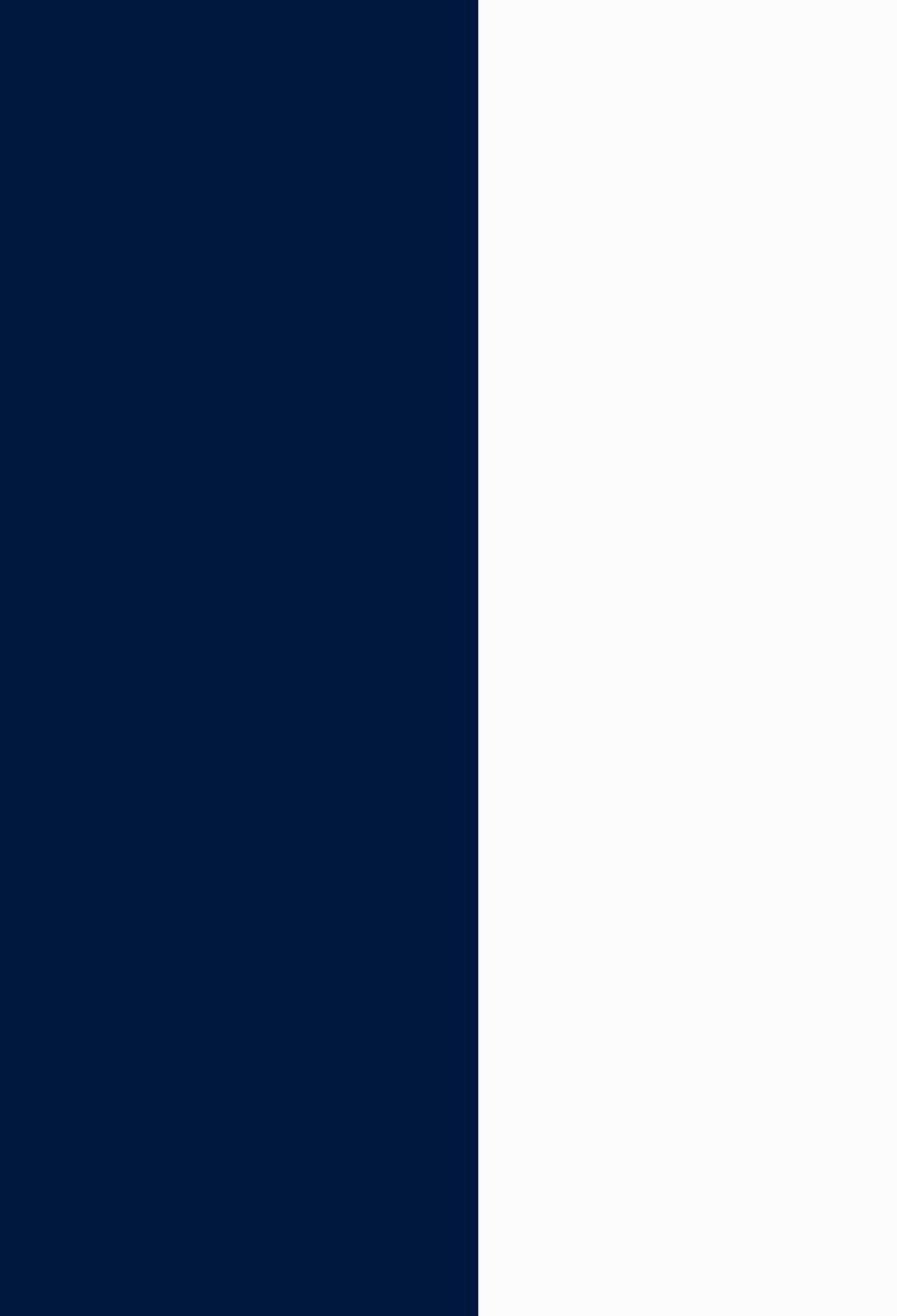




TULANE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT
ACADEMIC YEAR IN REVIEW
JULY 2024–JUNE 2025





OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

What a year it's been!

The 2024–2025 academic year was a remarkable journey—fueled by growth, progress, and exciting transitions. Under the dynamic leadership of Interim Dean Ilianna Kwaske, SoPA kept its momentum strong and moving forward, as highlighted in her letter on page 2 and in the pages that follow.

Now, SoPA is ready for its next chapter—one of growth. We're delighted to welcome our incoming dean, Amelia Manning, whose bold vision and experience from Southern New Hampshire University promise an inspiring future. Meet her on page 23 to get a glimpse of what lies ahead.

Before we turn the page, let's take a moment to recognize our extraordinary faculty and staff, who have kept the energy high, the work meaningful, and our students inspired every step of the way. Their dedication, passion, and creativity have been the driving force behind our vibrant community and the continued success of our students.

Keep up with news from the Tulane School of Professional Advancement by visiting sopa.tulane.edu/news and by following @TulaneSoPA on social media.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

As we close the 2024–2025 academic year, I am proud to share highlights that reflect the collective achievements of the Tulane School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) in this Academic Year in Review.

Featured in the following pages are faculty accomplishments, student awards and activities, connections to the community, and new partnerships. For example, SoPA Media + Design students swept the local ADDY® awards again, and one of our digital design students was a National Gold ADDY® winner. Faculty and alumni



from education, legal studies, and kinesiology have published books. Our joyous commencement ceremony was the culmination of faculty, staff, and students' work, and included celebrating our first cohorts of students from our Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Education, and College-in-Prison programs. Each endeavor, from small to bold, reflects our dedication to excellence, innovation, and access and comes to life in the stories that follow.

Not shown in the pictures is the work behind the scenes by the talented SoPA faculty and staff for whom I am so grateful. It is worth acknowledging that this team moved the needle in a positive direction on nearly every performance metric over the past year. SoPA achieved strong enrollment growth in AY25, with graduate enrollment up 75% and undergraduate enrollment up 23%, bringing the total student count to 1,356. New policies implemented this year to make SoPA more transfer friendly and the creation of 8-week terms to be launched in 2026 for the Master of Science in Cyber Technology will offer more flexible pathways for adult learners. Student engagement was strengthened through the launch of success coaching, expanded career advising, and personalized digital outreach. SoPA's financial health improved, with undergraduate net revenue up 8% and

graduate revenue up 25% year-to-date, and giving to SoPA has increased over 40%. Since July 2024, SoPA established new memorandums of understanding with community organizations and other Tulane units on program development, nursing curriculum, and instructional design. With all of this, SoPA is well-positioned to expand its reach under our new dean, Amelia Manning.

I am grateful to be part of SoPA's journey, and look forward to building on this year's momentum and pursuing the opportunities before us.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ilianna Kwaska".

Ilianna Kwaska, PhD
Interim Dean

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 A YEAR OF
IMPACT

8 A LEGACY OF
ACHIEVEMENT

12 A CELEBRATION TO
REMEMBER

18 A CONNECTION TO THE
COMMUNITY

22 A LOOK TO THE
FUTURE

A YEAR OF IMPACT

SoPA FACULTY HONORED

bit.ly/sopafacultyawards2025

The annual faculty convocation, held April 11, was an emotion-filled evening during which 13 faculty members were honored with prestigious awards recognizing excellence in teaching, research, service, and mentorship. Students, mentors, staff and fellow faculty were all in attendance to offer personal sentiments about each honoree during the presentation of awards.

Emily Vokes Award

Michael Wallace, Emergency & Security Studies

John Percy Dyer Award

Amanda Hartle, Information Technology

Donna Smith, Media + Design

Distinguished Faculty Award

Dara Bramson, Humanities & Social Sciences

Katie Forster, Information Technology

Erica Smith, Education

Jedidiah Raskie, Emergency & Security Studies

Phil Molay, Media + Design

Shuntasia Coleman, Media + Design

Lesa Myrick McCrea, General Legal Studies

Cynthia Washington, Business & Leadership Studies

Jilla Tombar, John Lewis Public Administration

Craig Flanagan, Kinesiology ■



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.



RICHARDSON SOMMERS NAMED IDEAAL FELLOW

bit.ly/ideaal-fellows

Tihara Richardson Sommers, PhD, professor of practice in the John Lewis Public Administration Program, was named an IDEAAL fellow. The program seeks to increase the knowledge and awareness of environmental and public health disaster research methods and skills among interdisciplinary, early career researchers who are interested in conducting public health-focused hazards and disaster research. ■



CONGRATULATIONS, DR. G!

Tamar Gregorian, PhD, (third from left) affectionately known to students as “Dr.G,” is the associate program director and professor of practice for SoPA’s Media + Design Program. Gregorian was presented with the 2025 Educator of the Year Award by the American Advertising Federation of New Orleans. ■



A TIME TO BOND

This year's faculty and staff retreat reinforced SoPA's strong culture and team by practicing restorative dialogue to improve constructive communication and creating together. The SoPA team bonded with one another during a collage workshop where they visualized their interpretation of the school's vision statement.

The team also recommitted to the school's mission and a shared vision to provide excellence and quality through industry-driven curricula, foster belonging, meet students where they are, create clear pathways to student success, build partnerships to meet industry needs and provide educational opportunities for students to make quality education accessible. ■

A RARE INVITATION

SoPA's Emergency and Security Studies Program Director, Michael Wallace, EdD, along with Professor of Practice and Associate Program Director Becky Rouse, DM, attended the Homeland Defense Conference at the Homeland Defense Institute located at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs to discuss SoPA's degree and certificate offerings.

During their visit, Wallace received a rare invitation for a visit to the Cheyenne Mountain Complex, touring the Alternate NORAD & U.S. Northern Command Center—a facility not open to the public. The underground complex was built to withstand nuclear attacks and serves as a location for military operations. ■



A LEGACY OF ACHIEVEMENT



SoPA IT GRAD HELPS DISTINGUISH ART FROM AI

bit.ly/sopa-art-from-ai

In a world where seeing is no longer believing, SoPA graduate Ben Yoss has developed a tool that helps users identify AI-generated images.

Yoss's start-up company, Pixguard AI, uses artificial intelligence to verify that an online image is authentic and gives artists an opportunity to protect and receive credit for their work.

Currently in development as a Google Chrome extension, Pixguard AI integrates seamlessly into the browsing experience. The software will place a small verification badge in the corner of authenticated content, allowing users to hover and view information about the original creator. ■



SoPA LAUNCHES SHRM STUDENT CHAPTER

bit.ly/sopa-shrm-launch

A new organization for students interested in leadership using a human resources approach welcomed members and guests on Wednesday, April 23, on the Uptown campus. LeSHRM, a twist on the professional version of the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), is a dynamic student-led organization supported by SoPA and its Business & Leadership Studies Program, which is home to the undergraduate human resources major.

The inaugural meet-and-greet brought together students from a variety of programs across Tulane. Distinguished guests included Tulane's Vice President of Human Resources Jonathan Small; SHRM NOLA President Patrick Morrison; SHRM NOLA President-Elect Rickey Coleman; CEO of Minor Consulting Group Jacqueline Minor; and Ochsner Health Employee Relations Specialist Whitley Robinson. ■

THE GOLD STANDARD

Sofia von der Schulenburg, SoPA Media + Design student, took home a National Gold ADDY® and the Special Judges Award at the 2025 National American Advertising Federation Awards—recognizing her work as the best in its category for creative excellence. A Gold ADDY® is recognition of the highest level of creative excellence and is judged to be superior to all other entries in the category. ■



NETWORK SECURITY CHAMPIONS

The SoPA Information Technology Program, in partnership with Idea Village and Operation Spark, brought students from the Greater New Orleans area together to puzzle over networking fundamentals and analyze network packet captures to find cybersecurity incident artifacts. The event, held in October 2024, was sponsored by Susco Solutions, who awarded drones to the first-place team. ■



PENS, PAGES, & POSSIBILITIES

CELEBRATING SoPA AUTHORS

A crop of new authors saw their books hit shelves this year. It was an unexpected dream come true for some and a lifelong goal for others. From textbooks to children's literature, here are a few of the books published by SoPA full-time faculty, adjuncts and students.



"Do Not Be Afraid" by Cassidy Williams (left)

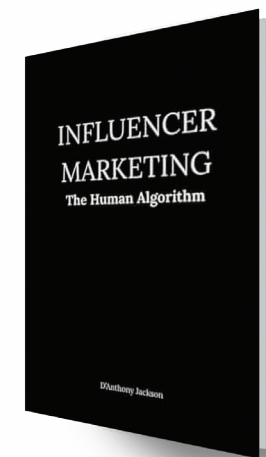
"The Boy Whose Tummy Does Not Think Ice Cream Is Too Yummy!" by Libby Shadoan (center)

"My Guiding Star" by Richard J. Mihans II (right)

LESSONS IN LITERATURE

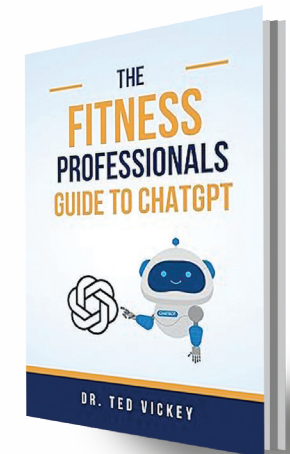
A course on children's and adolescent literature at SoPA evolved into an unexpected writer's studio, leading several students—and their professor—to become children's book authors. Richard Mihans, PhD, a senior professor of practice in SoPA's Education Program, designed the class not only to explore the psychology behind children's literature but also to encourage students to experience the process of becoming authors themselves. The class of 24 students became a collaborative, creative environment where they exchanged feedback, developed storyboards, and supported one another through the writing process.

Mihans then partnered with Covenant Books, a South Carolina-based publisher, to offer students a chance to submit their manuscripts for publication. As a result, four books were published including his own. After the books were released, Mihans partnered with Tulane Libraries to host a book talk where he and two of the new authors read excerpts from their books. The course's success reshaped his teaching philosophy, encouraging more flexibility and student-driven learning in his future classes. ■



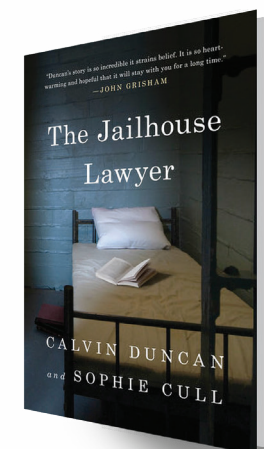
STRATEGY & INFLUENCE

Influencer Strategy (MDES 2310) is offered online through the Media + Design Program, and provides valuable insights into one of the fastest-growing digital marketing fields. The course is taught and was developed by D'Anthony Jackson, Vice President and Director of Social and Influencer Strategy at Ogilvy, a prominent advertising agency in New York City. According to Jackson, his book "Influencer Marketing: The Human Algorithm" came about to address a void he'd found in the textbook industry. He said, "After building an influencer marketing course from scratch at Tulane University, I realized the textbook I wanted for my students didn't exist, so I wrote it!" ■



AI + FITNESS

"The Fitness Professionals Guide to ChatGPT," written by SoPA Kinesiology Program professor, Ted Vickey, PhD, shows fitness professionals how to harness the power of artificial intelligence to streamline their business, enhance client experiences, and ultimately, grow their impact. Written for fitness professionals who want to work smarter—not harder—Vickey explains, "Coaches who embrace AI will outpace those who fear it because they'll be more efficient and deliver better client experiences." The book breaks down how tools like ChatGPT can be a game-changer for personal trainers, gym owners, and online coaches." ■



TIME SERVED

"The Jailhouse Lawyer" is a searing and ultimately hopeful account of SoPA alumnus Calvin Duncan, JD, and his 30-year path through Angola after a wrongful murder conviction, his coming-of-age as a legal mind while imprisoned, and his continued advocacy for those on the inside. Duncan is also an adjunct faculty member in the General Legal Studies Program and served as the 2025 commencement speaker for Loyola University. ■

A CELEBRATION TO REMEMBER



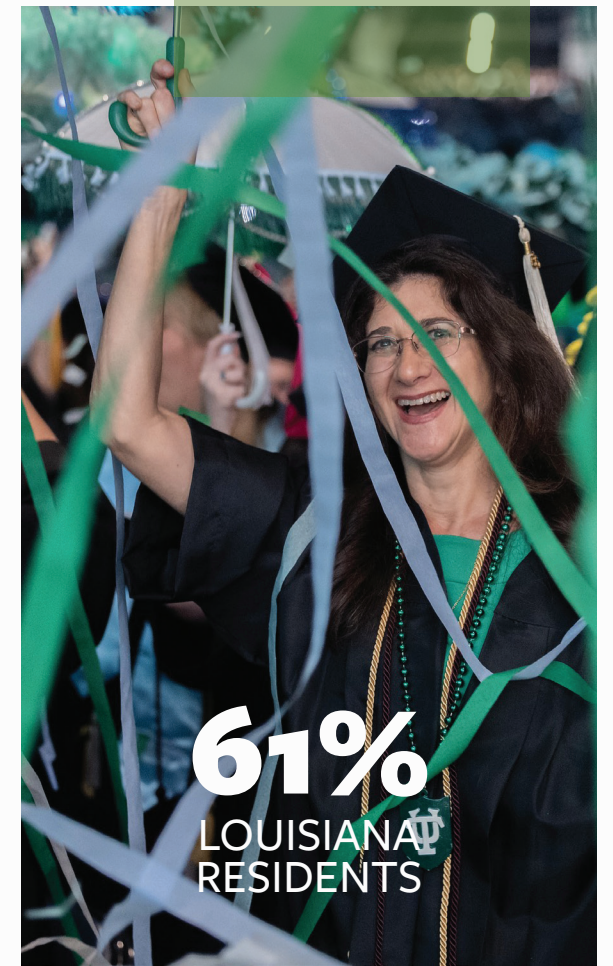
EXPERIENCE
COMMENCEMENT



CLASS OF
2025



157
CERTIFICATES
AWARDED



61%
LOUISIANA
RESIDENTS



27
STATES
REPRESENTED



10%
ACTIVE-DUTY
MILITARY OR VETERANS



222
DEGREES
EARNED



A YEAR OF FIRSTS

Tulane University conferred degrees upon the first cohort of graduates to earn the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and the Master of Education (MEd) through SoPA during the university's 2025 Unified Commencement Ceremony held Saturday, May 17. SoPA launched both the online MEd and the MAT degrees in 2023 with a goal of providing a rigorous and rewarding pathway for the next generation of educators. Both programs offer an intensive blend of academic coursework and hands-on experience preparing graduates for immediate impact in the field. The MAT leads to teacher certification in the state of Louisiana, which has reciprocity with 42 other states across the U.S. ■

FROM PRISON TO COLLEGE GRADUATE

SoPA and Operation Restoration celebrated the first graduate of the College-in-Prison Program on Thursday, January 9, with a reception on the Uptown campus. Stephanie King, who continued the program after her release in 2023, earned the Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences degree with a summa cum laude honor designation in December 2024.

"This wasn't just about earning a diploma," said King. "It was about proving to myself that I could change, that I could build something better for myself and my family."

Twelve additional students from King's cohort at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) will complete their degree requirements in early August. LCIW will hold an on-site graduation for those students on Oct. 30, where they will don their caps and gowns. ■



SEE HER
BIG MOMENT





ONLINE DEGREE, REAL IMPACT

Balancing a classroom of fourth graders and graduate school isn't easy, but for Danyel Hudson, it was never about ease.

It was about impact.

Hudson was among the first cohort of students to earn a Master of Education degree from SoPA. The degree launched in August 2023 and can be completed 100% online in just four semesters.

As a full-time teacher at Chicago International Charter School's Basil campus, located on the south-side of Chicago, Hudson's commitment to her students runs deep. She works tirelessly to ensure her classroom is a space of inclusion, understanding and growth.

"For someone like me who is learning remotely, I am able to engage in the readings, listen to the lectures, communicate with classmates, and do interactive assignments," said Hudson. "I really appreciate this program's methods of tackling learning in different ways for different learners." ■



SECOND TIME'S THE CHARM

Like many first-year college students, Ben Singer graduated from high school and was hit with all the pressures that accompany the newfound freedom associated with being on your own for the first time. After a short break from pursuing his degree, he leaned on his family—and SoPA—for the support he needed to get back on track.

"I enrolled at a university in Virginia after high school and let's just say that it did not go well," recalls Singer. "After taking some time to get myself together, I enrolled at SoPA and that led me where am I today."

Singer says he is grateful that SoPA took a chance on his success even though he applied with less-than-stellar grades. Not only did Singer prove his ability by completing his studies with a 4.0 GPA, he was inducted into the Alpha Sigma Lambda Honor Society for adult learners, the Lambda Epsilon Chi Honor Society for legal studies students, and served as the student commencement speaker for the 2025 SoPA diploma ceremony. ■



SEMPER FINE DESIGN

Originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico, Raul Fuster went to high school in Bay St. Louis where he developed an interest in film and photography. He then attended the University of Southern Mississippi where he eventually switched his focus to computer science but left—before earning a degree—to enlist in the Marines.

Throughout his career in the Marine Corps, Fuster held a variety of roles that reflect a broad and diverse range of experience. He began as an avionics technician, working on utility and attack helicopters, and later served as a recruiter in Massachusetts. His instructional skills were put to use as an avionics instructor at Camp Pendleton, CA. Additionally, Fuster worked as a substance abuse control officer and suicide prevention officer with various units. For six years, he served at the Naval Air Station New Orleans in Belle Chasse with HMLA-773 Det. A as an avionics technician.

When Raul Fuster retired from the U.S. Marine Corps after 20 years in 2019, he decided he wanted to go back to school. This spring, Foster graduated from SoPA with a major in Digital Design and a minor in Interactive Design. ■



KINESIOLOGY GRAD ON THE BIG STAGE

Devin Goldman got the opportunity of a lifetime when she applied and was selected to share her Tulane experience as the student speaker during the 2025 Unified Commencement Ceremony.

She says her four years on campus and in New Orleans could not have been more fulfilling, even with significant personal challenges that she experienced during her sophomore year.

"I'm a big fan of public speaking," the native New Yorker said. "And I like to go for things. My excitement for this kept building up. I wanted a chance to talk to my fellow graduates and say good-bye to Tulane in the right way."

Goldman graduated with bachelor's degrees in psychology and health and wellness. ■

A CONNECTION TO THE COMMUNITY



THROW ME SOMETHING, SoPA!

SoPA faculty and staff gathered at the Arc of Greater New Orleans for a day of service, where they rolled up their sleeves to help sort recycled Mardi Gras throws. In addition to bringing the team together over baubles and beads, this activity supports an organization that uplifts the community by working to provide people with intellectual disabilities opportunities to develop, function, and live to their fullest potential. ■

THE GIFT OF WARMTH

The John Lewis Public Administration Program at SoPA hosted the inaugural Community Impact Project for students attending the program's annual residency on the Uptown campus. The residency culminated with the graduate students packaging donations of winter items for seniors at the New Orleans Council on Aging. ■





Photo Credit | Anthony LaMothe Photography

BRIDGING BUSINESS, EDUCATION, & COMMUNITY

SoPA Interim Dean Ilianna Kwaske was appointed by Tulane President Michael Fitts to represent the university’s interest on the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. Kwaske, along with A.B Freeman School of Business Dean Paulo Goes, will serve alternating years on the Board, where they will play an instrumental role in bridging education and businesses in New Orleans.

During Kwaske’s first year on the Board, Tulane hosted its first Chamber After 5 networking event at Yulman Stadium bringing together students and professionals from the greater New Orleans area. ■

HOT DIGGITY DOG

SoPA’s Student Government hosted a year-end mixer for fellow students at Dat Dog Freret on April 16. The event offered an opportunity to wind down the semester with familiar faces, enjoy some hot dogs, and connect with SoPA students, faculty and alumni. ■



A SoPA SUPER BOWL

STUDENTS & THE BIG GAME



LOGO WITH A LEGACY

SoPA Information Technology alumna Tahj Williams’ artistry earned national acclaim as she fulfilled a commission to design the official Super Bowl LIX logo for the NFL.

Williams, who is Queen of a New Orleans Black Masking Indian tribe was asked to design a logo for the game as a tribute to the city and its local culture.

Her hand-beaded design paid homage to the elaborate suits worn by masking Indians during Mardi Gras and Super Sunday celebrations. Known locally as “Queen Tahj,” some would say she’s experiencing a whirlwind of recent accomplishments including an on-stage appearance at the Grammy’s with super star artist, Jon Batiste in 2022. ■

PREGAME PERFORMANCE

Jessica Harvey is the the choir and vocal music instructor at KIPP New Orleans High Schools and a graduate student in SoPA’s Master of Arts in Teaching program. For a few months this year, Harvey held another title—director of the Greater New Orleans High School Choral Collective, a 125-student choir made up of singers from 12 different schools, who performed on Super Bowl Sunday alongside New Orleans native and Grammy Award-winning artist Ledisi. Under Harvey’s direction, the choir performed “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” ■



VIEW THE
FOX8 SEGMENT



SEE TAHJ
IN ACTION



Photo Credit | Justen Williams Media

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

SoPA MOVES FORWARD ON NEW DEGREES

Master of Science in Cyber Technology

The Master of Science in Cyber Technology is the first-of-its-kind accelerated degree at SoPA. Designed to be completed in 12 months, students take two online classes every 8 weeks and earn a graduate certificate and a master's degree in one year.

Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies*

The Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies program is a bachelor's degree completion program designed for those who have previously started college but never finished. For the first time at SoPA, students may transfer up to 75 credits toward the 120 credits needed to earn a Tulane degree.

Graduate Certificate in Strategic Communication*

The Graduate Certificate in Strategic Communication consists of four foundational courses and is ideal for professionals looking to advance their skills and applied understanding of public relations, digital marketing, and graphic design. This graduate certificate can be completed on its own or stacked into several master's degrees at SoPA.

**Pending SACS approval. ■*

NEW INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Industry partnerships have been a growing priority at SoPA this past year. In July 2024, we developed a template for partnership agreements to establish strategic partnerships with public and private organizations. Through this agreement, the organizations promote our programs to employees who are eligible to receive a tuition discount as part of the partnership. Our hope is that this agreement is an entry to developing deeper working relationships with organizations to create customized programming to help upskill their workforce and affords our community increased access to a Tulane education. These partnerships are instrumental in expanding the depth of views in SoPA classrooms and fostering critical thinking. This year SoPA added five new partnerships including **Ochsner Health** and the **Louisiana State Fire Marshal**, making SoPA degrees more accessible to Ochsner Health employees and first responders. The partnership extends a 20% tuition discount on any of SoPA's industry-relevant degrees and certificates. ■

MCGRAIL SCHOLARSHIP FOR VETERANS

SoPA together with The Flag and General Officers' Network announce the establishment of the Rear Admiral Charles R. "Chuck" McGrail Memorial Scholarship Fund in tribute to a leader whose career exemplified integrity, humility, and dedication to service.

The fund provides \$45,000 of financial support over five years for active duty, reserve, National Guard, and honorably discharged veteran students from any U.S. uniformed service pursuing undergraduate or graduate studies through SoPA programs.

"Our programs at SoPA are attractive to active duty and veteran students because we tailor them to fit the lives of working adults and nontraditional students," said SoPA Interim Dean Ilianna Kwaske. "This flexibility allows our students to advance their careers while serving their country from anywhere in the world."

The McGrail Scholarship will combine with an existing 20% tuition discount match offered to eligible military students at SoPA making this one of the most accessible and supportive programs for service members transitioning to civilian life or pursuing advancement while still in uniform. ■

SoPA WELCOMES NEW DEAN

Amelia Manning, former chief operating officer at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), has been named dean of Tulane University's School of Professional Advancement (SoPA), effective Aug. 1.

Manning brings more than two decades of leadership experience in higher education, including an extensive track record of innovation and student-focused growth. At SNHU, she led strategic efforts that more than doubled student enrollment and implemented advanced systems for student support and retention.



"Amelia's career has been defined by a clear commitment to understanding what students need to thrive," Tulane President Michael A. Fitts said. "We are thrilled to welcome her to Tulane, where her leadership will help SoPA reach more students and support them in achieving their academic and professional goals."

Manning will lead SoPA's efforts to expand access to high-quality, flexible academic programs that serve working adults, military-connected students and lifelong learners. The school offers in-person and online options for bachelor's degree completion, graduate study and professional certificates across a wide range of applied fields.

"It is an honor to join Tulane University, and I am excited to work alongside a talented and dedicated team to further enhance our students' educational experiences and success," Manning said. "I was drawn to Tulane and its School of Professional Advancement because of the long-standing commitment to increasing access to high-quality, workforce-aligned programs. I look forward to leading the next phase of growth and impact for the School of Professional Advancement."

During her tenure at SNHU, Manning enhanced student success by developing internal capabilities in predictive analytics, course design and faculty development. She led the implementation of a new student information system. She oversaw the upgrade of customer relationship and learning management platforms, enabling more personalized and data-informed student support that contributed to increased student engagement, higher retention rates and growth in re-enrollment.

Manning holds a Master of Arts in counseling education from the University of New Hampshire and a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from Saint Michael's College. She also completed the advanced management program at Harvard Business School. She currently serves as vice chair of the board of Urban College of Boston and is a board member for the American College of Education.

Manning will succeed Ilianna Kwaske, associate dean for academic affairs and senior professor of practice, who has served as interim dean since January 2024 following the departure of former Dean Suri Duitch. ■

THANK YOU

FOR SUPPORTING SoPA!



SCAN TO GIVE

 giving.tulane.edu

EVERY GIFT MAKES
AN IMPACT



MARKETING TEAM

Alicia Jasmin, MPA

Director of Marketing and Communications

Don Cooper

Media and Communications Specialist

Andrea Sagnard

Marketing and Communications Associate

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Ilianna Kwaske, PhD

Interim Dean

Bill Rials, PhD

Interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Christa Payne, MBA

Chief Business Officer

Sheila Gold, DSW

Assistant Dean of Admissions

Email questions or comments
to **sopanews@tulane.edu**.



TULANE UNIVERSITY
School *of* Professional
Advancement

Richardson Building, Suite 204
6823 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70118

sopa.tulane.edu