

Faculty excellence recognized at SoPA's annual convocation

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Top row, from left, honorees Phil Molay, Jedidiah Raskie, Michael Wallace, and Craig Flanagan. Bottom row, from left, honorees Erica Smith and Dara Bramson with Interim Dean Ilianna Kwaske, and Interim Associate Dean Bill Rials. Honorees not pictured are Donna Smith, Amanda Fennell, Shuntasia Coleman, Katie Forster, Lesa Myrick McCrea, Jilla Tombar and Cynthia Washington. (Photo by Andrea Sagnard)

On Friday, April 11, the Tulane School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) held its annual faculty convocation at the 1834 Club on the Uptown campus. The event honored 13 faculty members with prestigious awards recognizing excellence in teaching, research, service, and mentorship.

The evening's highest honor, the Emily Vokes Faculty Service Award, was presented to Michael Wallace, director of SoPA's Emergency and Security Studies Program. Named after Tulane geology professor and adult learning advocate Emily Vokes, the award honors a lifetime of service to SoPA in areas including teaching, advising, advocacy, administration, and leadership.

After thanking a list of individuals who contributed to his academic career, including his 25-year mentor Terrence Fitzmorris, Wallace, a U.S. Navy veteran, concluded:

"As a former intelligence officer, I'm not very comfortable being in the spotlight, but I am very humbled to receive this award."

Wallace received the award from longtime colleague and fellow SoPA Program Director Robyn Ice, who offered high praise for his impact.

"Dr. Michael Wallace sets the gold standard. His students praise his ability to make complex ideas clear and abstract concepts real, and they honor his lived experience," said Ice. "He takes ownership of his students' academic success—from the moment they enroll until they're gainfully employed—and he is Tulane's strongest advocate for veterans, active military, and other students connected to the armed forces."

The evening also included remarks from Interim Dean Ilianna Kwaske, who shared highlights from SoPA's year, and a spirited toast by Interim Associate Dean Bill Rials, who opened the event with a toast perfect for a room full of educators:

"May your coffee be strong and your inboxes light," he said.

In a particularly meaningful part of the program, students who had nominated award recipients spoke about their experiences. Lisa Wurtzel, a Media + Design Program student, shared her reflections on a graphic design course taught by honoree Donna Smith.

"When I enrolled in the digital design program, I was well into mid-life," said Wurtzel. "Adults learn differently, and Professor Donna Smith meets us where we are. She gives us space to explore, to potentially fail, and to try again. Most importantly, she allows us to bring our lived experience into our studies."

The full list of honorees for the 2025 Faculty Convocation are:

Emily Vokes Award

Michael Wallace - Emergency and Security Studies

John Percy Dyer Award

Amanda Fennell – Information Technology

Donna Smith – Media + Design

Distinguished Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching

Dara Bramson - Humanities and Social Sciences

Katie Forster – Information Technology

Erica Smith - Education

Jedidiah Raskie – Emergency and Security Studies

Phil Molay - Media + Design

Shuntasia Coleman - Media + Design

Lesa Myrick McCrea - General Legal Studies

Cynthia Washington – Business and Leadership Studies

Jilla Tombar – John Lewis Public Administration

Craig Flanagan - Kinesiology

Click the image below for more photos from the event.

