

Personal Statement

To the esteemed members of the Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure Committee at The University of New Orleans:

I am extremely grateful for your time and energy, reading through the narratives I have prepared for my tenure dossier. I know that the end of the semester is always a complicated time. I hope to express my gratitude for your review in an appropriate and un-hyperbolic way: your work is meaningful to me.

Writing these documents gave me an opportunity to reflect not only on the last seven years of my time as an assistant professor at UNO, but also the entirety of my career at UNO starting in 2008. I focus on the teaching, service, and research I have performed here since 2019, but I found it difficult to make points without referring to the first part of my full-time employment, from 2011-2019.

My family has been deeply involved in UNO almost since its beginnings. Both my mother and my father are first-generation college students. They began taking classes towards their bachelor's degrees in science here in 1968. This is where they met and eventually started dating (at the persistence of my dad). In this sense, my very genetic origins are here at UNO. I have loved seeing my parents become more involved in the alumni association; my father is a past president (2013). It has been an honor to work with alumni through the UNO Foundation as we have scheduled gallery exhibitions for them, and to witness the creation of new alums each year – especially those graduate students who receive the Homer Hitt Art Award founded in 2015.

It has always been a point of pride for me to work here at my alma mater (B.A., Fine Arts, 2004) in the department and with the people I so dearly cherish as advisors, colleagues, and friends. UNO is family to me. I think that our transition back to the LSU system is also like returning to family and will ultimately serve to strengthen our resources and our communities.

I hope that what I have created for my tenure dossier meets your expectations of a colleague to join your ranks in tenure. It has been a remarkable experience to write these documents – a testament of a work ethic I value so much and that I admire in my colleagues.

Thank you for your time with my documents. I look forward to any response I may have from you.

Most sincerely,



Kathy Rodriguez
Assistant Professor, School of the Arts
Interim Program Coordinator, Fine Arts
Director, UNO Women's Center

Introduction

I divided this document into several areas for clarity for the members of the tenure and promotion committee:

1. [Introduction](#)

This is a brief overview of some of the issues I describe throughout the narrative.

2. [Teaching](#)

This is a summary of the teaching narrative for the dossier, describing ways I think I can immediately address needs in the classroom.

3. [Service](#)

This is a summary of the service document, with some thoughts on connecting and collaborating in my areas of service with other parts of the University

4. [Research](#)

This is a summary of the research narrative for the dossier, with notes on anticipated research and publication.

5. [Biography](#)

This is a brief biography also available on my website: [Link to Biography](#)

All the materials I am submitting for my tenure dossier may be found on the Tenure Review page on my website: [Link to Tenure Review Page](#)

The materials I sent for external review can be found on the External review page on my website: [Link to External Review Page](#)

More information can be found by navigating the menu options on my website: [Link to kathyrodriguez.info.](#)

All my teaching, service, and research narratives are linked to issues of healing, especially related to mental health. The points below relate some of the realizations and realities about mental health I have encountered in the past seven years:

- I am navigating the spectrum of post-quarantine and COVID PTSD, social anxiety, and depression in the classroom.
- It is in the arts that students tell me they feel the safest, in our studio classrooms where they can process their experiences, where they can be vulnerable.
- The expanded vocabulary I have now about neurodivergence is not an indicator of its increased prevalence; rather, I have better names for personalities and approaches than in the past. This continuing education is important to all my roles at UNO.
- The intersectionality in both the microcosm of the classroom and of campus, within the macrocosm of New Orleans, is something I celebrate at UNO.

- I love, and have always loved, learning about people's experiences; in my service roles (including teaching), I am public-facing and often interacting one-on-one or in small groups with students and community members, sharing and communicating.
- I think that owning being human and honoring others' humanness is extremely important.
- There are many healthy coping mechanisms to manage reactions to a variety of experiences that range from the everyday to the extreme. I do my best to implement healthy coping strategies in my classrooms; they include breathwork and stretching, as well as taking mindful pause.
- Content related to my mental health has been at the forefront of much of the research I have done since 2013. I see that it has been at least in the background of my artwork for much longer than that - I have had a mental health regimen since I was nine years old, which is also when I started painting with seriousness.

My research narrative focuses on the content of healing in my work. I took continuous FMLA in spring 2024 for the care of my mental health. This was a major milestone in my healing journey, which began when I was nine years old and started a mental health regimen. I felt extremely divided over the decision to take leave because I did not want to leave my students and faculty in a rut and because it was so close to the end of my tenure track. I realized, though, that I would not complete my tenure track and I would truly leave my students and faculty if I did not make the choice to care for myself.

I want to be candid about this because I think that stigmatizing mental health issues, and thus stigmatizing healing from them, leads to their cultural and social pervasiveness – there is more and unnecessary suffering because of shame. Communication is deeply important to me; it enables healing. In the spaces I manage and create, no one is ever mandated to communicate, and never specifically about anything. However, it is my aim to create safe, calm places for our students and our community – in and outside of the classroom, on and off campus - so that people in them feel safe to communicate and heal. I do my best to watch and listen and then respond in the best ways I can to encourage a sense of safety and belonging to promote healing.

Teaching

I will never forget my first day of teaching as IOR when I was a graduate student at The University of Montana in 2006. I used an overhead projector and transparencies to go over course requirements and the syllabus to save paper. I was visibly shaking, and I blurted out to my classroom, full of newly minted drawing students, that I was so nervous. The memory of using now anachronistic hardware is hilarious, but my nervousness in front of the group has not changed.

Humanizing myself has always been important to me in the classroom. I'm most grateful for the trust students put into the class, for each other and for me. Art making is a vulnerable space for most if not all our students. I feel vulnerable in that space too. Checking in with my students helps them feel ok with checking in with me and each other. It is a calm and safe space in the classroom. We all do our best to maintain it. We often manage it with a healthy sense of humor.

A lifelong insomniac, ideas for the tenure dossier would come to me most often at the witching hour, 3 a.m. I knew to scribble these down in half-sleep to review the next morning. I am looking at one now and have no idea what the abbreviation "IDC" is for – though it's not shorthand or slang. It is next to a note to "un-silo," which I know refers to the collaborative work I have been doing with other program coordinators and faculty in School of the Arts at UNO. One of the first discussions we've had is about equity in

enrollment caps especially for our gen ed appreciation classes. I think this is an easy way to ensure students have equal access to all our courses. No one appreciation class is exclusive because of its enrollment cap.

I want to address feasible fixes first. I think of students who have recently felt hampered by working at easels. We have a limited number of easels in painting – at last count, 19 in working shape. We set up makeshift tables together, in addition to the two already in the room, to help them out and now they are painting with more ease. I can pull extra tables from Property Control or gallery storage if they are available to supplement the number of easels and to make more students feel more comfortable in working in the space. This means we can increase the cap on enrollment in our painting classes because we can accommodate more people.

We are already painting in solvent free oil with no petroleum distillates. It is a chemically safer space though we still use some pigments that are poisonous. I perpetually research current health and safety protocols and the availability of synthetic materials with no known health hazards. I update my health and safety presentation for painters each year, and I am implementing more concentrated instruction on reading MSDS sheets. I continue to emphasize cleanliness in the shared space and for individual students. I try to do this with kindness and humor, with a funeral for brushes that were not washed and are now “dead,” and reminders from Patrick Swayze throughout the room to “be nice.”

I continue to revise the projects in the painting classes especially to accommodate the individual safety and needs of a diverse range of students, most of whom are coming to class with PTSD from quarantine. Kindness, compassion, communication, and empathy are antidotes for anxiety, a disorder I contend with as well. I try to attune to individual students’ needs while still meeting objectives for the class.

Some students may thrive more in courses in other departments that teach the same skills. We are working to correct redundancies across the SOTA curriculum and increase the number of gen ed classes and enrollments. A student who may have issues with painting in the studio could take a Scene Painting course in the Theatre department and meet the large-format component of the course description for FA 4751.

I think it is possible to find courses in the curricula for business and for sciences that students in SOTA should or must take. It is personally difficult for me to entirely separate the missions and focus of these other preeminent areas of education at UNO from those of SOTA, and I imagine ample areas of crossover which I want to investigate further. I think this is especially applicable to Arts Administration, historically a major that is beset by a lack of full-time faculty.

I am looking forward to finding creative and collaborative solutions to issues that have been confounding in the long term, and I hope to be part of the team to make things better for our campus community.

Service

The title of [an article, linked here](#), about my father's presidency of the UNO alumni association in 2013 reads, "Service is In His Blood."¹ My DNA comes imprinted with service. I regard everything I do at UNO as a kind of service:

- In teaching, I am of service to students' educational goals and professional development.
- In research, I provide service to my teaching by keeping my methods contemporary, timely, and appropriate for the research I want to make.
- In service, I act in service roles across campus and across the time of my employment here, with the intention of meeting the needs of our campus community and thus the New Orleans area.

I spend the most time unpacking the various roles of the Director of the UNO Women's Center in my service narrative. I firmly regard this 40-year-old institution as crucial and indispensable to the university's mission to "provid[e] educational excellence to a diverse undergraduate and graduate student body."² Education does not just happen in a classroom. As Director of the Women's Center, I provide educational materials for survivorship, support resources, and health care, and personal care items from donations to our students. I regularly update the Women's Center web pages at [uno.edu](#) with current information for the semester. I support faculty research in their areas of expertise by co-producing events. We maintain an important and singular library in the Center that focuses on the initiatives of [Belonging at UNO](#) and [SCCIA at UNO](#). It is my mission to create more awareness of Women's Center scholarships for undergraduate women students throughout campus. The work at the UNO Women's Center is a key provider of educational excellence at our institution.

I also spend time discussing roles of Fine Arts Gallery Director, service on committees, and my newest role as official Interim Program Coordinator for Fine Arts. I want to continue the work of the latter over the next semester to ease our transition to the LSU system and help our campus community feel that it can be present, mindful, and participatory. I think that the service roles I fill all inform each other; for instance, the FA Gallery on campus is the site of the visual art portion of a major initiative of the Undergraduate Research and Creativity Council on which I serve. I look forward to making new links among the roles.

Research

Student research and my own research are of equal importance to me. In teaching and in service roles, I work with students to develop their own styles of visual language. This is the form of writing visual artists use to communicate content or ideas. It is one of the greatest gifts of my life to be able to work with undergraduate and graduate students at UNO to find their autographic visual language, specific to them and their ideas.

This requires research and investigation from them and me, into the historical context and contemporary framework of visual arts. I see research in visual arts living in different areas of a giant, imaginary Venn diagram. Our students come to UNO from all over the country, every coast, every geographic area, every

¹ "Service is in his Blood: Meet the New President of the UNO International Alumni Association, *Campus News*, December 17, 2013, <https://www.uno.edu/news/2013-12-17/service-in-his-blood-meet-the-new-president-of-the-uno-international-alumni-association-0>

² "Mission," *Mission and Vision*, The University of New Orleans, <https://www.uno.edu/about-uno/mission>

landscape, and every background. The art world in the U.S. is characterized by different qualities that are site-specific to the areas in which they exist – Chicago is different from New York is different from New Orleans, for example. My students and I research these kinds of differences to learn more about how a variety of perspectives can inform individual art making, as well as emphasize the power of the personal. I prefer students to have a broad experience of artmaking rather than become attached to one view because in my experience, variety helped me refine my own interests and styles.

I know that the world of visual arts expands not only in geography, beyond the imaginary boundaries that frame different places, but also across time. It is a vast and ancient field of research, involving media that is as accessible as saliva and dust. I encourage students to research the best materials to use for an idea, but first, to make art to lead them to ideas to explore. I use my own research in the studio in my decades-long professional art practice as personal context to frame this guidance.

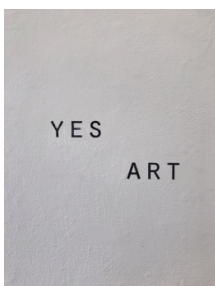
Biography

Since 2008, Kathy Rodriguez has served as an instructor at the University of New Orleans, teaching courses in art history and studio art. As an adjunct instructor from 2008-11, she also taught as an adjunct instructor at Delgado Community College campuses in Covington and City Park, New Orleans in addition to UNO Lakeshore and Jefferson Center campuses. She taught with UNO's study abroad programs in Innsbruck, Austria (2015), and Rome, Italy (2018). She is the recipient of two Engagement Awards for serving as mentor of choice to the most students in InnovateUNO, the annual university-wide research symposium at UNO.

In addition to teaching, Rodriguez served as Director of the UNO-St. Claude Gallery from 2011-18, curating exhibitions and scheduling programming for the off-campus presence of visual arts at UNO in the greater New Orleans community. She served in a similar capacity for the on-campus UNO Fine Arts Gallery from 2018-2020. She is currently the Director of the UNO Women's Center.

Rodriguez has an international exhibition record including virtual and in-person shows. Her work has been included in exhibitions at The Brooklyn Lyceum, Midwest Nice Art, The Louisiana State Capitol, The Contemporary Art Center in New Orleans, and The Ogden Museum of Art in New Orleans. She wrote art criticism for *New Orleans Art Review* from 2009-22 and published with Pelican Bomb and NOLA Defender. She has written for a variety of catalogs and for museum exhibitions, including the Missoula Art Museum as part of a grant by The Andy Warhol Foundation.

She was a founding member of TEN artists' collective (2011-18) and was a member of Second Story Gallery Collective in New Orleans from 2021-3. A native of Metairie, Louisiana, Rodriguez is delighted to live and work in New Orleans with students, artists, and others in the wide swath of the city and beyond. She is now an Assistant Professor at UNO.



Left: Image of remnants of deinstalled wall text from faculty show, UNO Fine Arts gallery, 2019; taken from Profs. Cheryl Hayes and Jeffrey Rinehart's names