

[SoPA students honored at MLK brunch](#)

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sopanews@tulane.edu



From left, IT student Sydney Young, MLK brunch keynote speaker Leona Tate, MPA student Zera Johnson, interim Tulane SoPA dean Ilianna Kwaske, and MPA program director Halima Leak Francis. The SoPA students were recognized for outstanding leadership in community service and engagement. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

Two Tulane School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) students were honored Friday, Jan. 31, during the King Freedom and Justice Brunch hosted by the Tulane University Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Recent MPA graduate Zera Johnson and Information Technology student Sydney Young were recognized for their outstanding leadership in community service and engagement.

About Zera

Zera Johnson completed her a Master of Public Administration degree in December with a specialization in Economic Development in the John Lewis Public Administration Program at Tulane SoPA. A New Orleans native and descendant of strong Black women, she is inspired by her community's resilience and dedicated to advancing equity and creating opportunities for underrepresented groups. Her recent work with the Women's Foundation of the South and A Bella LaFemme Society, both Black women-led nonprofits, has supported their missions to empower minority communities through financial, political, educational, and health initiatives. Drawing on her life experiences, education and professional development, Zera is committed to fostering

equity and uplifting her community.

About Sydney

Sydney Young is a co-founder of the Sterling Smiles Foundation, created in memory of her brother Sterling after his tragic death in an automobile accident. The Foundation embodies Dr. King's vision by building beloved communities where women, parents, and children can access mental health resources and support services with dignity and respect. Sydney works tirelessly to transform personal tragedy into community empowerment. Drawing on her professional DEI training and personal experience, her unwavering commitment to the Sterling Smiles Foundation exemplifies compassionate leadership, creating positive change by fostering mental well-being and resilience within families while ensuring support is accessible to all. Sydney and her family's commitment to Dr. King's values run so deep that her grandfather, Frank Hayden, sculpted a piece in honor of Dr. King displayed in New Orleans' Central City neighborhood at Hayden Plaza.

Learn more about upcoming events celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by visiting the [Spring is King website](#).