

[Spieker Prize awarded to kinesiology grad](#)

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Photo by J. Claude Portraits

[Tulane School of Professional Advancement \(SoPA\)](#) graduate and first-generation college student, Victor Calero-Hernandez, set his goal of attending Tulane after learning he would be moving from Colombia to the United States.

The accomplishment of that goal is what led him to the honor of being named the 2023 recipient of the [Dr. Gisela Spieker Prize](#) for exemplary first-generation college graduates.

“I wanted to go to the best school near my family in New Orleans,” he said. “It ended up working out, and here I am.”

Calero-Hernandez earned a [bachelor’s degree in exercise science](#) through Tulane SoPA’s [kinesiology program](#) and plans to pursue a master’s degree in neuroscience and subsequent doctorate degree.

His interests in motor learning can be attributed to his adolescent experience with severe scoliosis.

At 16 years old, Calero-Hernandez underwent a spinal fusion surgery to correct a 44.4-degree spinal curve, and endured a painful recovery.

“The school is giving me the opportunity to make the first steps toward my calling,” said Calero-Hernandez. “The professors and even classmates have been so supportive. It’s been an amazing experience.”

Calero-Hernandez moved to Chalmette, Louisiana in 2017 with just one year of high school left. As an ESL (English as a Second Language) student, he worked diligently to adapt to an entirely new language.



Calero-Hernandez's degree was conferred at the Tulane SoPA Diploma Ceremony on May 20, 2023. (Photo by J. Claude Portraits)

“I went through many moments where I wanted to give up,” he admitted. “But I knew the people I got to know, the relationships I made, the knowledge I learned and the impact I can make would give value to my life.”

The Dr. Gisela Spieker Prize, which was first awarded in 2020, is named for a SoPA alumna (UC, '61) who attended night classes while working full-time at a local insurance agency. Spieker's bequest aids graduating students who like her, are first-generation graduates.