

SoPA EMT course prepares students for careers in emergency medical services

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sopanews@tulane.edu



As part of the final exam, Tulane SoPA's EMT students work with live actors to diagnose and treat ailments. (Photo by Andrea Sagnard)

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A hybrid course at the Tulane School of Professional Advancement (Tulane SoPA) is giving students from all walks of life the opportunity to learn what it takes to be an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), whether they are pursuing emergency response as a career or learning new skills to supplement their ongoing education.

[The EMT class](#) was first introduced at Tulane SoPA in early 2024 and drew so much interest that a waiting list was immediately created. The next session of the 15-week class begins on May 20, with additional sessions slated to be available throughout the year. Some reading and coursework are done online, with weekly in-person classes and other hands-on training also provided.

Rebecca Rouse, associate director and professor of practice in Tulane SoPA's Emergency and Security Studies Program, said the class has attracted students who want to be full-time EMTs, as well as those pursuing Tulane SoPA degrees in related areas such as homeland security and public health. Others are preparing for medical school or want to learn how to address emergency situations in their roles as public servants or educators.

"It is offered as a standalone course, so students can come to Tulane SoPA only for this, or in addition to their other coursework," Rouse said. "When the student finishes, they will have earned three college credits that they can apply toward their degree. In some cases, those credits may also count toward continuing education requirements in certain fields. Every student will also come out of the class with the training and education required to take the national certification exam to become an EMT."

Patrick Messmer, director of security and emergency operations at Audubon Nature Institute, serves as the lead instructor in the course. Messmer said the class is designed to provide both theoretical knowledge through readings and discussion, as well as hands-on instruction with the use of modern tools that mimic those used on actual ambulances.

"Some of the main areas we focus on are cardiac arrest management, AED operations, and patient assessment in two categories - medical and trauma," Messmer said. "Trauma assessments include situations such as shootings, car accidents or fights. Medical assessments would include situations such as overdoses, diabetes, or mental health emergencies. We teach students how to handle all those types of situations and treat patients with both medication and equipment."

Messmer said Tulane SoPA has also used virtual reality headsets in the course. Instructors can program the headsets to simulate a scenario, such as a patient in respiratory distress, then watch as students walk through their assessment and the treatment they would provide in a real-life situation.

In addition, students in the course participate in a ride-along with New Orleans emergency responders to get a feel for what a shift on the job entails.

“We’re fortunate in New Orleans to have great partners who understand the value of clinical experience,” Messmer said. “It’s one thing for students to learn things in the classroom, but it takes the education to another level when they get to work with an experienced crew and respond to calls. I’ve had students tell me that their lessons make so much more sense after seeing them applied to real patients.”

In addition to earning three credit hours, students who complete the course are approved to take the national certification exam. If they pass the exam, they can then pursue a license in Louisiana to practice as an EMT.

“It’s a three-step process to become an EMT, and this course is the first step in that process,” Messmer said.

Rouse noted that emergency response is a lucrative career with abundant job opportunities throughout the country. Some Tulane SoPA students have expressed interest in working with Tulane’s own Emergency Medical Services, or elsewhere in New Orleans. Others have taken their education and applied it in other states.

“There’s been a huge shortage of EMTs across the country, and agencies are constantly looking for people to work on their ambulances,” she said. “There’s always a lot of opportunities for those who graduate.”

For information on registering for the EMT course, visit the [course page](#).