2025

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Dr. Rachel T. Davis-Haley  
Mr. Wood Delahoussaye  
Ms. Janice R. Manuel  
Dr. Joe Ricks  
Mr. Gary Solomon  
Mr. Mark-Anthony Thomas  
Mr. Stephen Weber  
Ms. Robin Williams  
Mr. Carlos Zervigon

EXCUSED:

Ms. Rhenea Carter  
Ms. Beth Scioneaux

EX-OFFICIO:

Mr. Silas Cooper

CALL TO ORDER

Board President, Mr. Gary Solomon, called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll was taken. There were nine members present. A quorum was present.

Mr. Carlos Zervigon made a motion to amend the agenda to add an action item on the Board Chair report dealing with the President/CEO compensation based on the Personnel Committee report. Ms. Janice Manuel seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Wood Delahoussaye moved to approve the NOCCA Board of Directors Meeting Minutes of March 26, 2025. Ms. Manuel seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.

STUDENT SERVICES

Ms. Prinsey Walker, Director of Community Engagement, described the success of Senior Saturday, Homecoming, Graduation and Celebration. The Homecoming event was the first ever. Mr. Blake Coheley, Director of Student Services and Admissions, shared a breakdown of how the required days in the school calendar are calculated, including the built-in margin of days to put back on the calendar if we lose days to weather, etc. Mr. Coheley also provided the 2024-25 EOY Enrollment Statistics showing that NOCCA was able to serve a total of 2,497 students in the following programs: Auditioned Students, 2024 Summer Off Campus Enrollment, Off-Campus Non-Credit Workshop Enrollment, and On Campus Non-Credit Workshop Enrollment. Dr. Joe Ricks asked if the Board could also see the parish-by-parish breakdown of all those programs in future presentations.

#### FINANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Ms. Anna Schwab, Deputy CFO, reported that the budget was on pace for this time of year. Ms. Schwab also spoke of Operations Goals in the newly purchased Chevron Forum such as upgrading security to match the main campus, upgrading hardware and software in the HVAC systems, improvements in Science classrooms venting, and considering roll-down gating.

#### ARTS AND ACADEMICS (Dr. Kit Nelson and Ms. Kesha McKey)

Dr. Kit Nelson and Ms. Kesha McKey presented the Student and Parent Handbook for 2025-26. The Board was guided to the pages with updates from the previously approved handbook for review.

- Discussion ensued regarding wording of the dress code updates. Dr. Nelson and Ms. McKey agreed to update the verbiage being discussed.
- Mr. Solomon asked for the NOCCA Policy on Interactions with Law Enforcement and Immigration Authorities to be sent to the Board.
- Much discussion ensued regarding the updates to the Process for Reentry after a student has been recommended for expulsion. The board asked to revert to the prior, previously approved Process for Reentry to replace the updates, with the understanding that more time was needed to review the process.

Dr. Ricks made a motion to move to Executive Session. Mr. Mark-Anthony Thomas seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried. The Executive Session started at 6:14 p.m. Mr. Delahoussaye motioned to return to Regular Session. Dr. Ricks seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried. The Board moved back to Regular Session at 6:40 p.m.

Mr. Thomas motioned to approve the Student and Parent Handbook for 2025-26 with the following exceptions: 1) Give staff the prerogative to edit the second bullet to clarify the wording, and 2) the Process of Reentry will revert to current version prior to the updates. Ms. Robin Williams seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Dr. Nelson reported 100% graduation rate of NOCCA Academic Studio students and Ms. McKey reported a total of \$47 million in gift aid offers to NOCCA seniors.

#### NOCCA FOUNDATION

Mr. Adonis Rose was unable to attend.

#### BOARD PRESIDENT REPORT

Ms. Janice Manuel reported on the Personnel Committee meeting held just prior to this board meeting. The Committee met with Mr. Cooper to review the annual President/CEO Evaluations. They agreed to continue the conversation into the following year to develop some actionable steps.

Mr. Solomon explained that the President/CEO contract allows for adjustment to the compensation annually at the discretion of the Personnel Committee and the Board. following the President/CEO Evaluation review. The Personnel Committee recommended that Mr. Cooper's salary is increased by 3%,

commensurate with the salary increases of the full time faculty. Ms. Rachel Davis-Haley made a motion to increase Mr. Cooper's salary by 3% effective August 4, 2025. Dr. Ricks seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Mr. Solomon asked for a motion to approve the Board Resolution authorizing NOCCA to enter into a contract with Adams & Reese for legal services. Compensation for these services not to exceed \$50,000 for the period from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026. Mr. Delahoussaye motioned to authorize Mr. Solomon to enter into this contract with Adams & Reese. Ms. Davis-Haley seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried.

PRESIDENT/CEO

Mr. Cooper spoke of the testimony he and Ms. Schwab made to Senate Finance and House Appropriations that was received very well by these committees. They received much positive feedback after the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Solomon asked for public comment. There was none.

REMARKS/OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Solomon asked for any closing remarks or other business. None was offered.

ADJOURN

Dr. Ricks made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Delahoussaye seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at p.m.

Submitted by:

Reviewed by:

Attest:

Leigh Traylor  
Recording Secretary

Silas Cooper  
Secretary to the Board

Gary Solomon  
President of the Board

Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

NOCCA  
Board of Directors  
Personnel Committee Meeting  
May 28, 2025

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Ms. Rachel Davis-Haley  
Ms. Janice Manuel  
Mr. Steve Weber  
Mr. Carlos Zervigon  
Mr. Gary Solomon, (non-voting)

EXCUSED:

CALL TO ORDER

The Personnel Committee Chair, Ms. Janice Manuel, called the meeting to order at 3:34 p.m.

ROLL CALL

The roll was taken. There were four of four members present. There was a quorum.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Manuel made a motion to go into Executive Session. Mr. Steve Weber seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried. The Committee moved into Executive Session to discuss the results of the President/CEO evaluation at 3:36 p.m.

Mr. Weber motioned to return to General Session. Ms. Rachel Davis-Haley seconded the motion. A vote was held. All were in favor. Motion carried. The Committee returned from Executive Session at 4:55 p.m.

REMARKS/OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Manuel asked for any closing remarks/other business. There were none.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Manuel asked for public comment. There was none.

ADJOURN

Ms. Davis-Haley made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Weber seconded the motion. A roll call vote was held. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Submitted by:

Reviewed by:

Attest:

Leigh Traylor  
Recording Secretary

Janice Manuel  
Chair, Personnel Committee

Gary Solomon  
President of the Board

Date Approved: \_\_\_\_\_



# NOCCA Faculty Biographies 2025-26

## NOCCA Arts Faculty Bios

### Classical Instrumental

**Hristo Birbochukov (Chair)** is an Artist-Teacher in Applied Piano and Chair of the Classical Instrumental Department at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). He also teaches graduate piano majors at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) and serves as Co-Director and Faculty of the New Orleans Piano Institute (NOPI) and on the Board of Directors of the Musical Arts Society of New Orleans (MASNO). Praised for his “sensitivity” and “superb artistry” (Edward Lein, *Intermezzo Concert Series*), Birbochukov has performed widely in solo and collaborative concerts across Eastern Europe and the United States, including his New York debut recital in 2012. A prizewinner of national and international piano competitions, he has appeared with numerous orchestras and participated in international music festivals such as the *International Festival for Contemporary Piano Music pplanissimo* (Sofia) and the *International Festival of New Music* (Florida). His performances have been broadcast on television and radio in Bulgaria and the U.S., and he has been featured in international publications, including the official website of *BBC Music Magazine*. A sought-after educator, Dr. Birbochukov has been named a *Steinway & Sons Top Teacher* (2017, 2018, 2024). Additional honors include the *Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award* (2017), a quarterfinalist for the *GRAMMY Music Educator Award* (2017), listing as Pianist and Music Educator in *Marquis Who's Who in America* (2015-present), the *Phi Kappa Phi Artist of the Year Award* (2007), and the *Tallahassee Music Guild Award* (2005, 2007). Dr. Birbochukov has presented recitals and masterclasses at colleges and universities across the U.S., adjudicated competitions in both the United States and Eastern Europe, and his students have earned top prizes in state, regional, and national competitions and have been selected as finalists for NPR's *From the Top*. For more information, visit [birbochukov.com](http://birbochukov.com)

**Josiah Bullach (Faculty)** serves as Associate and Assistant Principal Horn of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. Since his appointment to the LPO in 2016, Josiah has played an active role as a performer, recording artist, and educator in the Greater New Orleans area. He is a faculty member at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and is a member of several chamber groups, including the New Orleans Chamber Players, the LPO Hornsound, and Musaica. Beyond Louisiana, Josiah plays principal horn in the Pensacola Symphony Orchestra and has been a guest performer with the Mobile Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Pops Orchestra, Cleveland City Chamber Orchestra, Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra, Kentucky Symphony Orchestra, Firelands Symphony Orchestra, and WindSync. In 2022, he won Second Prize in the International Horn Competition of America. A native of Ohio, Josiah began taking horn lessons from his uncle Ron Kurzen at the age of eight. He then went on to receive his Bachelor of Music degree from the Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Jesse McCormick. He was a prize winner of the Tuesday Musical Association

Scholarship Competition, a featured soloist with the Cleveland Youth Wind Symphony for their 2012 European concert tour, and a soloist at both Baldwin Wallace University and the University of Cincinnati-College Conservatory of Music, where he continued graduate studies as a student of Randy Gardner. When not playing the horn, Josiah enjoys an active lifestyle of running, CrossFit, and neighborhood walks with his wife, Alli, and their dog.

**Leslie Cain (Faculty)** has been widely praised for her delicate touch, sense of color, and scholarly approach to interpretation at the keyboard. A native of Los Angeles, she completed her undergraduate studies at the Manhattan School of Music and earned her Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She also holds an undergraduate degree in Philosophy from California State University, Los Angeles, where she was named the department's Outstanding Undergraduate in her junior year. Her doctoral thesis, *Ravel the Existentialist?*, integrates these dual areas of expertise by using the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre as a new interpretive lens to examine the music and life of composer Maurice Ravel. Dr. Cain is a top prizewinner of numerous competitions, including the Music Teacher's National Association Senior Piano Competition, the Los Angeles International Liszt Competition, and the Cypress College Piano Competition. She was a member of UC Santa Barbara's prestigious fellowship ensemble, the Young Artist Quartet, and especially enjoys chamber music collaborations with string players. She has appeared in master classes with many of the world's foremost artists, including Murray Perahia, Jeremy Denk, and Yo-Yo Ma, and was one of six pianists invited by the Weill Music Institute to perform in Richard Goode's all-Debussy master class at Carnegie Hall, as part of the inaugural season of the Resnick Education Wing. Dr. Cain is also an alumna of the Conservatoire Américain, the renowned institute of music held each summer at the Château de Fontainebleau, France. Dr. Cain currently resides in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she holds a faculty appointment as Artist-Teacher at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts.

**Zorica Dimova (Faculty)** is originally from Bulgaria. She started playing the violin when she was 5 years old. At 9, she joined the Youth Orchestra with which she toured Europe and won various awards. Dimova graduated from the National Music Conservatory "Pancho Vladigerov" in Sofia, Bulgaria. She was featured as a soloist of the Symphony Orchestra in Stara Zagora and the State Academy Symphony Orchestra performing Mozart's Violin Concerto No.5, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D major, and Brahms' Violin Concerto in D major. Before coming to the United States, Dimova was a member of the Bankya Chamber Orchestra and New Symphony Orchestra. She joined the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra in 2003. During the summers, Dimova played with the Missouri Symphony Orchestra and Music in the Mountains Music Festival. She also performed with the Illinois Symphony Orchestra, Orlando Philharmonic, and Nashville Symphony. Zorica is an active solo and chamber musician as well as an educator. She performs in collaboration with many different groups in the US and abroad and gives master classes. Dimova is on the faculty at NOCCA and a former lecturer at Southeastern Louisiana University, teaching applied violin/viola, chamber music, and orchestra repertoire. She also maintains private studios in Mandeville and New Orleans. Many of Dimova's students have won awards and scholarships from competitions, auditions, and music organizations such as National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America, Music Teachers National Association competition, Junior Philharmonic Society of New Orleans, Greater New Orleans Youth Orchestra Concerto competition, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra Concerto Competition, Louisiana Music Teachers Association String Rally, Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall, Boston University Tanglewood Institute, Philadelphia International Music Festival. Dimova's students were accepted with full scholarships in the music programs of Oberlin Conservatory, Yale University, and

LSU. Zorica Dimova holds a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Violin and Viola Performance from Louisiana State University.

---

## Creative Writing

**Annell López (Chair)** is the winner of the Louise Meriwether First Book Prize and the author of the short story collection *I'll Give You a Reason*, a finalist for the PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize for best debut short story collection. Named a best short story collection of 2024 by Electric Literature, *I'll Give You a Reason* has been longlisted for the Maya Angelou Book Award, the Reforma Latinx Book Award, and the Clark Fiction Prize. Most recently, she was recognized as a Gambit's 40 under 40. López was a Peter Taylor Fellow at the Kenyon Review Workshops. Her work has appeared in *Guernica*, *American Short Fiction*, *The Common*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Refinery29*, and *TIME*. López received her MFA from the University of New Orleans, where she was awarded the Joanna Leake Fiction Prize. Throughout her years in the classroom, López has been the recipient of multiple Teacher of the Year awards. In 2022, she received a New Orleans Excellence in Teaching Award.

**Anne Gisleson (Faculty)** is the author of *The Futilitarians* (Little, Brown), a San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year. Her writing has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Oxford American*, *The Believer*, and many other publications. Her essays have been featured in several anthologies such as *Best American Non-Required Reading*, *Airplane Reading*, *Life in the Wake*, and others. She co-edited and co-wrote *How to Rebuild a City: Field Guide from a Work in Progress*, about ground-up rebuilding efforts in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and her work has also appeared in several books of art and photography, most recently in Akasha Rabut's *Death Magick Abundance* and Cheryl Gerber's *Cherchez la Femme*. Her nonfiction book *Wild Iris* is forthcoming from LSU Press' Louisiana True series. She teaches at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, the University of New Orleans MFA program, and is co-founder of the literary and visual arts non-profit Antenna.

**E. Gross (Faculty)** is a poet and interdisciplinary artist from New Orleans. They are the author of *this body/that lightning show*, selected by Jericho Brown for the Hilary Tham Capital Collection of The Word Works Press (2019), and *DEAR ESCAPE ARTIST*, a chapbook in collaboration with artist Sara White (Antenna 2016 and 2023). Their poem, "Ghazal at the end of the world", was selected by Beth Ann Fennelly as the Poetry Contest Winner for the Words and Music Festival in 2020 and appeared in the *Peauxdunque Review*. Other poems have appeared in *Green Mountains Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Fairy Tale Review*, and a wide array of journals and anthologies. With collaborators Norah Lovell and Lee Deigaard, they create interdisciplinary installations as the LENS Collective. March 2025 saw the premiere of *Medea as a lounge singer*, their song cycle in collaboration with composer Tucker Fuller at the Toulouse Theatre. A NOCCA alum, they hold an MFA in Poetry from Hunter College of the City University of New York and a BA from Vassar College, and now teach Creative Writing at New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and English at Loyola University. They are currently developing a libretto about environmental activist orca whales.

**Annalise Torcson (Faculty)** is a short story writer, novelist, and poet. She holds an M.Phil in Irish Literature from Trinity College Dublin, as well as a Master's in Creative Writing from the University of Oxford. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in multiple publications, most recently *Poetry Ireland Review*, and her theatrical work has been staged at "Raze the Space's International Theater Project"

in Los Angeles. She was the recipient of Oxford's F.H. Pasby Prize and has been longlisted for the Disquiet Prize in Fiction and the Alpine Fellowship Prize in Poetry. She was also awarded a creative residency at Tulane University's "A Studio in the Woods" in recognition of her writing's relationship to the environment. She has been employed as a bookseller, and has interned at Copper Canyon Press in Port Townsend, Washington. She is currently at work on her debut novel, conducting interviews and research on the Pacific Northwest's "Timber Wars" of the 1980s and 1990s. She is an alumna of the Creative Writing program at NOCCA.

**Andy Young (Faculty)** grew up in southern West Virginia and has lived most of her adult life in New Orleans. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Warren Wilson's Program for Writers, her second full-length collection, *Museum of the Soon to Depart*, came out in October 2024 from Carnegie Mellon University Press. She has also made four chapbooks and two kids. She has won the Patricia Spears Jones Award, the Nazim Hikmet Award, and has been granted residencies in Virginia, Louisiana, Vermont, and Barcelona. She and her partner, Khaled Hegazzi, translate poems from Arabic that have been published in *Southern Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and the *Norton Anthology Language for a New Century*. Before teaching, she worked as a sushi waitress, bartender, bookseller, jar-filler in a pickle factory, journalist, transcriber, copyeditor, and voice actor. Her work has been translated into several languages, featured in classical and electronic music, in flamenco and modern dance performances, in an award-winning poetry film which she directed, and in jewelry, tattoos, and public buses.

---

## Culinary Arts

**Dana D'Anzi Tuohy (Chair)** Chef Dana began working at the age of 13, just stocking products in a family friend's school supply store, but learning the important lessons of being on time, precise counting of inventory, and learning to communicate with customers. Her first foray into the food business was scooping ice cream at Häagen-Dazs during high school. After graduating from Ben Franklin HS, she quickly discovered that studying chemical engineering was not for her. Taking time away from college to uncover her passion, she secured a reservationist job at Commander's Palace. It was here that she fell in love with the restaurant business. It was also here that she met Chef Emeril Lagasse, who became her career mentor. Chef Dana traveled the country before returning to college at Johnson & Wales University to study Culinary Arts, earning an Associate's degree in Culinary and a Bachelor's degree in Restaurant & Hotel Management. It was at J&W as a teaching assistant and fellow that she discovered her love of teaching. Returning to New Orleans after graduating, Chef Dana started working for Chef Emeril at NOLA Restaurant. She quickly moved up the ranks at both NOLA and Emeril's. She moved to Las Vegas, continuing to work for Chef Emeril at Emeril's New Orleans Fish House and Delmonico Steakhouse, later becoming the company's first female chef at the steakhouse. As the company grew, so did Chef Dana's career, and she earned the position of Culinary Director of Chef Emeril's four restaurants in Las Vegas. After a successful career in the restaurant business and a wish to return home to be near family, she was tapped to become the Founding Department Chair of Culinary Arts at NOCCA. Coming home to New Orleans meant building a new home at NOCCA, where she has lived for the last 15 years, welcoming and graduating hundreds of students.

**Jessie Wightkin Gelini (Faculty)** is a native New Orleanian and an alumna of NOCCA's Dance Department. Chef Jessie's passion for food led her to study Culinary Anthropology at the University

of Alabama, where she explored the cultural stories behind cuisine. After Katrina, when Jessie returned home, she began working at the prestigious Commander's Palace, where she started as their shrimp peeler and after four years left as the Pastry Chef. Chef Jessie was also instrumental in the launching of the kitchen team at Bacchanal Wine, Company Burger, and Taceaux Loceaux food truck - famously and fabulously appearing on Anthony Bourdain's "The Layover" slinging tacos! Passing on the traditions of her culinary roots is what Chef Jessie is most passionate about making the transition from the restaurant world to Culinary education a natural move. Her Culinary Teacher career began at Edible Schoolyard and led her back home to NOCCA. Chef Jessie continues to cook as a private chef and caterer, but her heart lies with education. A self-proclaimed Food Explorer, she is enthusiastic about traveling the world through food. Telling the stories of people, places, and ingredients, one plate at a time.

**Kamili Hemphill (Faculty)** brings over two decades of culinary experience spanning fine dining, recipe development, and education. A graduate of Spelman College (B.A. History) and the New England Culinary Institute (A.O.S. Culinary Arts), she began her career in the celebrated kitchens of New Orleans, working at NOLA Restaurant, Emeril's Restaurant, and Peristyle as a Line Cook, Banquet Chef, and Sous Chef from 1996 to 2004. In 2008, Chef Kamili transitioned into culinary writing at Emeril's Homebase, where for more than a decade she developed, tested, and edited recipes for cookbooks, magazines, and digital platforms. Her career has also included work as a caterer and personal chef, further expanding her range of expertise. Since 2019, Chef Kamili has served as a Culinary Instructor at NOCCA, where she combines her professional kitchen experience and writing background to inspire and equip the next generation of chefs. She is a ServSafe Food Protection Manager and Certified ServSafe Instructor, and she is currently pursuing certification as a Certified Culinary Educator through the American Culinary Federation.

**Samantha Price (Faculty)** After graduating from Le Cordon Bleu's pastry arts program in Miami, FL, in 2008, she realized her passion lay in the art of making bread. Upon entering school, her Chef asked, "In what medium does your passion lie?" With the utmost certainty, she proclaimed Wedding Cakes! Just before graduation, that same chef asked her the same question again, except this time her answer had changed. Bread is where her heart and passion will forever be. From that day forward, Chef Sam has been honing her bread-baking skills in bakeries and restaurants. Chef Sam moved to New Orleans in 2021 after falling in love with the city's cuisine, people, history, and mystery. She worked at the esteemed Brigtsen's Restaurant, where, under Chef Frank Brigtsen's tutelage, she gained knowledge and skills well beyond the bakeshop. Never one to lie low, Chef Sam was also baking all the breads and pastries for a beloved local breakfast chain. She jumped at the chance to come to NOCCA with Chef Frank to experience what was happening over here and loved every minute of it. When the opportunity came to join the NOCCA culinary faculty, Chef Sam did not hesitate to say yes. She has been sharing her knowledge and talents for 3 years now, and she couldn't be happier.

**Denaé Reddick (Faculty)** is a proud 2017 graduate of the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, where she first discovered and nurtured her passion for baking and pastry. Her love of pastry runs deep; she launched a successful cupcake business as a freshman in high school and, as a dedicated senior, earned NOCCA's prestigious President's Honors Award in Culinary Arts. Chef Denaé continued her culinary journey as part of the inaugural class at the New Orleans Culinary and Hospitality Institute, further developing her techniques and artistic style. Since graduating from NOCHI, she has thrived as a skilled and innovative cake decorator in the city of New Orleans, perfecting elegant celebration and wedding cakes—including a creation that was proudly featured on The Today Show

with Hoda and Jenna. Beyond her work as a decorator, Chef Denaé has returned to NOCCA and NOCHI as a Baking & Pastry instructor, where she continues to share her creativity, expertise, and enthusiasm with the next generation of chefs.

---

## Dance

**Tianna Pourciau Sykes (Chair)** is a dance educator, choreographer, and arts administrator with experience spanning 25 years. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Dance from Kennesaw State University and is currently the Chair of the Dance Department at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and Artistic Director of NOLA Contemporary Ballet. She began her professional career as a freelance dancer with various dance companies, regional theaters, industrials, and commercial productions. Tianna served as Director of Dance at Rockdale County Public Schools' Academy for the Performing and Visual Arts for five years, where she developed the program's structure and designed and implemented dance curriculum at the county level. Throughout her career, she has taught various forms of dance to students of all ages, from beginner to professional levels at various schools and arts institutions across the country. As a choreographer, she has created and presented various dance works and productions at the pre-professional and professional level. Her choreographic works have been presented professionally at venues in New Orleans, LA, Orlando, FL, Atlanta, GA, Houston, TX, and North Carolina. Tianna has served as a panel guest speaker and adjudicator for various dance events and conventions nationally. She is also co-founder, Creative Director and Managing Editor of internationally published photography company, Sykes Photography, LLC, and a contributing writer and correspondent for international dance publication, Dance Mogul Magazine. As a working artist, dance educator, and arts administrator, Tianna continues to provide her artistic leadership and skillful expertise, and she hopes to continue to make an impact through the development, training, and mentoring of young artists.

**Brad Broomfield (accompanist)** Hailing from New Orleans, LA, Brad Broomfield is a culturalist and creative specializing in drum and dance traditions emanating from West Africa, the Muslim world, and their respective diasporas, with a particular focus on the Caribbean and its ties to south Louisiana. His studies have led him to research music and dance with recognized culture-bearers in and from Ghana, Cuba, Brazil, Haiti, Honduras, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Spain, and India. Brad previously taught Afro-Cuban drumming for the African Rhythms Drum & Dance Troupe at UPenn and performed with Philadelphia's renowned Kulu Mele African Dance & Drum Ensemble, as well as with the Arab cultural organization Al-Bustan. Brad is currently a member of New Orleans' premier Afro-Brazilian music and dance institution, Casa Samba, and has also performed with other New Orleans-based African dance groups such as N'Fungola Sibo and Nkiruka. He has toured as a drummer with the internationally-acclaimed, modern Afro-Caribena group, ÎFÉ. Brad also has an extensive background in Western classical music. Before returning to the US in 2020, he was the Percussion and Music Theory Teacher at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Jerusalem, Palestine. Before that, Brad was the Principal Percussionist/Timpanist of the Jordanian National Orchestra, as well as the Director of Western & Arab Percussion at the National Conservatory of Music in Amman. Before moving to the Middle East, he toured Central America with the Youth Orchestra of the Americas and appeared on their Latin Grammy Award-winning album. Brad received his master's degree from Temple University, studying with the principal players of the Philadelphia Orchestra percussion and timpani sections, including the late Alan Abel, with additional studies with the principal percussionist of the New York Philharmonic. Immediately following graduate studies, Brad

toured internationally as Featured Percussionist/Snare Drum Soloist with the Tony and Emmy Award-winning Broadway show "Blast!" He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, during which time he was a 4x runner-up of the PAS international snare drum competition and performed as a member of the Acadiana Symphony Orchestra. Currently, Brad can be found playing percussion with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and OperaCréole.

**Jemina Hart (Faculty)** is originally from Honduras; a graduate of Loyola University, New Orleans, where she majored in psychology and minored in ballet. She then moved to New York City to continue her studies in Ballet and Modern/Contemporary dance under master instructors such as Peff Modelski, Elena Kunikova, Val Suarez, Max Stone, and Janna Hicks. While in New York, she performed with classical and modern dance companies and made lifelong friendships with incredible artists who have helped shape the world of dance. Jemina is also a Physical Therapist. She earned her Master's Degree from Hunter College and trained under Marika Molnar at West Side Dance PT for 6 years, where she had the pleasure of working alongside pioneers in the creation and development of the field of dance medicine. As a PT, Jemina worked with dancers from the New York City Ballet and other professional companies, students from the Juilliard School, as well as performers from Broadway shows. She specializes in ballet and contemporary/modern technique, alignment, neuromuscular control, and breath. She is also a scoliosis specialist certified in the Schroth Method with a special interest in adolescent idiopathic scoliosis. In 2012, Jemina moved back home to the New Orleans region, where she has taught ballet, pointe, and contemporary, as well as choreographed for over 10 years. She has been a joyful member of the NOCCA family since 2023.

**Stephani Kammer-Taylor (Faculty)** resides in New Orleans as a professional instructor and choreographer, entering her 12th year on the professional dance faculty at New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. After earning her Bachelor of Performing Arts degree from Oklahoma City University, Stephani began her professional career in New York, appearing in regional theaters, industrials, and prime-time television. Upon relocating to Los Angeles, Stephani would begin her ten-year working relationship with Janet Jackson. She has appeared in several videos, television performances, and promotional tours with Ms. Jackson in the US, England, and Tokyo, and served as Assistant Creative Director to Gil Duldulao on Janet's Rock Witch U world tour. Since returning to New Orleans, she has been hired by production companies such as Touch Down Entertainment and Caballero Casting to serve as an agent for local talent. Stephani was instrumental in casting local dancers for Beyoncé & Kendrick Lamar's Super Bowl halftime shows and has provided talent for multiple international commercials. Mrs. Kammer-Taylor successfully served as Head Choreographer of the Miss USA (2014-2020) & Miss Universe pageants (2013-2023). Most recently, she choreographed episodes for Hulu's Iron Mike series and Netflix's soon-to-be-released The Corps. Stephani is listed in The Cambridge Who's Who Among Executive & Professional Women for her many years of hard work and dedication to the arts. Mrs. Kammer-Taylor has taught internationally in Tokyo, Japan, at Broadway Dance Center, and traveled to over seventy countries, educating and inspiring dancers all over the globe.

**Heidi Malnar (Faculty)** is a tap dancer, choreographer, and dance educator who has resided in New Orleans since 2010. She holds a BA in Dance from Columbia College Chicago. In Chicago, she performed with Chicago Tap Theatre, under the direction of Mark Yonally, and later with Jump Rhythm Jazz Project, under Billy Siegenfeld. She won an Emmy Award® for her performance in the multi-Emmy Award winning documentary Jump Rhythm Jazz Project: Getting There. In 2013, she founded her company Theatre on Tap, and in 2014 joined the dance faculty at New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). In 2022, she created Hoofing for Heroes™, an adaptive tap dance program for

Veterans at the New Orleans VA Medical Center. Her choreography has been seen at The National WW2 Museum's BB's Stage Door Canteen, Le Petit Theatre, and Rivertown Theaters for the Performing Arts. She has been awarded four New Orleans Arts & Entertainment Big Easy Awards. Heidi holds her yoga teaching certification as an RYT® 200 and 140hr Trauma-Informed Yoga Instructor. She most recently completed her Master of Arts in Counseling, specializing in Clinical Mental Health from Saybrook University. Combining her worlds of dance, education, counseling, and yoga, Heidi is passionate about creating community, developing deeper connections to ourselves and others, and exploring somatic approaches to holistic wellness.

**Kesha McKey (Faculty, Director of Arts)** is an African American female performing artist, choreographer, and educator born and raised in New Orleans. Kesha is a NOCCA Dance alum, receiving her BS in Biology pre-med from Xavier University of LA and an MFA in Dance Performance from UW-Milwaukee. She is currently the Director of Arts at NOCCA and serves on the Dance Faculty. She also works in the New Orleans community as a teaching artist and *Dance for Social Change* choreographer at Dancing Grounds. She has served as a dance educator for over 25 years and demonstrates a commitment to sustaining the artistic voice of Black dancers and choreographers in New Orleans. Kesha is the founding Artistic Director of KM Dance Project, an essential artistic platform for emerging Black choreographers in NOLA. Kesha's choreographic work, *Raw Fruit*, has received the 2021-22 NPN Creation and Development Fund Awards and a 2019 NEFA National Dance Project Production Grant, being the first dance company in Louisiana to receive this award. Her other awards include a 2025 NPN Take Notice Award, 2022-23 Dance/USA DFA Fellowship, 2022 Urban Bush Women (UBW) CCI 2.0/CCI 2019 Alum, 2020 CAC N.O. SweetArts Award, 2018/19 CAC Southern Crossings Residency, and a 2016 Dancing While Black Fellowship. Kesha's performance credits include: KM Dance Project's *Raw Fruit* 2022-25 tour, Urban Bush Women's *Hair and Other Stories* 2018-19 tour, Junebug Productions *Gomela: to return* 2018-19 tour, Junebug Productions *Homecoming Project* 2018-2020, and the Lula Elzy N.O. Dance Theatre. Her choreographic credits include: 2024 Lamar University *Dance Unleashed Residency*, 2024 Alabama Dance Festival, 2023 BAADAss Women's Festival, 2019 NPN Conference, 2018 Urban Bush Women's Summer Leadership Institute, 2018 *Women in Dance Conference*, Junebug Production's *Power of the Black Feminine*, 2016 Alternate Roots Week, and Peridance 2016 APAP Showcase.

**Melanie Montalto Ryan (Faculty)** is a former professional ballet dancer who began her training in New Orleans at Giacobbe Academy of Dance. She was awarded trainee scholarships to American Ballet Theatre and Alvin Ailey before accepting a traineeship for the Harkness Ballet in New York under Ballet Master David Howard. Upon returning to New Orleans as a Principal dancer with Delta Festival Ballet, she performed solo roles in *Sleeping Beauty* as the Fairy of the Golden Vine and *Pas de Trois*, *Swan Lake Pas de Trois*, Lucille Grahm in *Pas de Quatre*, *Les Sylphide*, *Songs of a Wayfarer*, *Graduation Ball*, *Raymonda Pas de Dix*, *Variations from Day to Day* and many more. She was a guest performer in Ellen Hardeman's *Nutcracker* as the Sugar Plum Fairy and a recreation of George Balanchine's *Who Cares*. Her performances in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Songs of a Wayfarer* were given exemplary reviews and featured in *Dance Magazine*. Melanie has taught ballet for over 30 years at many prestigious schools, such as Giacobbe Academy of Dance and Schramel Conservatory. She is the former Director of NOBT's Pre-Professional Day Program, Ballet Mistress for Young Artist Master Classes in Lafayette, and she is currently Artist in Residence at Jean Leigh Dance Academy in Denham Springs. Many of Melanie's former students have gone on to perform professionally with some of the most renowned companies in the world. She loves working with the students at NOCCA, passing on her love and passion for ballet.

**Kelly White (Faculty)** Born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, Kelly Seph White is a performer, choreographer, researcher, and dance educator. She holds a BFA in Dance Performance and Choreography from the University of Southern Mississippi and an M.A. in Dance Education from New York University. She is the mother of a bright and beautiful daughter named Morgan. In 17 years of living in New York City, Kelly had the honor of studying under the great Jean Leon Destine, Baba Richard Gonzalez, Nia Love, Ronald K. Brown, Nadia Dieudonne, and Aussettua Amor Amenkum (New Orleans). She was also honored to have trained and performed at the American Dance Festival, Plaza Cuba, New Waves Trinidad, Bates Dance Festival, and Jacob's Pillow. Ms. White has performed with Ase Dance Theater Collective, Kumbuka African Drum and Dance Collective, Kwame Ross's Prophecy Dance Works, and Nia Love's Blacksmith's Daughter. Her choreography has been performed in venues and productions such as the 92nd Street Y, Psychotherapy Network Association Conference, Mixed Flava's Performance Series, Dance Africa, Feast: A Yoruba Project, and Voices of Congo Square New Orleans, where she also served as the Associate Director. Ms. White is a second-generation educator who has brought the art form of dance to a host of colleges and public schools located in Florida, Cuba, Louisiana, Georgia, California, Mississippi, Vermont, Texas, New Jersey, and New York. In 2017, Kelly co-founded and is the Director of EVOLVE Diaspora, where she creates weekend intensives, cultural immersion trips, and community classes for professional dancers, researchers, scholars, and educators to intensely study dances of the African Diaspora. Currently, she is on staff teaching African Diaspora Dance Styles at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, Professor of dance at the Southern University and A&M College, and is the Director of Education at Young Audiences of Louisiana.

---

## **Entertainment Production and Design**

**Philip Wingerter (Chair)** is beginning his fifteenth school year as the Technical Director and a faculty member within the Entertainment Production Design (EPD) Department at New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. This will be his third year serving as Chair of the EPD Department as well. He is a graduate of Holy Cross High School and an alum of the inaugural EPD (formally known as Theatre Design) Department class of 2001 at NOCCA. Philip received his BFA in Theatrical Design and Technical Direction from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2005. He has worked in many community, regional, and professional theaters throughout the area to include Le Petit Theater, JPAS, Rivertown, Tulane Summer Lyric, Saenger Theater, New Orleans Convention Center, and various other venues. Philip has also worked on multiple films and for several production companies, including Event Producers, Kern Studios, Solomon Group, Mardi Gras Productions, and Professional Scenic Services. In addition to his work in theater and other live events, he is also heavily involved in producing the annual Krewe of Orpheus Mardi Gras parade, where he serves as Vice President, as well as Director of Security and the Parade Marshal. Over the past 20 years, Philip has worked on well over 200 theatrical shows, concerts, conventions, and various other live events and parades. During the last fifteen years, Philip has continued to be an active and engaged member of the greater New Orleans entertainment community, working on various professional opportunities and events, in addition to being an integral part of the success of the NOCCA production season and the institution overall.

**Anna Donnell (Faculty)** serves as head Costume Designer, instructor, and shop steward at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. NOCCA Design Credits include: *Macbeth*, *Chicago*, *Back to Baroque*, *Push*, *The Boy at the Edge of Everything*, *Twelfth Night*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Habitat*, and *Last Day on*

*the Titanic*. She is a professional film costumer as a union member of IATSE Local 478 in New Orleans. Selected Film/TV costume credits include: *Interview with the Vampire* (AMC), *Daisy Jones and the Six* (Amazon)\*, *Five Days at Memorial* (Apple+). She is a graduate of The School at Steppenwolf, The Academy at Black Box Acting, and the BFA Acting Studio at The University of Mississippi, where she also worked for the department costume shop and gained her technical knowledge of costume construction. Anna spent seven years in Chicago theatre, working with many performances in many capacities as an artist. She is a facilitator for Global Hive Laboratories, an international devising collective where she has served as writer, performer, accessibility designer, Viewpoints Movement instructor, costume designer, and chef in Chicago, London, Paris, Piacenza, and Oaxaca. This is her third year at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, serving as head Costume Designer, instructor, and shop steward. \*Emmy Award Winner - Outstanding Period Costumes For A Limited Or Anthology Series Or Movie - 2023.

**Daniel Zimmer (Faculty)** received his formal training in design at New York's Studio and Forum of Stage Design and, for over 30 years, has designed theatre, dance, and opera productions in the New Orleans area. For the past 24 years, Daniel has taught production and stage design at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) - Entertainment Production Design department.

---

## **Jazz Instrumental**

**Michael Peller (Faculty)** After studying at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Mr. Peller has been a jazz educator serving New Orleans since 1989. He taught jazz piano and improvisation for fifteen years at Loyola University in New Orleans before joining the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts faculty in 2002. He became the chair of the renowned Jazz department at NOCCA in 2005. Some of his former students include Brian Blade, Jon Cowherd, Jonathan Batiste, Trombone Shorty, Rich Vogel, and others who have created distinguished careers for themselves with artists like Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Wynton Marsalis, Liz Wright, Joni Mitchell, Lenny Kravitz, and Galactic. In the last 25 years, he has lived in New Orleans and New York, giving his music a unique perspective that draws freely from the influences of the two cities. As a composer, he has created a body of work that encompasses modern jazz harmony, indigenous New Orleans rhythms, and elements of the classic American songbook of the 1930s and the 1940s. He has released two critically acclaimed CDs of his jazz compositions. His first CD, "Cloud Nine," was released in 1997, and his second CD, "Son of Sky," was released in 2001. Both CDs featured a veritable of "who's who" of the New Orleans modern jazz scene, such as Bill Huntington, John Vidacovich, Steve Masakowski, Tony Dagradi, Bill Summers, James Singleton, and Phillip Manuel. In addition, he released two CDs of Jazz standards, "Piano Standard" in 2008 and "Round' Midnight" in 2012. As an arranger and producer, he has worked in a variety of contexts from trio to big band; most notably, on the MAXJAZZ CD release of singer Phillip Manuel's, "Love Happened to Me." This CD featured five original compositions by Peller as well as his arrangements. He has performed with a multitude of great jazz artists, including Wynton Marsalis, Buddy Rich, Branford Marsalis, Chet Baker, Bobby McFerrin, and Harry Connick Jr.

**Chris Severin (Faculty)** Chris Severin is an amazingly talented, versatile, and accomplished master-musician from the Treme area of New Orleans. He graduated from the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) in 1976 during its adolescence and later attended Southern University of New Orleans (SUNO) for music education. The greats Alvin Batiste, Ellis Marsalis, and Walter Payton were all a part of Mr. Severin's musical training. A skilled teacher himself, Mr. Severin believes in and

promotes consistent practice as the path to a musician's success and payoff. His daily discourse often details music history, theory, and fundamentals. In the business for over 30 years, Mr. Severin's extensive client list includes many of the world's most gifted singers and musicians including: Diane Reeves, Dr. John, Terrence Blanchard, Allen Toussaint, Bonnie Raitt, Nicholas Payton, Ellis Marsalis, Wynton Marsalis, Branford Marsalis, Lou Rawls, Alvin Batiste, Herlin Riley, Victor Goines, Irma Thomas and Kent Jordan. Mr. Severin has played his seven-string bass across the globe and is a frequent flyer for the top jazz recording companies such as Blue Note, Rounder, MCA, and Windham Hill Records. He is a member of the [Union of New Orleans Musicians, AFM Local 174-496](#), BMI, the co-owner of Chrisan Music, Lead Engineer at the Box Studios-Studio A, a prior member of Windjammer, Vietnam, Allen Toussaint Band, and holds several sponsorships, including Schecter Guitars and DR Strings. Mr. Severin's universal sound sets him apart. He plays seven-string and acoustic bass for all genres of music, including R&B, jazz, and hip-hop. In his capacity as a faculty member, Mr. Severin provides music, media arts, and jazz instruction for the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). He also continues to provide private lessons on everything bass and is a teacher during the Sunday Youth Music Workshop at Tipitina's.

**Dominic Minix (Faculty)** Dominic Minix is a New Orleans guitarist, singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer. As an up-and-coming guitarist, Dominic paid his dues playing with New Orleans jazz elders like the *Marsalis Family* at historic venues including *Tipitina's*, *Preservation Hall*, and the *New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival*. Dominic went on to record and tour with major artists *Solange* and *Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah*. Dominic's guitar work is featured on *NPR Tiny Desk* and on *Christian Scott's* Grammy-nominated album "*The Emancipation Procrastination*." Through his time playing home New Orleans, he has performed with *Saul Williams*, *Tank and the Bangas*, opened for *Stevie Wonder*, *John Schofield*, *Dr. John*, and more, and built his own projects exploring the sonic expanses of punk rock, modern jazz, and hip hop. Dominic has produced multiple projects as a band leader of the neo soul-influenced *Dominic Minix Quartet* (Introducing) and the punk rock-jazz outfit *Yung Vul (Cannonball Adderall)*. As a solo artist, Dominic produced several hip hop and singer-songwriter projects, including "*85 and Ride*," "*Sun Will Show Again*," and "*Works on Progress*," a compilation he produced in partnership with *Community Records*, highlighting and benefiting Black artists from the Gulf Coast. In 2020, Dominic released the highly acclaimed *New Tone* ska band, *Bad Operation*, with a self-released debut full-length album. Dominic's latest release is the spring 2022 full-length ambient jazz album entitled "*Swim*."

**Stephen Gladney (Faculty)** Gladney, a 2024 Foundation for Louisiana World Maker and sixth-generation New Orleans native, hails from the city's iconic Lower 9th Ward. With a professional career that began at just 12, Gladney brings a wealth of experience, an infectious spirit, and a signature "Gladney Bow" hairstyle to every performance, making him a truly unforgettable artist. A graduate of both the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) and the New School for Jazz & Contemporary Music, Gladney's early achievements include being selected for the esteemed Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz (now the Herbie Hancock Institute) All-Star group. This role took him across the U.S., performing educational jazz "informances" with jazz greats Lisa Henry and Antonio Hart. During this time, Gladney was also honored to perform at the White House under the Obama administration. With a 20-year career spanning high-profile performances, music videos, and live TV appearances, Gladney has been seen on *The Kelly & Ryan Show*, *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, and BBC's *The Graham Norton Show*. His international collaborations feature an impressive roster of artists, including Jonathan Batiste, Jake Shears of Scissor Sisters, Ellis Marsalis, George Duke, Delfeayo Marsalis, Solange, and Joe Dyson. A two-time GRAMMY nominee, he contributed to Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah's 2018 album, *The Emancipation Procrastination*, on the track "Cages" and

played a key role in the creation of *The Rumble's Stories From the Battlefield*. Currently, Gladney leads his self-titled band, with the debut single "Selenite," released in 2021, marking the beginning of his band's recording journey. He is a proud member of the Recording Academy and serves as the woodwind instructor at his alma mater, NOCCA, leading the next generation of musicians.

**Xavier Reed (Chair)** Xavier Reed is a dynamic multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, composer, producer, and educator born and raised in New Orleans, LA. Ever since Xavier graduated from the NOCCA Jazz department in 2013, he has been working closely with NOCCA students; first as a visiting artist, then as a full-time faculty member, and now as the Department Chair of the renowned Jazz program, where he teaches Trumpet and Drumset. He graduated Summa Cum Laude from the University of New Orleans in 2017 and has been working as a teacher and gigging musician in New Orleans and abroad. Xavier has played and/or recorded with artists such as *Tank and The Bangaz*, *IFÉ*, *Bill Summers*, *Saul Williams*, *Big Freida*, *GLADNEY*, *Steve Lands*, *Dominic Minix*, *Zack Villere*, and more. Xavier Reed is a dedicated teacher, musician, and lover of the arts with a deep passion for the world and its people.

---

## Media Arts

**Shelly Short (Chair)** is an award-winning photographer and filmmaker with over 25 years of visual and media arts experience. She holds a Master's of Fine Arts in Film and Television and a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Photography from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Shelly's photography has been represented in several galleries, including Artel Gallery, ThincSavannah Gallery, The Museum of Contemporary Art Georgia, and Pensacola State College Gallery. Published in SCAD's Silver and Ink photography annual and films featured at The Santa Fe and Charleston International Film Festivals, Shelly continues to develop work based on her lived experiences and exploration into the symbols, routines, and traditions that create our sense of self. For the past 20 years, she has taught internationally and state-side in Malaysia, Georgia, New Mexico, and California, both at the college and high school levels. Shelly works professionally as an independent filmmaker and photographer and has worked with companies including RE/MAX Realty Group and Keller Williams Realty. Shelly is in her 9th year of chairing high school film and media programs, with the last three proudly here at NOCCA.

**Sarah Devlin (Faculty)** is a filmmaker and multimedia artist based in New Orleans. Her work blends digital media with hands-on techniques—like stop motion, projection, puppetry, and miniature set design—often using recycled and found materials. She's drawn to processes that mix media and favor texture, imperfection, and experimentation. While filmmaking is at the core of her practice, Sarah also builds sets (both tiny and larger-than-life-sized), designs visuals for stage productions, and collaborates on puppet-driven installations. Her work often explores themes of mental health, chronic illness, and grief. Recent projects include music videos for local artists like Steele Creek and Ever More Nest, animation and puppetry for *Doomscrolling* at the Contemporary Arts Center, and collaborations with collectives like The Hoot-n-Holler Inn on cardboard-based community installations. Her films and installations have been exhibited nationally and recognized by organizations like YoungArts, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, and the Women and Minorities in Media Festival.

**Dylan Hunter (Faculty)** graduated from Vestavia Hills High School in Birmingham, AL, in 2004. He attended Rhodes College in Memphis, TN, from 2004 to 2008, began composing music, and graduated

with a BA in Theater. In Fall 2008, he returned to Birmingham and worked for Birmingham Children's Theater as a touring performer and outreach educator, bringing plays and theater education to rural communities across the Southeast. During this time, he began his professional acting career and built his portfolio of original music. After moving to New Orleans in 2011, he continued as a professional performer and began composing music and sound for mixed media. In 2016, he became a company member of Goat in the Road Productions. From 2016 to 2019, he completed over thirty hours of music credits at the University of New Orleans. In Fall 2020, he began a full-ride merit scholarship at the Tulane University Newcomb School of Arts, teaching undergraduate musicianship as a TA. At both Tulane and UNO, he composed music for a handful of internationally acclaimed chamber ensembles. In Spring 2023, he began working as a substitute musical director, accompanist, and acting coach in the Theater department at the New Orleans Center for Performing Arts. In Fall 2023, he was hired as a part-time instructor in the Media Arts department at NOCCA, and he also graduated from Tulane with a Master's in Music Composition. Fall 2024 (and to present), he stepped into a full-time faculty position as professor of Audio Arts in the MA department at NOCCA.

**Malcolm Johnson Jr. (Faculty)** is a seasoned Director, Photographer, and Producer with over a decade of experience in visual storytelling. As the founder of Malcolm J Studios, he has successfully led a production company, annually delivering more than 100 high-quality media projects for a diverse range of corporate, commercial, and individual clients. His expertise spans a wide array of video content, including commercials, promotional videos, event coverage, music videos, documentaries, and feature films. In addition to his entrepreneurial pursuits, Malcolm serves as a Lead Photographer for the New Orleans Saints and Pelicans, where he is in his fifth year of capturing the excitement, energy, and key moments of the teams' games and all sponsorship activations. His collaborative approach with marketing and sponsorship teams ensures the production of high-quality content that meets strategic goals. Beyond his professional work, Malcolm is dedicated to mentoring the next generation of media artists, having served as a Photography & Digital Media Instructor at Renew Accelerated High School from 2018-2019. He is a graduate of Tulane University with a Bachelor of Arts in Digital Design. With a strong foundation in both the creative and business aspects of media production, Malcolm continues to produce engaging and impactful visual content across various platforms.

**Lisa Moraschi Shattuck (Faculty)** is a New Orleans-born artist, educator, parent, and co-founder of Catapult, a laboratory dedicated to original theater and design. She teaches "Scriptwriting" and "Media Literature, Representation and Collaboration" in the Nocca Media Arts department. She has written and performed with Mondo Bizarro, NEW NOISE, Vagabond Inventions, Southern Repertory Theatre, ArtSpot Productions, San Francisco's Storyworks and Cutting Ball, Phoenix's Childsplay, Charleston's PURE Theatre, and internationally in *Cry You One*, funded by Creative Capital and NEFA. She was a 2013 Network of Ensemble Theater fellow and the 2015 TCG Fox Actor Alternate. Her play "12" was featured at Performatica at the Universidad de las Américas in Mexico in 2018. She played "Emelda" in the national tour of the award-winning "A Kingdom, A Chasm" at the Borderlight Festival and was selected for the National Performance Network's annual conference in December of 2019. She performed in "Ezell: Ballad of a Land Man," which toured the United States in 2022. She played Teresa Jacona at the BK House in Goat in the Road's *The Family Line* in 2023. She is an Alternate Roots artist and has taught in the Media Arts department at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts since 2006! Previously, she taught Video Art and Writing at Eleanor McMain and Metairie Park Country Day School. Last spring, she directed Wonder Wander City Park, a land and labor acknowledgement shared through immersive audio, live actors, and time travel featured at the 2025 We Will Dream festival co-produced by No Dream Deferred.

**Zoe C. Zollinger (Faculty)** is a lifelong resident of New Orleans and an avid supporter of the arts. She graduated from Mandeville High School and NOCCA in 2015 in the Media Arts discipline, on her way to a Bachelor of Arts in Animation from Savannah College of Art & Design (SCAD) in 2019. Creating her own wide range of films and helping others on film crews, from directing, animating, and producing. Zoe worked for James Samaritan, a non-profit headquartered in Covington, LA, right out of college, and assisted them with marketing and promotion of their mission to support Foster Youth. She subsequently worked for Stoa Group as a media specialist, directing, producing, filming, editing, and post-production of their social media posts and construction updates, as well as providing support in photography and graphic design. Stoa Group is a multi-family developer and management company headquartered in Hammond, LA. She also worked for the New Orleans Children's Museum, assisting the arts workshop, which got her into her love of teaching. She has been a teacher for NOCCA for three years, teaching Animation and Media Literacy. Zoe has spent a lot of time mentoring her students, teaching them the fundamentals and production of both film and animation. Also, working with NOCCA's outreach by doing Media Arts workshops in different parts of the state, including some teaching collaborations with BE LOUD STUDIOS. She always thought of herself as a teacher and is excited to be a part of the Media Arts staff at her alma mater.

---

## Theater Arts

**Amy Boyce Holtcamp (Chair)** is a writer and director. Her other directing credits include: *Macbeth and Shakespeare's R&J* (Serenbe Playhouse), *Broomstick* (Southern Rep), *Death of a Salesman* (Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre), *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Julius Caesar* (The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane), *Waxie Moon: Extreme Boylesque* (Northwest New Works at On the Boards), *Waxie Moon: Boylesque Cinematheque* (Next Stage), *Heavens to Betsy* by Stephanie Timm (Next Stage), *Wonderful Life* (Washington Ensemble Theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (EVE Productions), *A Christmas Story* (Everett Historic Theatre), *Having Our Say: The Delaney Sisters First 100 Years* (Public Theatre of Kentucky), *Sorry, Wrong Number* (The Culture Project, NY), *Christina and Apartment Building of the Blind* (Soho Rep, NY), and *Machinal* and *Stage Blood* at the University of Washington. Her play, *Dead Reckoning*, was produced as part of the Soho Rep Summer Camp Festival of New Plays, and *The Mystery of Chung Ling Soo* (created with The Flying Carpet Theatre Company) ran in Atlanta's Seven Stages Studio Space (Creative Loafing Award for Best Touring Show of 2005) and at festivals throughout Europe. Other produced plays include *String Theory* (written with Sarah Braunstein and Michael Barakiva at Vassar College) and *Island of Misfits* (Next Stage - Seattle). Her adaptation of the Odysseus myth, *Odysseys*, was performed as part of the conference Nostos: War, the Odyssey and Narratives of Return at the University of South Carolina, and her play *Relevant, Adult, Uncensored*, about Hallie Flanagan, was produced as part of a conference celebrating the Federal Theatre Project at A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle. Holtcamp is a graduate of Vassar College and holds an M.F.A. in Directing from the University of Washington. Holtcamp is also the recipient of the Molly Thatcher Kazan Memorial Prize in Drama for her acting in Elizabeth Egloff's *The Lover*. She is currently the Chair of Theatre Arts at the New Orleans Center for Creative Art.

**Leslie Castay (Faculty)** holds an MFA from Tulane University. She is a veteran of Broadway, Television, Film, and Cabaret stages. A multiple Big Easy Award winner, she returned to New Orleans after a 20-plus-year career as a New York City-based actress. Her Broadway credits include *Beauty and the*

*Beast*, *Guys and Dolls*, *3Penny Opera* (starring Sting), *42nd St*, and numerous Off-Broadway and National Touring productions. She has performed as a soloist at Carnegie Hall, the New Orleans Symphony, and the New Orleans Opera. Some of her directing credits include *Holiday Inn* (Big Easy Award winner for Best Musical and Best Director), *Company*, *School of Rock*, *Waitress*, *The Addams Family*, *Little Women*, *This Property is Condemned*, *Rocky Horror Show*, and *Guys and Dolls* for NOCCA. She directed and co-created Southern Rep's original holiday jukebox musical, *Mandatory Merriment*, which ran for three seasons. Film and TV credits include *The Big Short*, *Green Book*, *NCIS: New Orleans*, *Beautiful Creatures*, *Secrets of Sulphur Springs*, Hulu Network's *Mike*, and as "Alicia Mayfair" on AMC's *Anne Rice's Mayfair Witches*. She is passionate about teaching the next generation of performing artists and is thrilled to be at NOCCA!

**Arrianna Chai (Faculty)** is a passionate performer, educator, and writer who supports and uplifts young artists. She earned her BFA from the Webster Conservatory of Theatre Arts and has been telling bold, honest stories ever since. She began her professional journey as an actor and theatre education intern at Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, performing as Dussie Mae in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and touring schools as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. She most recently worked with Crescent City Stage in collaboration with Goat in the Road, helping students turn their original stories into fully staged performances. Currently, she teaches Acting I and II at NOCCA, where she guides students through the fundamentals of performance, emphasizing ensemble, self-expression, and truthful storytelling.

**Blake Coheley (Faculty, Director of Admissions)** is currently the Director of Student Services and former Chair of Dance and Musical Theatre at the renowned New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). A passionate dancer since the age of three, Blake has toured internationally with The United States Air Force Tops in Blue and performed in acclaimed productions such as *Oliver*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Bye-Bye Birdie*, *42nd Street*, and *Annie*. As an award-winning director and choreographer, Blake has led numerous plays, musicals, theme park shows and industrials, including: *SideShow*, *Working*, *Floyd Collins*, *Anything Goes*, *Godspell*, *Nunsense*, *The Fantasticks*, *Steel Pier*, *A Chorus Line*, *The Who's Tommy*, *Singing in the Rain*, *Jane Eyre*, *Bat Boy*, *SWING*, *The Musical*, *The Secret Garden*, *Carnival*, *Next to Normal*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Aida*, *Heathers*, *Big Fish*, *Fun Home*, *All is Calm*, *Chicago*, *Noises Off*, *Mississippi's Delta Queen Beatles Spectacular*, *7-up* and Harley Davidson's Industrials and in Las Vegas, *The Revue*, an introspective of 80's pop culture and music. He was honored to create, direct, and choreograph "Let Freedom Swing" at The National World War II Museum's Stage Door Canteen and also direct and contribute to the Museum's multi-sensory experience "Expressions of America." Blake is dedicated to inspiring young dancers, singers, and artists and currently serves as President of Dance Teachers United, a leading non-profit organization for dance educators nationwide. His accolades include multiple awards for Best Choreography from the Big Easy Entertainment Awards and recognition as Dance Teacher of the Year in 1998 and 2015. He is also the Executive Director of Anne Reinking's "The Broadway Theatre Project" and continues to teach in their intensive training program. Recently, he received the Teacher of the Year award from the International NETWORK of Schools for the Advancement of Arts Education. A multi-talented actor, director, and choreographer, Blake is committed to excellence in his craft and instills that same dedication in his students and ensembles.

**Simone Immanuel (Faculty)** is a multidisciplinary actor and writer from New Orleans, LA. Film and TV credits include *South Side* (Comedy Central), *Under False Colors: The Story of Frances Thompson* (Comfrey Films), and *Intersection* (Tuckergurl). Stage credits include her Off-Broadway debut in *7 Minutes* by Stefano Massini, her original play *I'm Gonna Let It Shine* (finalist, Kennedy Center's John Cauble Award), and *From the Inside Out*, presented at Long Wharf Theatre's Black Trans Women at

the Center festival. A graduate of NOCCA and Ball State University (BFA, Acting), Simone is Co-Director of Loud Queer Youth Theatre. She created and hosts *Created to Create*, a talk show spotlighting local Black artists in New Orleans, amplifying cultural bearers, and promoting community growth. She has served as an Artist-at-Work Resident with Ashé Cultural Arts Center and the Office of Art and Film and is the Program Consultant for The Alliance for Cultural Equity (A.C.E.), supporting the preservation and amplification of marginalized histories and cultures. Simone is a 2022 Broadway Advocacy Coalition Artivism Fellow, 2023-2024 New Orleans Museum of Art Creative Assembly member, and founder of Bulbancha Beholders, a collective supporting young Black, trans, and queer artists.

**Lauren Malara (Faculty)** is a proud New Orleans native and NOCCA alum. She holds a B.F.A. in Acting from DePaul University, an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of New Orleans, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Xavier University of Louisiana. In 2016, she implemented a Comedy Studies program at NOCCA. In addition to her decade of experience in secondary education, she facilitates professional development and provides affordable community classes for adult learners. Outside of the classroom, Lauren enriches the community with laughter. She is an alum of the famed Second City. Her NPR podcast, *Life Raft*, is a regional Edward R. Murrow award winner. Currently, she hosts and produces The Bear With Me Comedy Open Mic, the longest woman-run comedy show in the state of Louisiana. She is thrilled to have recently released her first comedy album through The New Orleans Public Library.

**Jose C. Simbulan (Faculty)** has been on the podium and in the pits of various theatres over the past 35 years. His work as a music director, conductor, pianist, and keyboard player has provided him with the opportunities to work at Barrington Stage Company, Milwaukee Rep, Arena Stage, Arizona Theatre Company, Connecticut Repertory Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Baltimore Center Stage, Ford's Theatre, Signature Theatre, and Charleston Stage Company; as well as the Broadway productions of *Lestat* and *A Chorus Line*, and the national tours of *Mamma Mia!* and *Wicked*. He is engaged regularly as an audition pianist for Disney Live Entertainment (Parks and Cruise Line), College Audition Project (CAP) United Auditions, Unified Professional Theatre Auditions (UPTA), and the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) Pro-Div Auditions. In 2019, he was inducted into the SETC Hall of Fame. He is a proud graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University. He recently made his New Orleans professional debut as the music director for *A Chorus Line* and Company for Tulane University's Summer Lyric Theatre.

**Natsumi Sugiyama (Faculty)** is an accomplished performer, educator, filmmaker, and martial artist whose career bridges theatre, film, and martial arts at an international level. Originally from Japan, she holds a Master of Liberal Arts from Tulane University, earned in 2015, and a Bachelor of Arts from Waseda University in Tokyo, completed in 2001. At the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA), Sugiyama brings her deep international experience directly into the classroom, blending artistry with rigorous physical training. Beyond her work at NOCCA, she has served for several years as a guest lecturer at Tulane University for TIDE 1880 - Martial Arts for the Performing Arts, a seminar exploring the intersection of martial disciplines and performance, and will return again in fall 2025. She has also been invited on multiple occasions to teach THEA 3030 - Suzuki Method of Acting in Tulane's Department of Theatre and Dance, with her next engagement scheduled for spring 2026. Sugiyama's performance career began in Japan, where she became a member of the Tokyo-based theatre company Ku Na'uka under Artistic Director Satoshi Miyagi. With the company, she played leading roles in productions such as *Narukami*, *Helen of Troy*, and *Electra*. She also worked under the renowned director Tadashi Suzuki in *Kachikachiyama*, *Ivanov*, and *Cinderella*. Her stage work has

been presented at major international festivals including The Theatre Olympics in Delphi, Greece; The Beseto Festival in Neiha, China; The Nikan Festival in Seoul, Korea; and The International Theatre Festival of New Delhi, India. She performed *The Tale of Mephisto* at the Asian Performing Arts Festival in Gimhae, South Korea, and co-created *Medea* with director Antony Sandoval, later adapted into the award-winning featurette *Medea Redux*, in which she played the lead. Her work in film has earned extensive international recognition. *Medea Redux* received the Royal Reel Award at the 2016 Canada International Film Festival, the Award of Merit from the Accolade Global Film Competition, and multiple official festival selections before winning Best Director at the Monza Film Festival in Italy in 2021. Her film *Incarnation* was awarded an Honorable Mention at the 2022 Tokyo International Short Film Festival and was an official selection at the 2023 Toronto Indie Filmmakers Festival. *Strange Beast* brought her numerous accolades, including Best Director in the Dance Film category at the 2023 Toronto Indie Filmmakers Festival, Best Cinematography at the 2023 Short Film Munich Awards, Best Actress awards at both the Summer Monte Carlo Film Awards and the Paris International Short Festival, and Best Dance Film at the 2025 Kyoto Independent Film Festival. Her recent work, *This Is #1*, received an Honorable Mention at the 2025 Europe Music Video Awards and multiple selections at international festivals, including the Tokyo Lift-Off and Madrid Arthouse Film Festivals. Parallel to her artistic achievements, Sugiyama is a highly accomplished martial artist. She holds a fifth-degree black belt in Shotokan Karate and a second-degree black belt in Shodokan (Tomiki) Aikido. As a lead martial arts instructor, she trains students in both disciplines and serves as a member of the USA Shotokan Karate Team. She has competed in the World Cup and is scheduled to represent the United States at the upcoming Pan American Championship. Through her unique integration of performance, film, teaching, and martial arts mastery, Natsumi Sugiyama offers her students at NOCCA an education grounded in discipline, artistry, and a global perspective.

**Katelin Zelon (Faculty)** is a New York City and New Orleans based choreographer and teacher, her recent choreography projects include *COMPANY* (Tulane Summer Lyric), *Jersey Boys* (Virginia Musical Theatre), *Something Rotten*, *Hairspray* and *The Prom* (Rivertown Theaters, LA), Princeton University, *White Christmas* and *GREASE* (Fireside Dinner Theatre, WI), *SpongeBob the Musical* (First Stage, WI). Additional choreography credits include *Matilda*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Singing in the Rain* (Rivertown Theater, LA), *Elf the Musical* (First Stage, WI), *The Addams Family* (New Theater, KS), *Wizard of Oz*, *Joseph and the Amazing...*, and *Cinderella* (Fireside Dinner Theatre, WI), *TWITTER*, *Oscar Health*, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, and various productions at *Broadway Workshop*. Katelin has served as assistant choreographer to Richard Hinds, as well as Al Blackstone, for the debut of his original, Off-Broadway show, *Freddie Falls in Love* (Signature Theatre). Katelin graduated with a Bachelor of Science in American Dance Pedagogy from Oklahoma City University. She served as the private dance coach for Danielle Brooks (*Orange is the New Black* and Broadway's *The Color Purple*). Katelin currently serves on faculty at the New Center of Creative Arts and as guest theater dance [faculty](#) at Broadway Dance Center and MOVE Dance Studio. All my love and gratitude to my husband and family, whose support has allowed me to live a limitless life and the confidence to boldly pursue my passion. @katelinzelon

---

## Visual Arts

**Michel Varisco (Chair)** explores ecological and social justice themes through aerial and underwater photography, video, public sculpture, and temporal installations. She earned her MFA from Tulane University and studied internationally at The Lacoste School of Art in France and in Cortona, Italy. Since 1996, she has taught at NOCCA|Riverfront, where she currently serves as Chair of the Visual Arts Department. Her teaching honors include multiple awards from the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts and numerous Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Varisco was a featured artist in Prospect.4 Biennial and has completed major public art commissions, including *Turning: Prayer Wheels for the Mississippi* for the City of New Orleans and *Fragile Land Rotunda*, commissioned by the Arts Council of New Orleans on behalf of the Joan Mitchell Foundation. Her work has been exhibited and published internationally, and is held in public, private, and corporate collections such as the National Library of Paris, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, and the SURDNA Foundation. Selected solo exhibitions include the Ogden Museum, Acadiana Center for the Arts, A Gallery for Fine Photography, and the Pingyao International Photography Festival (China). Group exhibitions include the El Paso Museum of Art, Huntington Museum of Art, Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art, Armory Center for the Arts, Gallery 1646 (The Hague), Soho Photo Gallery (NY), and the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Her photographs are featured in numerous books, including *Shifting* and *Lightning Storm Mind*, and she has received fellowships from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, the SURDNA Foundation, and artist residencies from the Rauschenberg Foundation.

**Zarouhie Abdalian (Faculty)** works across printmaking, sculpture, and sound, with a focus on context specificity and installation. Abdalian received an MFA from California College of the Arts, San Francisco, and a BA *summa cum laude* with Honors in Studio Art from Tulane University, New Orleans. Abdalian has exhibited her work at numerous international venues and biennials, including Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Secession, Vienna; Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco; 2017 Whitney Biennial, New York; MOSTYN, Wales; the 5th Ural Industrial Biennial, Ekaterinburg, Russia; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), North Adams; Prospect.3, New Orleans; the 8th Berlin Biennale; 9th Shanghai Biennale; CAFAM Biennale, Beijing; and the 12th Istanbul Biennial. Previous solo exhibitions include Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London; Haynes Court, Chicago; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans; LAXART, Los Angeles; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland; and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Abdalian was a 2017-2018 Pollock-Krasner Foundation grantee and a 2020 recipient of a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. Her work is held in public collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, CA; and Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, CA. Select publications include *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Art Review*, and *The Wire*.

**Marcus Brown (Faculty)**, Website: <https://artistmarcus.com/> - A native of New Orleans, Marcus Brown is a sculptor, painter, inventor, musician, and educator. Brown holds a M.Ed. from Portland State University and a BFA from the Kansas City Institute of Art (KCAI) in Missouri. His work is expansive and includes national and international exhibits and performances in New York City, Berlin, Germany, and Krakow, Poland, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, McKenna Art Gallery, and the New Orleans Museum of Art, to name a few. Brown currently has public sculptures in Biloxi, Mississippi (Human Universal Musical Sound [HUMS]) and The New Leaf on St. Bernard Ave., St. Peter Claver, and Henriette Delille at St. Peter Claver School in New Orleans. He also has sound sculptures at JAMNOLA

and recently developed a public piece for interactive display at the 2022 New Orleans French Quarter Festival. Mentors like the late Lin Emery, John T. Scott, and Jim Leedy collectively instilled in Brown the importance of always learning and experimenting to create your own path. In that vein, Brown developed a form of painting called Electro-sonic Painting in which the artist paints with sound/data-producing instruments. He has performed with his invention in several venues, both locally and nationally. In addition to his performance art, Brown has exhibited with artists such as Andy Warhol, Chris Burden, Hannah Wilke, and others around the world. Brown is currently combining a new form of creative storytelling using Augmented Reality (AR) sculptures with interactive multimedia elements. His latest project, *Passage*, is a geotagged musically interactive augmented reality (AR) sculpture installation series based on slave ships and enslaved peoples.

**Terry DeRoche (Faculty)** is an accomplished artist and educator with over 25 years of experience teaching visual arts at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). With a background in both fine arts and special education, DeRoche holds an M.Ed. in Gifted & Talented Education from the University of New Orleans and a B.F.A. in Photography from the Maine College of Art At NOCCA, DeRoche has developed and taught curriculum in digital media, drawing, and painting, while also serving in leadership roles including Summer Department Chair, Arts Expanded core team member, and faculty representative on the NOCCA|Institute Board. Beyond teaching, DeRoche has contributed as a computer technician, designer of institutional publications, and mentor for emerging artists. DeRoche's professional practice spans photography and digital media, with exhibitions ranging from local faculty showcases to international exhibitions in Prague and juried shows curated by leading museum professionals. Their design work has been featured in publications, performance programs, and book projects, with many self-published photography collections. A dedicated arts advocate, DeRoche has earned recognition, including multiple National Scholastic Art & Writing Educator Gold Medals and a SURDNA Arts Teachers Fellowship. They have presented nationally on arts education, digital media, and curriculum development, and have served as juror, visiting artist, and mentor in various academic and community arts settings. DeRoche's career reflects a deep commitment to fostering creativity, advancing arts education, and sustaining an active studio practice.

**Sarah House (Faculty)**, a Baltimore native, moved to New Orleans in 2010 to earn her MFA in Studio Art from Tulane University. House has been an Artist in Residence at 10 different national and international residency programs, most recently at the Joan Mitchell Center. Sarah House is represented by Ann Connelly Fine Art and is a Member Artist at Baton Rouge Gallery. She is a Windgate fellow, a Nyburg Fellow, and a 2022 Center for Craft Career Advancement Grant recipient. House currently serves as a Visual Arts Instructor at New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts.

**Madeleine Kelly (Faculty)** is a visual artist based in New Orleans working in painting, printmaking, and installation. Her work explores encounters with mystery in the natural world, especially through the flora, fauna, light, and water of the South Louisiana landscape. She received a BA from the University of San Francisco and an MFA from the University of New Orleans. Kelly is the recipient of the 2024 Homer L. Hitt Society Art Award, was the 2024 King Range National Conservation Area Artist-in-Residence, and was a New Orleans Water Collaborative Brackish Collective Artist-in-Residence in 2025. A long-time arts educator, she received the 2015-2016 Teacher of the Year award at ReNew Accelerated High School in New Orleans. She has shown her work locally and nationally with recent solo exhibitions at the Berry Biodiversity Center in Laramie, WY, and the SCARF gallery in Shelter Cove, CA. Her work has been featured in the *New Orleans Arts Rag* and *Antenna Signals Magazine*.

**Keith Perelli (Faculty)** is a visual artist exploring the figure through painting, printmaking, and drawing. He received a Bachelor's in Arts in Painting and Printmaking at The University of New Orleans and his Master of Fine Arts from The University of Cincinnati in sculpture. His figurative work explores our human experience through the filter of life and southern upbringing. He has participated in numerous national and international invitationals and juried exhibitions. Mr. Perelli is a recipient of a SURDNA Foundation's Arts Teacher Fellowship, a Louisiana Division of the Arts Fellowship, and a Fondazione Ratti Arts Fellowship. He has received five professional development grants from the Louisiana Division of the Arts. He was awarded a Downtown District Development /RTA commission for a public works project on Canal Street in New Orleans in 2009. He was selected as the juror for the September 23rd Competition at the Alexandria Museum of Art in 2011. Mr. Perelli has had solo exhibitions in New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Houston. He was also featured at the Leslie Lohman Foundation Gallery in New York and an exhibit titled "Katrina, Catastrophe and Catharsis" at the Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs, CO. A traveling mid-career survey of his work was exhibited at the Alexandria Museum of Art in Louisiana, Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, The Isaac Delgado Gallery at Delgado Community College in New Orleans and Gallery 308 in Muncie Indiana. His professional website is [keithperelli.com](http://keithperelli.com).

**Laura Vélez (Faculty)** is a Puerto Rican artist whose multidisciplinary practice spans painting, drawing, and sculptural installation. Centered on the human figure, her work investigates identity, cultural heritage, and personal narrative through portraiture and figurative imagery. Raised in Louisiana, Vélez graduated from the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). She earned her BFA from Louisiana Tech University and her MFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, with additional studies at the New York Academy of Art and the Art Students League of New York. Her career includes a range of creative roles that continue to shape the depth of her studio practice. She has worked as a mural painter with Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program and in art conservation with institutions such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. These experiences have enriched her technical expertise and deepened her sensitivity to history, materials, and preservation. Vélez's work has been exhibited nationally in venues such as the Slought Foundation in Philadelphia; the Mexican Consulate, The Front Gallery, and LeMieux Gallery in New Orleans; and Cabrini College in Radnor, PA, where she presented a solo exhibition. Her work has also been featured in several catalogues and publications, including *New American Paintings* and *Hispanic Women Making Art: Creative Empowerment and Identity*. In addition, her works have been commissioned for private collections nationally and internationally.

**Jade Thiraswas (Faculty)** is a Thai-American artist from New Orleans, Louisiana, raised between the Gulf South and Southeast Asia. Drawing from her roots as what she playfully calls Cajun Asian, Jade's work explores the layered experiences of identity, community, and cultural preservation. She works primarily in photography, often in close collaboration with her subjects, challenging traditional boundaries of authorship and representation—especially within documentary practices shaped by colonialism, otherness, and patriarchy. Her long-term projects unfold naturally over time, taking on a spirit of visual ethnography—grounded in research, deep listening, trust, sensitivity, and care. Jade is an alum of the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, where she first discovered her love for the visual arts. She earned her BFA in photography and art history from Memphis College of Art in 2015 and her MFA in photography & related media from Rochester Institute of Technology in 2018. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, she's contributed to *The New York Times*, is a member of Women Photograph, and has learned a lot through artist residencies, portfolio reviews, internships, and a variety of workshops. These days, she's back in her hometown—getting reconnected with her Cajun Asian heritage, playing with her poodle, eating beaucoup good food, and

teaching at NOCCA, the very place where her creative journey first began. She brings an expanded perspective into the classroom, introducing students to a diverse view of contemporary art and the many paths available to working artists.

---

## Vocal Music

**Phyllis Treigle (Chair)** is a native of New Orleans and is the daughter of the great bass-baritone Norman Treigle. She holds a B.M. and M.M. from Loyola University and made her professional debut with the New Orleans Opera Association in 1980. She has since appeared with this company several times, most notably as Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer* in 1998. She was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio in the early 1980s and appeared in several roles with Houston Grand Opera. Miss Treigle has also appeared with the New York City Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Dublin Grand Opera Society, Pittsburgh Opera, Sarasota Opera Association, and Wolf Trap Opera Company, among others. In 1997, Ms. Treigle portrayed the title role in the original version of Cherubini's *Médée*, for Opera Quotannis, at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, which was subsequently recorded by Newport Classic. More recent performing credits include the role of Dame Marthe Schwerlein in *Faust* and the role of Mamma Lucia in *Cavalleria rusticana*, with the New Orleans Opera Association in 2017. Ms. Treigle joined the faculty of the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) in 2001 and has been Department Chair of Vocal Music since 2006. She will portray the role of Madame de Croissy in New Orleans Opera's production of *Dialogues des Carmélites* in March 2026.

**Brandon Banks (Faculty)** began his music studies at the age of 14 and became a self-taught pianist. At 16, he began his theatrical debut as musical director with the show *Guys and Dolls* (2011) in his hometown of New Bern, NC. He began his formal studies at East Carolina University and obtained a bachelor's degree in Music Education with a concentration in Choral Music (2016) and a master's degree in Piano Performance (2018). In 2018, he relocated to further his education at Florida State University. He obtained a second master's and a doctorate in Piano Performance with a concentration in Collaborative Piano (2020, 2023). He has accompanied choirs at the middle and high school level for 15 years in North Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. He has musically directed over 50 shows, including *Rent*, *Company*, *In The Heights*, *Into The Woods*, *Catch Me If You Can*, and *The Prom*. He is a member of the music honor society Pi Kappa Lambda and currently serves as music director for the summer camp Belvoir Terrace in Massachusetts and as a staff pianist for Loyola University in New Orleans. He will serve as music director for Destrehan High School's production of *Shrek the Musical* (March 2026) and *Jagged Little Pill* with JPAC (April 2026). He is beyond grateful for the opportunity to work at NOCCA and bring his expertise to the next generation of musical talent.

**Mark-Anthony Thomas (Faculty)** Praised for his versatility and spontaneity, multi-genre vocalist Mark-Anthony Thomas is a proud native of New Orleans, Louisiana. He is a graduate of the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA) and Loyola University of New Orleans, where he received his Master of Music, studying with internationally acclaimed artist Luretta Bybee. Most recently, Mark-Anthony has appeared in New Orleans Opera's production of *Blue as Policeman #2* and was a soloist with the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra for their annual Holiday Spectacular. He performed the title role in the world premiere of Chris Burton's *The Self Portrait of Jonathan Jenkins* with New Fangled Opera. He also has performed various roles and concerts in the greater New Orleans area, specifically productions at Loyola University New Orleans, including Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* (Gherardo), Gounod's *Romeo e Juliette* (Tybalt), Kurt Weill's *Street Scene* (Daniel Buchanan),

Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* (First Commissioner), Massenet's *Cendrillon* (Le Roi), and Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (La Théière). He has also appeared in OperaCreole and Cripple Creek Theatre's production of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* (Andy) and as Servant/First Soldier in Jose Rivera's *Sueño*. Mark-Anthony is currently a semi-finalist for the 2026 Grammy Educator of the Year award. Along with his operatic repertoire, he is a songwriter, arranger, and performs at jazz and R&B venues throughout the New Orleans region. He is also the Arts Pastor at Vintage Church New Orleans, an Artist-Teacher at NOCCA, and serves on its Board of Directors, serves on the Jr. Philharmonic Society of New Orleans's Board of Directors, and is a background vocalist for the GRAMMY-award winning Tank and the Bangas.

## **NOCCA Academic Faculty Bios**

### **Staff**

**Felicia Steward (Special Education Coordinator)** is a seasoned educator with over 15 years of experience supporting student success through special education, academic assessment, and inclusive instructional leadership. Felicia holds a Master's of Education in Inclusive Classroom Leadership from Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, and a Bachelor of Science in Marketing from Grambling State University. Throughout her career, Felicia has remained deeply committed to equity in education. She has developed and implemented Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with exceptionalities across multiple schools, including Algiers Technology Academy, Algiers Charter, Glen Oaks Middle School, ReNEW Cultural Arts Academy, and Kenilworth Science & Technology Middle School. She also has experience as the Special Test Coordinator at Landry-Walker High School, where she oversaw all statewide testing. Her expertise lies in bridging the gap between compliance and care—ensuring that all students, especially those with learning differences, are given the support they need to thrive academically and personally. She continues to advocate for inclusive practices, data-driven instruction, and collaborative educational environments that uplift all learners.

**Kit Nelson (Director of Academic Studio)** has been a part of the NOCCA team since 2012 and has served as an Integrated Sciences Faculty Member, Chair of Integrated Sciences, and currently as Director of Academic Studio. During that time, she has helped to build and continues to support the Academic Studio program with a focus on ensuring that the Academic Studio is a visionary school for creative learners. Having earned her PhD from Southern Methodist University in 2001, Kit spent 7 years directing and conducting research at ancient sites in Egypt, Peru, and the American Southwest while also teaching at Tulane University. In recognition of her commitment to and skills in fostering an educational environment composed of critical thinking, hands-on experiences, and artistic expression, she was awarded several teaching and service awards, including the prestigious Newcomb Distinguished Faculty Award in 2010, and has over 20 peer-reviewed publications. With her unwavering dedication to archaeology and education, Kit continues her interest in archaeology as a Research Associate of the University of Texas, San Antonio, and as a field archaeologist with the Mopan Valley Archaeological Project and the Mopan Valley Prehistoric Project. At NOCCA, she oversees the Academic Studio Faculty, Mental Health Services, Multilingual Learning, and Academic Studio Curriculum. She also works as part of the Student Support Team to ensure students have what they need to succeed at NOCCA and is a member of the Administrative Leadership Team. Kit dedicates herself to understanding the unique strengths and ambitions of each student, encouraging

them to embrace and grow their individual passions and talents.

---

## Humanities

**Raina Zelinski (Chair)(9th Grade English Lead)** is Canadian-born and New Orleans-raised. She is a graduate of Ben Franklin High School and holds an MA in British Literature and Rhetoric Composition as well as an MAT in Secondary English Language Arts from the University of New Orleans. Her twenty-year career has focused on critical thinking, reading, and writing in secondary and post-secondary schools in New Orleans. She has joyfully been teaching at NOCCA for a decade. Raina is also a dancer (NOCCA alum!), a writer, a mother, and an avid naturalist. She was a founding member of the dance troupe, The Cherry Bombs, and is co-founder of Lucky Bean Poetry and Press.

**Adam Karlin (Faculty 9th Grade History Lead)** Before teaching, Adam Karlin's journalism career included contributions to publications like the BBC, NPR, Catapult, and The Bitter Southerner, as well as author or co-author credits on over 100 guidebooks for *Lonely Planet*, dispatching from every continent bar Antarctica. He is also the author of *Luna & the Heart of the Forest* (Breakwater Books), a Middle Grade dark fantasy novel that was named a top children's book of the year by Teach Magazine (Canada). He has an MA in International Studies from the School of Oriental & African Studies (University of London), an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of New Orleans, and lives with his wife, two kids, a dog, and some loud backyard crows.

**Madeline Todd (Faculty 10th Grade English Lead)** holds degrees in English and Secondary English Education from the University of Mississippi and is currently completing her MA in English at Middlebury College. Now in her seventh year of teaching, her practice emphasizes student voice, inquiry, and collaborative dialogue, encouraging learners to think critically and engage with diverse perspectives. She believes trust and community are the foundation for meaningful learning and works to create a classroom where students feel supported, challenged, and empowered to grow as artists and intellectuals. Outside of the classroom, she enjoys yoga, writing, and spending time with her dog Louis, who bears a charming resemblance to Scrim.

**Eric Johns (Faculty 10th Grade History Lead)** is a Louisiana native who holds a Ph.D. in Musicology from UC Riverside, where he was also a postdoctoral fellow with the Center for Teaching and Learning. His musicological research has appeared in *Música Oral del Sur* and books including the *Cambridge Companion to Tango* (Cambridge University Press) and *Cultural History of the Guitar in Latin America* (Vernon Press). His educational research appears in *EduCause* and *To Improve the Academy*. Eric brings expertise in digital humanities from his previous work as Archivist & Curator on the Centennial Project for the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane. He is also a classically-trained guitarist and percussionist.

**Carlus Henderson (Faculty 11th Grade English Lead)** holds an MFA from the University of Michigan and is a writer and mixed media artist whose work blends history, memory, and Black cultural production. His teaching career centers on literature, history, and cultural studies in secondary and post-secondary classrooms, with a focus on the intersections of Black studies, Southern history, freedom dreaming, and civic engagement. Outside the classroom, his writing has appeared in *Callaloo* and *The Offing*, his films have been shown at The Eastern Parkway Theatre (Baltimore) and Cornell University, and he continues to explore the American South and its diasporas through poetry,

visual art, and community-engaged scholarship. A former chef's assistant and a cheese salesman in Vermont, he is currently in pre-production on a documentary that explores foodways, land, family, and the meaning of home.

**Kate Kokontis (Faculty 11th Grade History Lead)** is a cultural historian, visual artist, and writer; by far her proudest and most joyful creative and critical work has been co-founding (2011) and teaching (2011-present) in NOCCA's Humanities Department in the Academic Studio. Kate earned her B.A. from Yale, a post-baccalaureate certificate in painting from the SACI College of Art and Design-Florence, and her Ph.D. in Performance Studies from U.C. Berkeley. At NOCCA, Kate has been a long-standing member of the Equity Committee and has been involved in many collaborative projects with her colleagues across arts and academic disciplines. Locally, she has been involved in various education justice organizing projects; she currently serves on the executive council of the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO). Kate has been invited to present at the National Endowment for the Humanities and various universities and national conferences about critical, interdisciplinary high school humanities pedagogy and curriculum. In 2023, she completed a New School Creation Fellowship through the Center for Love and Justice / HTH School of Education.

**Angela Watkins (Faculty 12th Grade English Lead)** is a Chicago native who earned a B.A. from DePaul University and a Master's and Ph.D. in English (Literary Studies) from the University of Iowa. Her research background focuses on the African Diaspora, and she has published several articles, encyclopedia entries, and book reviews on the Harlem Renaissance, the Afro-Caribbean, and the American South. A fiction enthusiast, Dr. Watkins has written several short stories and is currently revising a novel draft. She also brings her love of storytelling into the classroom.

**Byron Lilly (Faculty 12th Grade History Lead)** moved to New Orleans in 2003, following a two-year commitment to the Peace Corps in Mali, West Africa. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in American Studies from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA (2001) and a Master's + 30 in U.S. History and Literature from Tulane University (2009). In addition to Mr. Lilly's academic pursuits, he owns and operates a Fig Orchard with his wife outside of Opelousas, LA. He is also a carpenter with over 25 years of experience. Mr. Lilly is in his 14th year with the Academic Studio.

**Pauline Kibby (Faculty French)** is a native of France who moved from Paris to New Orleans in 2010 to complete her Master's thesis at the University of New Orleans. She earned both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Political Science, specializing in International Relations, from Université Paris VIII, and later received her Teaching Certification from the Tulane School of Professional Advancement. Pauline has taught French in a wide range of settings and levels, from immersion education at the International School of Louisiana to advanced classes at the Alliance Française de la Nouvelle-Orléans. In recent years, while teaching at NOCCA, she has been continuously impressed and inspired by her students' unique perspectives and the creative spin they bring to anything they take on. Outside of school, she most enjoys gardening, playing music, spending time outdoors, and traveling.

**Jen Wilson Karaoglu (Multilingual Learners Lead and Spanish Faculty)** is an Oregonian at heart with a deep passion for language, culture, and education. She earned her Master's in Spanish Literature from Portland State University after studying at both the University of Arizona and PSU. A certified K-12 Spanish and ESL teacher with an emphasis in PBL, Jen has been working in education over the past 22 years in a wide range of educational roles including: Multilingual Learner Director, ESL teacher, Spanish teacher, Curriculum Coordinator, and Special Needs Case Manager. She has also

served as an academic coach for teachers of Multilingual Learners in New Orleans and in San Diego in collaboration with the University of San Diego, California. Her experience spans IB schools, charter schools, and language institutes, both in the U.S. and abroad. With 11 years working in education internationally, Jen brings a global perspective to her work and is deeply committed to fostering inclusive, multilingual learning environments where all students feel seen and supported. When not supporting language learning, she can be found training for a 5K, taking photographs, or spending time with her family.

---

## Sciences

**Helene Schmehl (Faculty 9th Grade Math Lead)** is a New Orleans native, educator, and linguist with over a decade of teaching experience, including three years teaching Algebra I. She earned her B.A. in German and Psychology from Bard College at Simon's Rock, followed by an M.A. in Linguistics from the University of Potsdam in Germany. An Erasmus Mundus Fellowship awardee, she is currently completing an M.Sc. in Computer Science with a focus on Natural Language Processing from Saarland University (Germany) and the University of the Basque Country (Spain). Her academic work has focused on multilingualism, contact phenomena, and the digital humanities. Before teaching, she worked as a curriculum designer for several online language-learning platforms, including Babel and Lingoda. In her free time, she teaches German classes at the Deutsches Haus for both children and adults.

**Marty Authier (Faculty 9th Grade Science Lead)** earned his Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Tulane University (2005) and his Master's Degree in Anthropology from Southern Methodist University (2008) in Dallas, TX. As he completed his Master's at SMU, he was a TA for a variety of anthropology classes, and then he designed and taught Honors First-Year Seminars for three years at SMU. His anthropology studies gave him a broad range of academic experiences from deep history and cultural geography to scientific method and statistics. He joined the NOCCA Academic Studio team in 2013 in the Integrated Humanities department, and he led the history side of Integrated Humanities I for nine years. In 2023, he switched to the Integrated Sciences, and he led the math side of Integrated Sciences I for three years. He now leads the physical science portion of Integrated Sciences I.

**Leni Ivonovsky (Faculty 10th Grade Math Lead)** earned her Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Auburn University in 2012. The primary focus of her undergraduate studies was working with incarcerated youth, completing her undergraduate practicum at the Alabama Department of Youth Services. In the Spring of 2014, she moved to New Orleans to complete a year of service through an AmeriCorps program at ReNew Accelerated High School. After completing her year of service, Ms. Ivanovsky joined the faculty at ReNew Accelerated High as a special education case manager and the lead mathematics interventionist, where she worked until 2017. The next year, she joined the faculty at Abramson Sci Academy as a special education case manager and math essentials teacher. In 2018, Ms. Ivanovsky joined the Integrated Mathematics faculty at NOCCA, where she has been the Geometry teacher since. Additionally, in 2018, Ms. Ivanovsky began to pursue her Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, which she finished in 2020.

**Kathy Brooks (Faculty 10th Grade Science Lead)** was born and raised in NOLA, left home to earn her B.S. in Psychology with minors in Animal Science and Wildlife and Fisheries from Texas A & M University. While at Texas A & M, her focus was on ethology (animal behavior), especially in

domesticated animals. She then continued her education at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln to earn her Master's degree in Biological Psychology, with her major research being in wild bird behavior and communication. Dr. Brooks worked and studied as a researcher and an instructor for several years in Conservation Biology at the University of New Orleans. She then finished her Ph.D. in Science Education at Louisiana State University, studying graphical components of popular college textbooks for their adherence to Tufte's good graphics principles and their incorporation of systems-based thinking. She has also taught Biology, Psychology, and Health Sciences to college students for more than a decade at the University of Holy Cross. Dr. Brooks joined NOCCA's faculty in 2014, rounding out her more than 25 year teaching career. Dr. Brooks was born and raised in New Orleans, and when not teaching, she enjoys spending time with her husband, her college-aged children, and her pets.

**Ted Marks (Faculty 11th Grade Math Lead)** has been a member of the mathematics faculty in the Department of Integrated Sciences at NOCCA since 2016. He earned his Ph.D. and M.A. in archaeology from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Iowa in 2018. His research as a graduate student focused on human adaptations to climate change in the Namib Desert over the Pleistocene-Holocene transition. Earlier, Dr. Marks earned his B.Sc. in Anthropology from Tulane University in 2007 with a focus on Latin American archaeology. Before NOCCA, he worked as a contract archaeologist with R.C. Goodwin and Associates, Inc., and taught courses as an adjunct professor in the Department of Anthropology at Tulane. In addition to teaching at NOCCA, Dr. Marks is currently involved in a long-term archaeological research project with an international team studying early human adaptations to arid environments in the Namib Desert, and he regularly contributes to scientific articles published in scholarly journals. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Dr. Marks has lived in New Orleans since 2004.

**Travis Haas (Faculty 11th Grade Science Lead)** earned his Ph.D. from the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Tulane University in 2014. His dissertation research examined the evolutionary implications of dam construction on the fishes of the Southeastern United States. He holds a B.A. in Biology and Music (Piano) from Lawrence University (2007), where his piano studies culminated in an interdisciplinary lecture-recital entitled, "The influence of birdsong in the literature of the piano." He also holds an M.S. in Biology (Ecology and Evolution) from Tulane University (2010). Before joining the Academic Studio faculty at NOCCA in 2013, Travis was a Visiting Professor of Urban Studies at Bard Early College New Orleans, where he taught an interdisciplinary science course about biodiversity and human well-being. For many summers, he taught a field biology course for gifted and talented rising high school freshmen as part of the Duke Talent Identification Program (TIP) at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. Since 2023, Travis has taught a marine ecology course for gifted and talented middle school students as part of Johns Hopkins's Center for Talented Youth (CTY) at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Travis's research examines the evolutionary and ecological implications of dam construction and flood control in the Southeastern United States, with the majority of his fieldwork conducted in the rivers and reservoirs of Alabama and Louisiana. In addition to his work as a scientist, Travis continues to maintain a private piano studio and performs on a limited basis.

**Amy Tilling (Faculty 12th Grade Math Lead)** earned her Bachelor of Science in Secondary Mathematics Education from SUNY Cortland and her Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Texas at Arlington. After graduating from SUNY Cortland, Amy moved to Philadelphia and taught in the Philadelphia School District for 2 years (teaching 5th and 6th grade Math and ACT Math prep) before relocating to King George, Virginia where she taught at King George High School for 3 years (teaching Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, Trigonometry, and PreCalculus).

After getting married in 2004, Amy moved to New Orleans in July 2005 to begin teaching Geometry at Hahnville High School. A desire to teach closer to home led her to teach at McGehee for 8 years (teaching middle school math & science and all math courses from PreAlgebra to AP Calculus and serving as Mathematics Department Chair) before transitioning to NOCCA in 2015. Since teaching at NOCCA, Amy has taught Integrated Sciences I, II, and IV as well as served as the Integrated Sciences Department Chair and is currently the Coordinator of Assessment and Academic Advancement.

**Russell Wolfe (Faculty 12th Grade Math Lead)** earned his Master's and PhD in Biomedical Engineering from Tulane University. His dissertation research investigated the impact of mechanical forces on stem cell differentiation and resulted in publications on the epigenetic differentiation of vascular phenotypes, insights into body plan development, and bioreactor techniques. During his graduate studies at Tulane, he also taught laboratory courses focused on embedded microcontrollers, biomedical devices, and robotics. Before joining Tulane, Russell earned a Bachelor of Science in Physics and Biology from Creighton University. During his undergraduate studies, he was a member of the Bio-optical Research Group and researched the impact of cellular heating during laser stretching using Raman spectroscopy in order to more accurately diagnose cancer cell metastasis. Since joining NOCCA in 2013, Russell has taught Integrated Sciences I, Integrated Sciences II, and Integrated Sciences IV as a math lead. In 2022, he transitioned from math lead to science lead. He served as the chair of the integrated sciences department from 2019-2022. Outside of his current position at NOCCA, Russell has obtained a certification for Data Science, and he has cultivated an artistic practice in ceramics for over a decade.

**Dale Baxter (Faculty Physical Education)** is a nationally certified clinical massage therapist with certification in Thai Massage and training in Deep Tissue Massage, Swedish Massage, Neuromuscular Therapy, Craniosacral Therapy, Sports Massage, and Reflexology. He began at a very young age experimenting with Eastern methodologies through martial arts training. While exploring his physical and spiritual capabilities, he discovered the beauty of music and his natural abilities to play and create musical compositions. Dale went on to travel around the world performing with various show bands and musical groups. Through his stage experience, he understood that performing can be very physically demanding and stressful. He also understood that one must practice a method of relaxation and release to allow the body to achieve maximum performance. He looked back on his training in martial arts and his experience as a performer and created a style of bodywork that releases physical stress while enhancing physical performance. In 2000, he created the Free Spirit Fitness Massage Company which focused on bodywork for performers and athletes. He has worked with various actors in the movie industry as well as performers of the New Orleans Ballet Association network, Ballet Hispanico, Rennie Harris Dance Company, and the Lula Elzy Dance Theatre. He is referred to as the one "natural necessity" by the dance community. In 2006 he established Salon ELAD, a full-service salon, which provides skin, hair, nail, and massage services to people in the New Orleans area. Using his innovative approach in creating massage modalities, he developed the ELAD Signature Massage. ELAD is an invigorating massage created from a mixture of martial arts and dance techniques geared to not only enhance physical performance, but also to increase flexibility and strength while releasing tension and stress. Dale went on to use his love of health and fitness to develop a physical regimen for performers, which fused martial arts techniques, structured physical games, and a natural, whole food lifestyle that allowed individuals to achieve optimum levels of physical fitness. Dale now teaches physical education at NOCCA where he focuses on the use of energy, self-love, respect for others, and discipline. He encourages students to practice these values in everyday life to achieve and maintain a positive and healthy lifestyle.

**Catherine Caldwell (Faculty Physical Education)** was born and raised in New Orleans. She is a performing artist, writer, choreographer, filmmaker, dance educator, and anti-racist organizer holding a Master of Arts Degree in Arts Administration from the University of New Orleans. Catherine is the Associate Director of KM Dance Project, where she also serves as a choreographer, rehearsal director, and performer. She received two Big Easy Awards in choreography and performance for her solo "IONO". She has also been named a Lead Artist with Junebug Productions, Incorporated, performing in such works as Power of the Black Feminine and Homecoming Project as well as rehearsal director and production assistant for their touring production, Gomela. Catherine has spent almost two decades in Dance Education. As a young educator, Catherine began teaching dance at Audubon Charter School, and later in several charter schools in the city. Catherine was a proud member of the dance faculty at Kelly's School of Dance and New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) for several years. She was selected as a Teacher Fellow with the Bates Dance Festival and has participated in the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance Teacher Workshop and the Ailey School Horton Teacher Workshop. In 2017, she completed a 200 hour yoga teacher training and is a certified yoga instructor through Yoga Alliance. In her early days at NOCCA, Catherine held a deep investment in the campus culture and community, serving as a member of the Equity Committee and as the Arts Faculty Representative on the NOCCA Board. She is a former co-facilitator of the Race and Gender Equity group meetings for New Orleans' Creative Response Network. Catherine is also a part of PISAB's (People's Institute for Survival and Beyond) Anti-Racist Organizer Network. Catherine's administrative roles have included Director of Member Services at Dance/USA, Managing Director for Dancing Grounds, Programs Logistics Coordinator for Urban Bush Women, Administrative Associate with Junebug Productions, and Program Associate for the Kuumba Institute at Ashe Cultural Arts Center. She currently serves on the board of Goat in the Road Productions. Catherine is currently working on a 500 hour yoga certification while also teaching yoga at NOCCA. She is also an adult ballet instructor at Dancing Grounds. She is currently working on her own dance curriculum rooted in brain development, patterns of connectivity and dance rigor. Catherine is also a playwright, with a work titled "Duplessis Street" based on her family's commune-style living on two plots of land in the seventh ward in New Orleans. Catherine is also one half of "Bell & Caldwell" an arts and culture resource and digital zine in New Orleans.