

# BOARD ON GULF EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

### CHAIR

#### **Ms. Jean May-Brett**

*Louisiana Department of Education (Retired)*

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Ms. Jean May-Brett was the Director of the Math Science Partnership (MSP) Program and STEM Partnership Coordinator for the Louisiana Department of Education before her retirement. Her duties included oversight of the MSP program in Louisiana providing math, science and technology professional development to classroom teachers through focused projects. Ms. May-Brett worked with public and private partners in an effort to develop regional and state STEM initiatives. She served as the State Coordinator for the Science Matters communication network. During her 25-years of classroom teaching Ms. May-Brett taught Earth Science, Environmental Science, and Mathematics to students in New York and Louisiana at the middle and high school levels. Her honors and awards include being a Tandy Scholars Champion of the Classroom, receiving the Outstanding Leadership in Science Education award from the National Science Education Leadership Association and been recognized as the Outstanding High School Science Teacher in Louisiana. She served as the Assistant Director of Educational Television Technology at Louisiana Public Broadcasting, Baton Rouge, Louisiana from 1998-2003 and was the Curriculum Director and Producer for the award winning middle school Enviro-Tacklebox© video series. Ms. May-Brett was also the content producer for Literacy and Learning©, another award winning program that provided professional development videos on teaching strategies. She is an officer in both the Louisiana Science Teachers Association and the Louisiana Association of Teachers of Mathematics. She is a past-president of the Louisiana Science Teachers Association (LSTA), the Louisiana Environmental Educators Association, the Southern Association of Marine Educators (SAME) and the National Marine Educators Association (NMEA). Ms. May-Brett has held numerous positions on committees and served on the Council for the National Science Teachers Association. She is a member of NOAA's Science Advisory Board and its Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Program Advisory Committee Working Group. She has served on the Management Council of the Central Gulf of Mexico (CGOM) Consortium for Ocean Science Exploration and Engagement (COSEE), and three terms on the Governor's Environmental Education Commission.

### MEMBERS

#### **Dr. Shanondora Billiot**

*Arizona State University School of Social Work*

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Dr. Billiot (United Houma Nation Citizen) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Arizona State University. She is currently serving as a Technical Advisory Member of the Climate Change Taskforce for the National Congress of American Indians as well as an advisory board member for the Social Responses to a Changing Environment Grand Challenge lead by the Academy of Social Workers. In addition, she is a member of the Governing Council for the Indigenous and Tribal Social Work Educators Association. Her current research uses mixed methods to explore indigenous-specific sensitivities to global environmental change exposure and pathways to health outcomes within Indigenous populations with the goal to co-develop adaptation activities. Dr. Billiot is currently a Co-PI on an interdisciplinary team exploring resilience, culture, climate and movement among an Indigenous community on the Gulf Coast funded by GRP Thriving Communities Grant (5). She earned a PhD in Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis as a Henry Roe Cloud fellow at Yale University and Minority Fellowship Program of the Council on Social Work Education.

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## **Dr. Farrah Cambrice**

*Prairie View A&M University*

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Farrah Gafford Cambrice, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU). Dr. Cambrice's research and teaching interests include race, disaster recovery, community building, and qualitative methods. Her peer-reviewed research appears in *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archive Professionals*, *Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Global Policy and Resilience*, and *Journal of Urban History*. Dr. Cambrice's latest publication, *Contemporary Debates in Social Justice: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Examining Black and Brown Lives*, is an edited book featuring essays, empirical research, and interviews concerning health, political and educational inequalities. Dr. Cambrice has served on several grant-funded interdisciplinary projects. As a co-principal investigator for the Smart and Connected Rural Communities Planning grant, Dr. Cambrice led the community engagement efforts to initiate smart technologies in rural communities. She also collaborated with a team of scholars from Tulane University and the University of New Orleans interested in recovering neighborhoods after Hurricane Katrina. The research team was awarded one of 18 National Science Foundation Urban Long-Term Area Exploratory (ULTRA-Ex) grants. Dr. Cambrice has also been recognized for her commitment to teaching and learning. She was awarded the Norman C. Francis Excellence in Teaching Award (2010), and more recently, she received the Andrew Mellon Outstanding Faculty award (Prairie View A&M University 2021).

## **Dr. John T. Cooper, Jr.**

*Texas A&M University*

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Dr. Cooper has dual titles as the Assistant Vice President for Public Partnership & Outreach and the Director of Texas Target Communities. Dr. Cooper earned a bachelor's degree in Economics as well as his Master's in Urban Planning from Texas A&M before completing a PhD in City and Regional Planning at University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill (UNC). His research and teaching focuses on participatory planning, particularly as it relates to preparing socially vulnerable populations to prepare for, survive and recover after disasters. Dr. Cooper serves on the Advisory Board for the UNC Coastal Resilience Center and on the boards of directors for the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and the Bill Anderson Fund. From 2005-2010, he was a Program Director at MDC Inc. in Durham, NC, where he directed the FEMA-funded Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Program (EPD). The EPD was a \$2.5 million effort to increase disaster awareness and preparedness in marginalized communities in eight (8) states along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

## **Dr. Donald W. Davis**

*Louisiana Sea Grant College Program*

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Donald (Don) Davis has been involved in coastal-related research for more than a half century. While working on his Ph.D. in LSU's Department of Geography and Anthropology, his professional career was influenced by geographers, cultural anthropologists, fluvial geomorphologists, nearshore geologists, and others. Each of these individuals focused their individual research on some cultural or physical element in the landscape. From this exposure, Dr. Davis came to appreciate the importance of humankind on Louisiana's coastal wetlands. His research interest has focused on the wide array of renewable and non-renewable resources that are a vital part of the industrialization of the marsh/swamp landscape complex. Currently, he is involved in projects related to restoring Louisiana's wetlands and understanding the wide array of human impacts on this environment. In addressing this challenge, he published in 2010: *Washed Away? The Invisible People of Louisiana's Wetlands*. Further, Dr. Carl Brasseaux and Dr. Davis have successfully negotiated a contract, with the support of the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, for a new book series dedicated to the northern Gulf of Mexico. The first book in the "America's Third Coast" series was the Brasseaux and Davis manuscript *Ain't There No More*. In 2017, the book received the Louisiana Literary Award for the best book written on Louisiana in that year. Professionally, this title is one of nearly 115 monographs, professional papers, or books in Davis' vita. Further, invited papers to a large assortment of profession originations exceed 200 and more than 400 public presentations are part of his vita, as well.

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## **Dr. Versie Johnson-Mallard**

*Kent State University*

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Dr. Versie Johnson-Mallard is the Dean, Professor and Henderson Endowed Chair at the Center for Nursign Research at Kent State University. Dr. Johnson-Mallard is a recognized national leader with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), National League for Nursing (NLN) and American Academy of Nursing (AAN) who works as an agent for collaborative opportunities for faculty, staff and students. Her strategic vision for the College of Nursing is to work collectively with other academic units on building research, scholarship and education initiatives. Dean Johnson-Mallard led funding collaborations with NASEM and National Institutes of Health (NIH) and engaged academic institutions, such as the UF Health Cancer Center, in developing interprofessional scientific innovations on cancer technology, prevention and management. Her research focus is on first generation and underserved populations of health care professionals and health consumers in the field of reproductive health methodology, culturally specific interventions as well as identifying strategies which may be used to inhibit the oncogenic activity of high-risk HPV genotypes.

## **Dr. Louella Mack-Webster**

*Mississippi Department of Education*

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Dr. Louella Mack-Webster is currently employed as STEM Program Supervisor for the Mississippi Department of Education. She began her career in education in 1988. Dr. Webster is a Non-traditional learner and graduate of Jackson State University where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies, 2008, Master of Science in Early Childhood Education, 2012, (Cognate-Educational Leadership) and Doctor of Education, 2014. Dr. Webster believes that academic achievement and performance is achieved by investing in the fundamental needs of our student population. She asserts that as an educator, it is her responsibility to both encourage and empower faculty, staff, parents, government officials, and communities to take ownership of the process for educating our future. Dr. Webster's educational and leadership service includes; State and Federal Programs, Member of National Career Pathways Network, MS Association of Career and Technical Educators, Administrator-Project Based Assessment MSCPASS, Technology Resource Specialist(21) Middle/High Schools, Administrative Learning Walks Committee, Hearing Officer-Student Disciplinary Due Process, Professional Development Facilitator, Business Owner-Director, Adjunct Professor, and Coordinator of Student Support Services. Honors bestowed upon Dr. Webster include Graduate Honors, Summa cum Laud Jackson State University 2012, Graduate Honors Magnum cum Laud Jackson State University 2008, Member of Alpha Sigma Lambda Honor Society 2013, Mu Chapter of Alpha Epsilon Lambda Honor Society 2014, Nomination Mississippi Business Journal-Mississippi's 50 Leading Business Women, 2018 Class. Dr. Louella Mack-Webster currently resides in Jackson, Mississippi.

## **Dr. Chris Simoniello**

*Texas A&M University*

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Dr. Chris Simoniello, Texas A&M University Research Scientist and GCOOS Outreach and Education (O/E) Manager, received a B.S. in Biological Sciences and Certificate in Marine Science from Florida International University, 1988. Her love of learning and action led to conducting herpetological studies in Everglades National Park, working in analytical chemistry for the Drinking Water Research Center, Miami, and researching bears, birds, seals and otters for the Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska, following the Exxon Valdez oil spill. She completed her Ph.D. in Biological Oceanography at the University of South Florida in 2003 and has conducted research in the area of physiological ecology from the Arctic to the Southern Ocean. Before GCOOS, Simoniello developed a regional O/E program for the Office of Naval Research-funded U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) testbed, the Southeast Atlantic Coastal Ocean Observing System. She has been engaged in leadership roles spanning the United Nations, NOAA, the U.S. IOOS and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance. Locally, she chairs the City of St. Petersburg Program for Public Information committee and participates on the City's Local Mitigation Strategies team. Among her accolades are the Antarctica Service Medal of the United States, a National Oceanographic Partnership Program Excellence in Partnering Award for the Marine Biodiversity Observation Network project, Business Partner of the Year recognition from the Pinellas

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Education Foundation, and four EPA Gulf Guardian awards. Simoniello is committed to creating dynamic mechanisms to nurture innovation and the scientific processes critical to better understanding our world and providing an adventurous call to action for our future ocean leaders.

## **Mr. Craig Strang**

*Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley*

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Mr. Strang is the Associate Director at the Lawrence Hall of Science. In this role, he serves on the Hall's executive management team and leads the Learning & Teaching Group that designs and carries out professional learning programs for education leaders around the world, as well as the Hall's school programs and early childhood learning activities. He has worked at the Hall since 1991 and considers himself a science, ocean science and environmental educator. In 1985 he founded the award winning Marine Activities, Resources & Education (MARE) Program, and since 2002 he has played a key role co-leading the nationwide Ocean Literacy Campaign. Mr. Strang's work in Ocean Literacy has taken him to Japan, China, Taiwan and several countries in Europe interested in improving public understanding of the importance of the ocean. He currently leads programs that assist school districts and outdoor and environmental education organizations to increase their capacity for supporting high quality, equitable science programs in the Common Core/NGSS era, conducts research on effective approaches to professional learning, and develops curriculum and instructional materials for classrooms and outdoor science programs. He serves as co-chair of the California Environmental Literacy Initiative charged with implementation of the California Blueprint for Environmental Literacy. Equity, inclusion, cultural relevance and environmental justice are at the center of Mr. Strang's work in both the formal K-12 and informal science education systems.

## **EX-OFFICIO MEMBER**

## **Dr. Regina M. Benjamin, NAM**

*Gulf States Health Policy Center, BayouClinic*

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Dr. Regina Benjamin served as the 18th U.S. surgeon general from 2009 to 2013, appointed by President Barack Obama. Prior to her tenure as the nation's physician, she practiced as a country doctor in rural Alabama. As founder and CEO of the rural BayouClinic in Bayou La Batre, Dr. Regina Benjamin is making a difference to the underserved poor in a small fishing village on the Gulf Coast of Alabama. It is a town of about 2500 people, about 80 percent of her patients live below the poverty level. Since 2013, she also has served as the chair of Public Health Sciences at Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana. Dr. Benjamin's career has taken some interesting twists. While completing her undergraduate degree in chemistry from Xavier University in New Orleans, she served as a student intern-trainee for the Central Intelligence Agency. After earning her doctor of medicine degree at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 1984, she served her internship and residency in family practice at the Medical Center of Central Georgia at Macon. From 1990 to 1995 she was a medical director at several nursing homes, and in 1993 she went on a medical mission to Honduras.