

Career Assessment

I am thrilled to seek tenure promotion at the University of Miami's (UM) School of Communication. Since my arrival, I garnered an exceptional impression of the school, its faculty, and their unwavering dedication to teaching and mentorship. I would be honored to join them in a long-term commitment to stewarding our school. This letter, along with my portfolio, showcases my creative and scholarly achievements, as well as my contributions to teaching and service, to both the university as well as the community.

I'm seeking a long-term academic appointment at UM to continue advancing my creative research and practice. I'm an award-winning filmmaker, director, and writer. My academic career provided me with a crucial space to push the boundaries of my cinematic language and to conduct creative research free of commercial agenda. I can explore content that I deem as ethically important rather than mainstream popular. My work within the film industry grants me unique professional experiences, while as an artist and scholar, I get to freely explore arthouse cinema and orient my work toward critical social commentary. Through my academic practice, I found a way to contribute my artistic voice to inspire social change. I'm looking to continue and expand my mission. I see film, and its many visual domains, as the language of the future that fosters a greater understanding of ourselves. I view UM's School of Communication as a meeting place for diverse 'languages' that shape the contemporary 'dialog' about cinema, new media, and the world we live in. It is the perfect place for me to cultivate my work.

I was awarded tenure before arriving at the University of Miami and held the position of Associate Professor at Ohio University since 2019. I relinquished my tenure in the Fall of 2022 as I accepted the tenure-track position at UM. Since then, I have written and directed two short narrative films and produced and directed a virtual-reality miniseries. My latest feature film received international distribution while my new feature screenplay was optioned for production. My work received four international film awards, and two nominations, and was officially selected to screen at many national and international film festivals. During this time, I received two consecutive University of Miami Fellowships in the Arts & Humanities Awards supporting my creative work. As the Principal Investigator, I initiated a cross-disciplinary project "Health, Care, and Empathy" developed in collaboration with UM's Miller School of Medicine. The project received a highly selective \$100,000 U-LINK Award for its implementation and commercialization. U-LINK awards creative research into transformative initiatives at UM and supports teams of artists and scholars in collaborative, problem-based inquiry to foster social change.

My films are distributed by multiple distribution companies, including Gravitas Ventures (US), Level Film (Canada), Red Sea Media (non-US), Eagle Films (Middle East), WOWOW Cinema (Japan), and Shorts International (World). My work has been showcased and critically acclaimed around the world receiving prestigious awards and recognition from national and international festivals, as well as prominent cultural institutions such as Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board of Canada, Canada and the Ontario Arts Councils, and the Canadian Film Center. I focus my creative work on character-driven narrative fiction. I favor personal and culturally diverse stories imbued with social commentary and featuring marginalized characters. I strive to present a well-researched and nuanced socio-political and economic context. In my process, I engage with real people to portray their stories honestly and to project their world as a real place, observed, rather than invented. A prominent critic, A.O. Scott ("The New York Times", "Variety") coin-named this latest articulation of realism in indie films as "Neo-Neo-realism". For me, "neo-neo" is not about grim reality and desperation, but about celebrating our incredible ability to prevail. It transcends everyday mundane failures into 'heroic acts' of overcoming that reveal something profound about human nature.

Before I took on my first academic position at the University of York in 2011, I had already been writing, directing, and producing theatre and film for over a decade. Throughout my academic career, I have maintained a dynamic and growing professional practice. My tenure at Ohio University and my current work at the University of Miami mark the most productive and successful periods in my career.

Creative Work

“22 Chaser” (2018)

My feature film, “22 Chaser” was released on Netflix in 2023 following its 2022 international release in India, Croatia, and South Korea. Last year, it was added to the streaming libraries at AppleTV and Google Play, while reviewed critically on Amazon and Letterbox among others.

“22 Chaser” depicts Ben, a tow truck driver, who brings his family to Toronto from a rural town in Ontario. Faced with mounting debt he enters the world of accident chasers facing up against his breaking moral compass. I directed the two-million-dollar production in Toronto in 2018 after several months of developing the script with an award-winning writer, Jeremy Boxen. It was produced by Don Carmody (“Chicago”, “Resident Evil”) and Daniel Bekerman (“The Witch”, “Percy”); starring A-listers such as Brian J. Smith (“Sense8”), Raoul Trujillo (“Sicario”, “Apocalipto”), Aaron Ashmore (“X- Men”), and John Kapelos (“The Breakfast Club”). After its theatrical premiere in Toronto, the film won the Writer’s Guild of Canada - Best Feature Screenplay award and was acclaimed as one of the best Canadian films of the year. Andrew Parker from The GATE wrote: “Sokolowski created an economically minded parable that would slot nicely alongside recent works by Steven Soderbergh and Dan Gilroy. It’s riveting from start to finish and one of the best Canadian debut features of the year.” Noel Murray from the Los Angeles Times, praised the story and its realistic themes, calling it: “a grabby tale”, while Norman Wilner from Toronto NOW complimented its visual style, direction, and performances, calling it: “One of the most surprising homegrown efforts of the year. Unpredictable and captivating from start to finish, 22 Chaser might end up being the best Canadian thriller.”

The film is currently distributed by Gravitas Ventures, a prominent L.A.-based distribution company founded by Nolan Gallagher. After its theatrical release in the US and Canada, including Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Orlando, Miami, Phoenix, Seattle, and Detroit, it is currently streaming on Amazon Prime, Paramount+, Apple TV, Google Play, Roku, Pluto, Sling, Fandango, and Tubi, while available internationally in many languages.

“River” (2023)

In 2023, I wrote and directed the short narrative film, “River”, an intimate portrait of a trans woman who returns home to attend the funeral of her estranged father only to discover that he faked his death to lure her into therapy. The film is set in a small town in rural Ohio and looks at transition in the context of conservative family values. It illuminates so-called 'conversion therapy' and its effects on gender-diverse communities. The script, inspired by a real story, was developed with the participation of transgender artists from the Stone Wall in Columbus - a nonprofit organization serving the LGBTQ+ community in Central Ohio. I conducted a nationwide talent search that resulted in hiring a New York-based transgender actress, Alex Might, to play the leading role. Her work instilled authenticity into the story, taking it to new levels, and garnering praise from critics and audiences around the world.

Since its release, the film won the Best Indy Short Award at the Budapest Movie Awards and was the winner at the Santa Barbara Indie Film Festival, Bucharest Rolling Ideas Festival, and Short Film Factory Festival. It premiered in the US at the prominent Martha's Vineyard International Film Festival which programs only a handful of the best American shorts and had its West Coast premiere at the Los

Angeles International Film Festival. “River” was a Nominee at the Montreal Independent Film Festival and the Semi-Finalist at Flickers' Rhode Island International, and Miami Short Film Festival. It has been officially selected and screened at the Academy Award qualifying 48th Cleveland International Film Festival, Berlin Indie Film Festival, Philadelphia Independent Film Festival, Cinema Columbus, Santa Barbara, Shorts Miami International, Budapest Movie Awards, Wexner Center for Film and Video – Ohio Shorts Festival, Reelout Queer Festival, SHORT to the Point, Pride Film Fest, Bucharest Rolling Ideas, Short Film Factory, Berlin Lift-Off, among others, as well as a special local presentation at the Miami Film Gate Interactive Festival - Media for Social Change program. It continues to screen internationally.

“Chelo” (2024)

In 2024, I wrote and directed the short narrative film, “Chelo”- the tale of a young immigrant and a single mother who strives to fulfill her aspiration of becoming an actress. Chelo leaves her one-year-old baby Chico with her best friend Sebastian to crash a film audition. She’s desperate to get the part that could change their lives. The film sheds light on the superficiality of the entertainment industry and challenges societal norms surrounding the portrayal of successful women. “Chelo” echoes many stories and comprises the local urban mythology of ‘dreamers’ who came to Miami looking for a better and safer life.

I cast Vanessa Tamayo Ochoa, a local up-and-coming Columbian actress to play the lead. Her personal story and portrayal of Chelo captured a real slice of the Columbian diaspora in Miami. The film will enter the US festival circuit in July 2024 as an official submission for the Sundance Film Festival. It will enter the international circuit in September as a submission for the Berlin International Film Festival.

“Medicaid Care Experience Simulation Project” (2022)

In 2021, I spearheaded the creative team as the Showrunner on “Medicaid Care Experience Simulation” – a project that consisted of three distinct 360-degree virtual reality miniseries. I was responsible for creating and developing the storylines and writing the scripts. I conceptualized characters and worked with assistant writers to craft three original teleplays: “Dre” – featuring a non-binary person seeking pregnancy, “Mr. Chen”, about an 80-year-old Chinese American, living with his bi-racial family, and experiencing elderly abuse and neglect, and “Ana Luisa”, following a single mother and a recent Mexican immigrant experiencing intimate partner violence.

The project received a \$6.4 million grant from the Ohio Department of Medicaid, administered by the Ohio Colleges of Medicine Government Resource Center, to creatively explore issues of cultural humility within the healthcare system. Ohio University partnered with Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) School of Medicine, University of Toledo (UToledo), Metro Health, and Equitas Health in developing the project. Production was overseen by Matt Love at the GRID Lab (Game Research and Immersive Design). The series premiered in 2022 at Heritage Hall - Ohio University, where audiences could immerse in the stories through VR headsets. Medicaid released two of the three stories but opted not to distribute the series featuring LGBTQ+ characters. During the writing of these stories, I conducted extensive research and listened to numerous personal stories and real-life experiences of transgender people seeking healthcare. This inspired me to take on a subsequent project, “Health, Care, and Empathy” as the Principal Investigator, writer, director, and producer.

“Health, Care, and Empathy” (2024)

In 2023 I began working on converting my creative research from the Medicaid Project into a new story concept, “Health, Care, and Empathy” – a virtual-reality miniseries and an immersive learning experience for healthcare professionals. The project was awarded a highly competitive \$ 100,000 University of

Miami U-LINK Award. As the Principal Investigator, I spearheaded the research and development and eventually directed and produced the series in 2024. It features Adriana, a trans woman, who navigates her transition while dealing with a messy divorce and fighting for the custody of her children. Medical research reveals significant disparities in the ways transgender people can access healthcare. The implicit bias within the system causes negative and often tragic outcomes. The show takes on the format of a television drama and uses its character-focused storyline to inspire empathy and broaden cultural understanding. It offers both compelling storytelling and an engaging educational experience. It was an opportunity to add my voice to the conversation about gender identity and to drive social change through storytelling. I conducted many interviews with people affected by the bias to tell their stories honestly. This raw material served as creative research for writing fictionalized characters and storylines. I co-wrote the teleplay with Mimi Olson, a transgender writer, whose personal experiences with healthcare gave the piece a unique and personal voice. The project was developed in collaboration with doctors and subject matter experts from the UM Miller School of Medicine, and with the participation of local transgender organizations and communities including the UM's LGBTQ Center, Trans-Social, Sun-Serve, Pride Lines, and the Yes Institute. I'm currently pursuing two National Institutes of Health awards: the NIH - Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) and PAR-24-077 Award addressing healthcare disparities among gender minority populations to expand this work. I intend to test the effectiveness of the series, publish the results, and attempt to implement the series as a module in the medical curriculum.

“The Farm” (2023)

In 2023, I wrote "The Farm," a feature screenplay intended for my upcoming film, which I aim to direct in 2025. The script won the Best Feature Screenplay Award at the 2023 University Film and Video Association Conference, and it was optioned for production by Directed Entropy - a production company based in Atlanta spearheaded by Garrett Bates ("Junction", "They/Them/Us", "The Atlantic City Story"). "The Farm" is a character-driven contemporary tragedy and a portrait of Martha, an eighty-year-old professor emeritus of law, who lost her daughter Anna to a gruesome murder. Her daughter disappeared thirty years ago, at the age of 19, and her body was never found. Martha must confront the man she believes knows where Anna's body is. The film is inspired by the real story of my aunt whose daughter was tragically murdered. Witnessing her devote much of her life to a futile pursuit of justice inspired the emotional core of the film. The fictionalized story is set in Southeast Ohio unveiling a vivid backdrop steeped in Appalachian folklore and mystique.

The production will be a joint venture between Garrett Bates and an Ohio-based producer, Karri O'Reilly ("Boogie Nights", "Wedding Crashers", "Carol"). The financing package is currently being reviewed by Deborah Moore an Executive Producer at the Inner Primary Entertainment and a former Executive VP for Line Cinema. It will include a minority co-producer from Poland, with funding sourced from the Polish Film Institute, which will enable me to engage a Polish Cinematographer and Designer. I will work with Tineka Becker, a prominent L.A.-based Casting Director with whom I worked on casting my feature film, "22 Chaser". Tineka is a former Manager of Feature Casting at Paramount and will help me to approach high-caliber actors for the leads including Charlotte Rampling for the title role.

“Blink” (2023)

In 2023, I completed writing the Bible Treatment for the original television series titled "Blink," a character-driven drama inspired by a true story. The series centers on Anastasia, also known as Blink, a twenty-five-year-old Ukrainian woman who escapes the war and establishes an unprecedented underground corporation in the U.S. specializing in stealing and exporting luxury cars to Russia. The series subverts the crime genre by portraying Blink as a feminist gangster. Tonally, it's an arthouse drama that delves into themes of gender inequality in the context of the criminal underworld. The

treatment has been positively reviewed by Kevin Hoiseth the former EVP for Worldwide Sales at the Concourse Media, based in L.A. I am currently writing the teleplay to be completed in 2025. I intend to pitch the series to HBO and other networks.

Future Project

I have embarked on my inaugural book project based on three decades of experience as a director, actor, and directing performance instructor. The book is intended for first-time and intermediate film directors and will offer comprehensive insights into the processes and methodologies of working with actors.

Teaching

My professional practice has always served as the foundation and a resource for my pedagogy. My teaching experience spans over two decades and several higher education institutions. Since graduating from the National Theatre School of Canada in 2000, I sought teaching opportunities and worked as an instructor at the Warsaw College of Communication and Media, the Toronto District School Board of Education, Wexford Collegiate School for the Arts, and Toronto's Soulpepper Theatre Academy, where I taught acting and directing. Since completing my MFA in Film in 2011, I took on adjunct positions and continued teaching at the Toronto Metropolitan University, York University, and the National Theatre School.

I took a tenure-track position at Ohio University in 2014 and was promoted to Associate Professor in 2019. I played a role in crafting a fresh undergraduate program while instructing the directing and production curriculum for second and third-year students. My area of teaching comprises a wide range of courses, from studio practicum in directing performance, to screenwriting, production, and film criticism. I feel privileged to be able to share with my students my experiences, techniques, and methods, and above all, my passion for filmmaking. Often, it's the latter that inspires and drives their creative curiosities.

Teaching directing performance has a special place in my pedagogical practice as I am a formally trained actor who has worked professionally in Canada and Europe, across theatre, film, and television. I eagerly and openly share my experiences with students. I approach teaching directing as an intricate collaborative process. The director's work with the actor can illuminate the 'inner truth' of a story in ways neither director, nor the actor could discover alone. Actors and directors are essential to each other, yet they may begin the process with conflicting interpretations with a creative chasm between them. Neither can accomplish their goals in isolation; inevitably they must surrender to the other's work. UCLA professor and acting coach Delia Salvi aptly describes this dynamic as "friendly enemies" in her 2003 book. I've been exploring this relationship firsthand while working with notable actors such as Tiio Horn ("On The Road"), Brian J. Smith ("Sense8"), Raoul Trujillo ("Sicario", "Apocalipto"), Camilla Scott ("Due South"), Aaron Ashmore ("X- Men"), and John Kapelos ("The Breakfast Club"). Directing performance is one of the most challenging processes in narrative filmmaking and also the most rewarding. I want my students to experience it firsthand and have ample opportunities to practice it before entering the professional arena.

To help UM students with their casting efforts I produced a general audition open to the local professional talent pool. Over a hundred actors came to present their work. From the audition tapes, I created a Casting Workbook – an online visual resource containing the actors' profiles. It is currently available to all students across the Department of Cinematic Arts. Beyond that, I established relationships with local agencies and casting directors further broadening the casting opportunities. As a result, the students get an opportunity to work with professional actors who elevate their films and

provide an important point of contact with the industry.

My twenty years of experience, spanning from directing micro-budget to multimillion-dollar productions, allow me to mentor diverse projects and work with diverse student filmmakers. Since my arrival, I created two new, intermediate, and advanced, directing courses: CCA 660 - Directing Techniques I and CCA 395 - Directing the Actor, offered to both, graduate and undergraduate students. I've established a new cross-disciplinary collaboration between the School of Communication and the Theatre Arts from the College of Arts and Sciences. Every Fall, Directing the Actor brings together acting students and film directors working collaboratively in the studio and on locations.

I teach advanced production courses, CCA 494 and CCA 750 – Special Topics in Cinematic Arts and From Script to Screen that bring together graduate and undergraduate students collaborating in producing fifteen original short films. I oversee their development and production and offer clear instructions and proven tools. My students know that they can rely on my expertise and guidance in and outside of the classroom. Their high regard is reflected in their course evaluations. The latest scores range from 4.5 to 5 exceeding the average ratings at the school.

Engaging in the international festival circuit enables me to introduce a wide array of cinematic perspectives to my classroom and extend invitations to esteemed guest artists, such as Aeschylus Poulos, the producer of “Sleeping Giant” (2015) - nominated for the 2015 Cannes Film Festival Critics Week Grand Prize and Golden Camera Award, Matt Johnson and Matthew Miller, director and producer of “The Dirties” (2013) - winners of Grand Jury Prize at Slamdance and Toronto Film Critics’ Awards, and Daniel Bekerman, producer of “The Witch” (2015) – winner of Directing Award and a nominee for the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival. In addition to my teaching responsibilities, I provide mentorship for several capstone projects and contribute to numerous thesis committees.

For me, teaching is equally about inspiring creative curiosity and providing professional opportunities to apply newly learned skills. Since my arrival, I invited several of my students to collaborate with me professionally. These opportunities provided them with real-life experience from the set and postproduction and earned them professional credit. It also facilitated connections with other professionals, a steppingstone for their future career opportunities.

Service

I strive to be a contributing participant in the daily life of the school. I serve as a member of the School of Communication’s Research /Creative Support and Services Committee; my responsibilities include reviewing faculty research proposals across all disciplines. I actively participated in the launch of the Shorts Miami International Film Festival (2023, 2024) and currently serve as a member of the Festival Committee working on developing its third season. I also serve on the L.A. Showcase Committee, organizing and developing an annual showcase of UM students’ films in Los Angeles. I recently traveled to L.A. where this year’s best films screened at the Crescent Theater in the heart of Beverly Hills. The screening was attended by UM alumni and industry professionals. It was a crucial outreach and fundraising event.

I see myself as a bridge builder. I initiated a continued dialog with the Miami-Dade Office of Film and Entertainment. I work closely with the Film Commissioner, Marco Giron, on a new Educational Initiative to foster closer collaborations between Film Miami and UM, as well as other local film schools and programs. The main goal of the Initiative is to augment local professional opportunities for graduating students.

I am collaborating with Prof. Kele Stewart, Co-Director of the Children & Youth Law Clinic at UM’s

School of Law in delivering a creative program through the After School Film Institute (ASFI) this summer. The program serves underprivileged high school students from Miami and South Florida communities by providing them with the tools to create original film works, guided by academic and industry professionals. The program features notable film experts who mentor students, introduce them to the craft of filmmaking, and offer professional opportunities while building essential life skills. The program represents an interdisciplinary collaboration among the respective UM schools of Communication, Law, and Education and Human Development. It brings together UM graduate students and professional filmmakers from the Miami-based film collective, White Elephant Group, to provide the youth with hands-on instruction and mentorship.

Beyond my service at UM, I have performed substantial ongoing service in my field. I collaborate with several cultural organizations in Miami. I was a festival juror for the esteemed Ibero-American Film Festival and adjudicated the Film Gate's "Best of the Fest" awards. I'm an active member of the University Film and Video Association and participate in the annual conferences as a reviewer and presenter.

During the past two years, I have invested time in building networks that connect our collective work with local and international institutions and industry. In the Summer of 2023, I was invited to The Faculty of Dramatic Arts at the University of Belgrade in Serbia where I delivered a master class and presented a program of films made by our students to a Serbian audience. During that visit, the Dean and the Chair of the Serbian school presented ideas for a potential trans-Atlantic collaboration between our students and departments. As I prepare for my second visit in June 2024, I envision a clear pathway to bringing this idea to fruition.

Conclusion

My arrival at UM sparked remarkable professional development and a surge of creative output. I take great pride in the progress I've made and the body of work I've produced, which has garnered recognition and acclaim both domestically and internationally.

Yet, this is only the beginning of what I aspire to achieve. I aim to enrich my professional and pedagogical practices, enhance my craft, and continue to drive social change through my scholarship. I focus on producing impactful work that has a broad outreach and creates international collaborations for the collective benefit of our school and students.

Throughout my journey, I have strived to foster trust and friendships among my colleagues and cherish the bonds forged along the way. As I meditate on the next chapter, I am excited to seek the role of Associate Professor at UM and dedicate myself to the long-term stewardship of our school and its legacy.