2026 John Lewis Public Administration Residency

TULANE
School *of* Professional Advancement
John Lewis Public Administration Program

SHAPING THE FUTURE:

Preparing Ethical, Innovative, and Inclusive Public Service Leaders



Friday, October 23rd–Sunday, October 25th, 2026

Kendall Cram Room #213, Lavin-Bernick Center,

Uptown Campus, Tulane University

WELCOME!


Dr. Halima Leak Francis

"If not us, then who? If not now, then when?"
— Congressman John R. Lewis (February 21, 1940 – July 17, 2020)

Welcome to the Tulane School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) John Lewis Public Administration Program 2026 MPA Residency. This year, we convene under the theme "Shaping the Future: Preparing Ethical, Innovative, and Inclusive Public Service Leaders."

Our program's namesake understood that the future is something we build through principled action. As a young Freedom Rider, John Lewis risked his life to challenge segregation. As chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), he helped organize a generation of young people in the fight for civil rights. He led a peaceful march from Selma, Alabama, to demand that all citizens, particularly Black Americans, be free to register and vote without facing literacy tests, poll taxes, intimidation, or violence. That moment of courage helped secure passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He carried that same commitment into public office, serving in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1987 until his death in 2020. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of his service. His journey from activist to public servant demonstrates what ethical, innovative, and inclusive leadership looks like over a lifetime.

Public service is changing rapidly. Communities face complex policy challenges, shifting public trust, rapid technological change, and growing demands for equity and accountability. These conditions call for leaders who are grounded in integrity, open to new ideas, and committed to serving everyone. Over the next three days, you will learn alongside practitioners, scholars, alumni, and community partners who are doing this work every day. You will also have the opportunity to connect in person with your MPA colleagues and build relationships that will sustain you throughout your careers.

Whether your path leads to government, nonprofit leadership, philanthropy, economic development, or public policy, your decisions will have real-world consequences. I encourage you to approach these challenges with hope, courage, and a commitment to public service. As you engage with our community, strengthen your ability to:

Lead ethically – Uphold integrity, transparency, and accountability.
Innovate boldly – Challenge assumptions and develop new solutions to longstanding problems.
Build inclusively – Center affected communities and strengthen institutions that serve everyone.
Shape the future – Recognize how today's actions influence tomorrow's communities and institutions.

My sincere thanks to our JLPA students, faculty, speakers, alumni, Tulane ICMA Student Chapter members, community partners, supporters, and programming hosts for making the 2026 Residency possible**.** Special recognition to our planning committee: Chair Professor Michelle Jackson; Faculty Lead Dr. Brian McNamara; Adjunct Faculty Representative Kimberly S. O'Neil; JLPA Alumni Representative Kate Donaghey; MPA Student Representative Howard Davis; and Program Administrator Celeste Uzee.

Thank you for joining us for the Tulane SoPA John Lewis Public Administration Program 2026 MPA Residency and for your commitment to shaping the future of public service. I look forward to learning alongside you!

With hope and gratitude,

Dr. Halima Leak Francis
Director and Senior Professor of Practice, John Lewis Public Administration Program
Carnegie Corporation of New York Professor of Social Entrepreneurship
Tulane School of Professional Advancement

2026 Planning Committee Members



Michelle D. Jackson
2026 Residency Chair & Adjunct Professor, JLPA



Dr. Brian McNamara
Associate Director & Senior Professor of Practice, JLPA



Kimberly S. O'Neil
Adjunct Professor, JLPA



Kate Donaghey
Adjunct Professor, JLPA



Celeste Uzee
Director of Special Projects
Tulane School of Professional Advancement (SoPA)

Event Information

Locations:

CLICK HERE TO VIEW AN INTERACTIVE CAMPUS MAP.

Friday & Saturday Sessions:

Kendall Cram Lecture Hall (Room 213), Lavin Bernick Center on the Uptown campus; it is located at 6823 St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans, or #29 on the interactive campus map linked above.

Friday Afternoon Networking Reception:

SoPA Office located at 204 Richardson Building, Tulane University Uptown Campus.

Sunday Morning: New Orleans Bus Tour

Breakfast will be served in the Kendall Cram Room. The bus will depart from Freret Street, just outside Devlin Fieldhouse/Fogelman Arena. Lunch will be served at the Tate Etienne and Prevost Center, located at 5909 St. Claude Avenue, which will be the final stop on the New Orleans Bus Tour. Following lunch, the bus will depart the TEP Center,stop at the Alder Hotel for guest drop-off, and then return to the Tulane campus.

Breakfast & Lunch (Pick up vouchers at registration desk):

Breakfast will be provided each day in the meeting room, along with coffee, tea, and water. Lunch will be provided in the dining room at Malkin-Sacks Commons

Commuters:

Parking rules on campus will change each day of the residency.

Friday, October 23:

PURCHASE A VISITOR PARKING PERMIT ($6) ONLINE HERE

(select the “visitor permit” option)

A visitor permit allows you to park in Tulane’s Diboll Garage, located at 2650 Ben Weiner Dr. IMPORTANT NOTE: You must vacate your campus parking space before 10 pm, or your car risks being towed due to football game parking regulations.

Saturday, October 24:

Football Game Parking Restrictions Apply

No parking voucher is required on weekends, but campus parking is highly restricted Saturday only due to the home football game. You may park on campus between St. Charles Avenue and Freret Street, along Law Road (one way, enter on St Charles Ave) and Engineering Road (enter/exit on Freret Street). Street parking along St Charles Avenue is available, but please be alert to the 2-hour limited parking zones (green bordered signs) along the residential streets around campus.

Sunday, October 25:

No visitor permit is required on weekends. Park in any campus space that does not display a “24-hour reserved” sign, including the Diboll garage.

Day 1- Friday, October 23rd

8:30 AM–9:30 AM	**Registration & Breakfast**
9:30 AM–9:50 AM	**Opening Remarks & Introduction of Host, Marco Tejeda-Kemp**
9:50 AM–10:15 AM	**Introductions & Icebreaker**
10:15 AM–11:00 AM	**Fireside Chat**

Session Title: **Making Good Trouble: The Power of Law, Justice and Moral Change**

Moderator: Dr. Brian McNamara, Senior Professor of Practice

Special Guest Speaker: Nora Ahmed, Legal Director, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Louisiana

Abstract: In this fireside chat, Legal Director Nora Ahmed will explore the intersection of law, public service, and social justice, examining how legal advocacy and ethical leadership can address systemic challenges, protect civil rights, and advance equity in our communities. The conversation will invite participants to consider what it means to make ″good trouble″in today's complex social and political environment and how public administrators, policymakers, legal professionals, and emerging leaders can translate their values into meaningful action.

About ACLU Louisiana:

The American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Louisiana (ACLU of Louisiana) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and advancing civil rights and civil liberties for all people in the state. Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, the ACLU of Louisiana challenges government abuse, defends individual freedoms, and promotes justice and equality.

11:15 AM–11:45 AM	**Solo Presentation**

Session Title: **Leveraging AI to Streamline Operations and Deliver Citzen-entric Government Services**

Speaker:

William ″Bill″ Rials, Ph.D, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Sr. Professor of Practice, Tulane SoPA

Abstract: In 2001, ″digital government″ meant moving paper forms to static PDF downloads. Today, it means real-time, AI-driven resident services, ″whole-of-state″ cybersecurity, and cloud-native infrastructure that never sleeps. This session will be a high-energy retrospective and a forward-looking strategy session that tracks the evolution of the public sector's digital DNA. We will walk through the ″waves″ of transformation we've navigated together and will provide a roadmap for the next quarter-century of innovation.

12:00 PM–1:00 PM	**Lunch**

1:00–1:45 PM	**Solo Presentation**

Session Title: **Twenty Years After Hurricane Katrina: Building a More Resilient New Orleans**

Special Guest Speaker: Lamar Gardere, Executive Director, The Data Center

Abstract: Twenty-one years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and exposed critical failures in the region's flood protection systems, the metro area continues to confront increasing climate uncertainty and the threat of future disasters. This discussion will explore lessons learned, ongoing challenges, and innovative

policy approaches to advance equitable recovery, protect vulnerable communities, and strengthen regional resilience and adaptability. Drawing on research, policy, and community perspectives, Lamar Gardere will examine how New Orleans' experiences can inform disaster preparedness, climate resilience, and recovery strategies in communities across the nation.

2:00 PM–2:45 PM Policy Pitch Presentations

Moderator: Michelle D. Jackson, Adjunct Professor, Tulane JLPA

Presenters:

Ashley Givens, MPA Student

Topic: "From Blight to Support: Converting Vacant City Properties into Childcare and Family Resource Centers"

Claire Reifschneider, MPA Graduate

Topic: "A Long-term Funding Plan for Distributable Renewable Energy Resources in New Orleans"

Danielle Martin, MPA Student

Topic: "The Return on Mobility: Fast-Tracking Transit-Oriented Communities along the East-West BRT Corridor"

Abstract: The inaugural JLPA Public Policy Pitch Competition showcases innovative, evidence-based policy solutions developed by Tulane University students, faculty, and alumni to address challenges affecting the Gulf Coast region. Participants will present public policy proposals or philanthropic strategic plans addressing issues such as economic development, public safety, sustainability, affordable housing, and community development. Three participants will present their proposals to a review panel, with each presenter allotted six minutes to pitch their idea, followed by four minutes of questions and answers. Awards will be provided.

Judges:

Sharon Goldsmith, Executive Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Programs, Tulane University Innovation Programs
Kimberly S. O'Neil, Adjunct Lecturer, Tulane JLPA
Amiyah King, Juvenile Justice Policy Advisor, City of New Orleans Office of Violence Prevention

3:00 PM–4:15 PM Panel Discussion

Session Title: **Ethics and Inclusion in Action**

Moderator: Dr. Brian McNamara, Senior Professor of Practice

Panelists:

Dr. Melissa Schigoda, CEO of Melissa Schigoda, LLC
Lieutenant Commander Jacob Gamble, U.S. Coast Guard
Mr. Marco Tejeda-Kemp, MPA Graduate

Abstract: Public administrators manage ethics and inclusion issues daily. Drawing upon their experience as public administrators at the local, regional, and federal levels, panelists discuss how they have managed ethics and inclusion in their professional practice. The discussion illustrates the myriad ways ethics and inclusion issues arise in individual, organizational, and multi-sector settings.

5:00 PM–7:00 PM	Networking Reception

Networking Reception

Friday, October 23, 2026
SoPA Building
204 Richardson Building | Tulane University

Networking Reception

TULANE UNIVERSITY
School *of* Professional
Advancement

Join us for an engaging evening of conversation, connection, and community as we bring together public service leaders, faculty, students, alumni, and friends of the John Lewis Public Administration Program.

Enjoy refreshments and meaningful conversations while building relationships, exchanging ideas, and celebrating the people who are shaping the future of public service.
Come connect. Come collaborate. Come be inspired.

Networking Reception

Friday, October 23, 2026
SoPA Building
204 Richardson Building | Tulane University
5:00 PM–7:00 PM

We look forward to welcoming you for an evening of fellowship and new connections.

Day 2- Saturday, October 24th

8:30 AM–9:30 AM	Breakfast

9:30 AM–11:00 AM	Philanthropy Workshop (Reading Requirements)

Session Topic: **Interactive Workshop Resourcing Resilience and Recovery: Cross-Sector Collaboration and Public Leadership After Hurricane Katrina**

Faculty Instructors: Faculty Instructors: Dr. Halima Leak Francis, JLPA Director and Senior Professor of Practice, and Professor Kimberly S. O'Neil, Adjunct Professor, Tulane JLPA

Abstract: Centered on Dr. Leak Francis' Brookings research on philanthropic investment in New Orleans' nonprofit sector after Hurricane Katrina, this interactive workshop explores the collaborative relationship among government, philanthropy, and nonprofits in community recovery. Professor O'Neil extends the conversation through her perspective as a former public administrator. Together, they examine public leaders' responsibility to prepare for crises, lead through them, and guide recovery. Following the opening conversation, participants will engage in small-group discussions, a gallery walk, and a closing discussion. They will consider how research and lessons from other communities help leaders plan rather than only react. They will also consider how cross-sector systems that center community needs and access to power, resources, and capital shape the future of communities of every size.

Required Preparation: During the session, students will work in small groups and share their responses in a gallery walk. Students should be prepared to draw on both the required materials and the opening discussion with Dr. Leak Francis and Professor O'Neil. Residency participants will engage in a hands-on, interactive session. To fully participate and meet residency engagement requirements, please review the required materials before the workshop. Reviewing the additional resource is optional and includes a link to all papers in the research series.

Required Course Readings & Videos: See the Course Announcements

11:15 AM–12:15 PM	Film Screening & Q&A

Film Titles: **Water Park and TIME II: Unfinished Business followed by a Q&A with the filmmaker**

Filmmaker: Joshua Montrel, JLPA Alumni, Filmmaker and Policy Analyst

Moderator: Michelle D. Jackson, Adjunct Professor, Tulane JLPA

Abstract: Experience filmmaker Joshua Montrel's two original films, Water Park and TIME II: Unfinished Business, which explore pressing social issues affecting Louisiana and beyond. **Water Park:** On the hottest day of summer, three young boys living in a town facing a water crisis embark on a journey to find a nostalgic place from their childhood, discoveringthe realities of a community grappling with water insecurity. **TIME II:** Unfinished Business: Follow Sibil Fox Richardson and Robert Richardson, subjects of the Oscar-nominated documentary TIME, in the next chapter of their ongoing journey for love and justice. Together, they lead a deeply personal fight to free their incarcerated partner and nephew.

12:15 PM–1:15 PM	Lunch

1:15 PM–2:00 PM | Fireside Chat

Session Title: **Leading Through Complexity: The Equal Justice Initiative, the Spirit of John Lewis, and the Future of Public Leadership**

Moderator: Dr. Halima Leak Francis, JLPA Director & Senior Professor of Practice

Special Guest Speaker: Theron Pride, Senior Attorney, Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)

Abstract: Leading through complexity requires public servants to build trust, work across sectors, and embrace innovative approaches to challenging community issues. The work of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) offers a powerful example of ethical and inclusive leadership—using history, advocacy, research, and community engagement to confront inequity and strengthen institutions. This discussion will explore how public leaders can bridge institutions and communities, challenge conventional approaches, and use partnership and innovation to create more equitable, responsive, and trusted public institutions.

About the EJI:

The Equal Justice Initiative is a Montgomery, Alabama–based nonprofit organization founded in 1989 by Bryan Stevenson to challenge mass incarceration, excessive punishment, racial and economic injustice, and violations of basic human rights. EJI provides legal representation to people who have been wrongfully convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in jails and prisons, while also pursuing broader criminal justice reform through litigation, research, advocacy, and public education. The organization reports that it has secured relief, release, or reduced sentences for more than 140 people sentenced to death and has helped expose systemic problems contributing to wrongful convictions and excessive punishment. EJI also operates the Legacy Museum, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Freedom Monument Sculpture Park, and Montgomery Square, using history and public education to connect slavery, racial terror, segregation, and mass incarceration. Its research documents the scale of these challenges: more than 3,175 people have been exonerated nationally since 1989, representing more than 27,200 years of wrongful imprisonment.

2:15 PM–3:30 PM | Panel Discussion

Session Title: **Building Strategic Economic Development Initiatives for Thriving Cities**

Moderator: Marco Tejeda-Kemp, MPA Graduate

Panelists:

Michael Ince, Director, New Orleans Mayor's Office of Nighttime Economy
Philip C. Harris, Tulane Adjunct Professor and Director of Economic Development, City of Greenacres, Florida
Robin Barnes, Tulane Adjunct Professor and Economic Recovery and Resilience Expert

Abstract: Thriving cities require thoughtful, collaborative, and inclusive economic development strategies. This panel will examine how cities can leverage their local assets, attract investment, support businesses and entrepreneurs, strengthen workforce systems, and create opportunities for residents. Panelists will share their perspectives on the role of public-private partnerships, innovation, infrastructure, and inclusive policies in fostering sustainable economic growth and building resilient communities.

4:00 PM–4:30 PM | Solo Presentation

Session Title: **Collaboration in Action- A Coast Guard Perspective**

Speaker: Captain Melanie A. Burnham, Commander, Sector New Orleans, U.S. Coast Guard

Abstract: CAPT Melanie Burnham, Sector Commander for U.S. Coast Guard Sector New Orleans, shares her perspectives and lessons on collaboration and relationship building with public-and private-sector stakeholders.

4:45 PM–5:15 PM | Fireside Chat

Session Title: **The Future of Public Administration: Where Do We Go From Here?**

Moderator: Robin Barnes, Adjunct Professor, Tulane JLPA

Speakers: Dr. Halima Leak Francis, JLPA Director & Dr. Brian McNamara, Senior Professor of Practice

Abstract: Learn how public administration must adapt to technological change, evolving community needs, fiscal challenges, and a changing workforce. Participants will explore the skills and leadership practice needed to navigate these challenges, with a focus on innovation, ethics, equity, collaboration, and community engagement. The presentation will help participants understand the future of public service and how they can contribute to building more responsive, inclusive, and effective government.

5:15 PM–5:30 PM | General Discussion

Session Title: Overview - New Orleans Bus Tour: Where History Shapes Policy & Public Service Preparation

Speaker: Michelle D. Jackson, Adjunct Professor, Tulane JLPA

Day 3- Sunday, October 25th

New Orleans Bus Tour: Where History Shapes Policy

Sunday, October 25, 2026 | 8:30 AM–2:00 PM

This required activity is for each student and one guest. Through driving and walking tours, we'll explore New Orleans' history and role in economic development, cultural preservation, racial equality, disaster recovery, and equitable community redevelopment. Breakfast will be provided at Tulane, with lunch at the historic Tate Etienne and Prevost Center in the Lower Ninth Ward. At TEP, we'll complete our community service project by presenting a special gift to senior residents.

Show Your Tulane Pride! Wear Tulane gear to represent our MPA Program and university throughout the city. Comfortable shoes are recommended.

Traveling Students:

You may check out of the hotel that morning. The hotel has agreed to store your luggage until we return, and the bus will bring you back to the hotel following the tour. Therefore, we strongly recommend scheduling flights after 5:00 PM.

New Orleans Bus Tour Itinerary (*Sites where guests depart bus):

1. Leland College – 7000 block of St. Charles Avenue
2. Christ Church Cathedral – 2919 St. Charles Avenue
3. Flint-Goodridge Hospital 2425 Louisiana Avenue & Lasalle Street
4. Dew Drop Inn – 2836 Lasalle Street
5. New Zion Baptist Church – 2319 Third Street
6. A.L. Davis Park (former Joseph Shakespeare Park) – 2600 Lasalle Street
7. People's Defense League – 2500 block of Lasalle Street
8. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committeee (SNCC) – 1800 block Jackson Avenue
9. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) – 1800 block Jackson Avenue & Oretha C. Haley Blvd.
10. Dryades Street Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) – 2220 Oretha C. Haley Blvd.
11. Ashe Cultural Arts Center – 1712 Oretha C. Haley Blvd.
12. Free Southern Theater – 1332 Oretha C. Haley
13. Free Southern Theater – 1240 Oretha C. Haley
14. *Mechanics Institute Massacre - Roosevelt Waldorf Astoria Hotel – 100 Roosevelt Way
15. 300 Canal Street next to Caesars Palace Casino
16. *White Supremacy Monument/ Congo Square – 100 Iberville Street
17. *Homer A. Plessy - Marker – 2800 block Plessy Way
18. *World War 1 Arc – 3800 block Burgundy Street
19. Tate Etienne Prevost Interpretive Center (TEP) – 5909 St. Claude Avenue

2026 Residency Speakers



Nora Ahmed

Legal Director, ACLU of Louisiana

Nora Ahmed is the Legal Director of the ACLU of Louisiana, where she has built one of the most consequential civil rights dockets in the Deep South since joining the affiliate in 2020. She oversees the organization's work across policing, immigration, voting rights, rapid response, and First Amendment issues.

Born and raised in Oregon to an Egyptian Muslim father and a South Asian Indian Hindu mother, Nora's commitment to civil rights became personal after 9/11, when a meeting with the FBI and the temporary seizure of her passport brought her face to face with racial profiling. She went on to teach in the South Bronx before earning her law degree from McGill University in 2012, clerking for the Honorable Jack B. Weinstein of the Eastern District of New York, and spent seven years litigating civil rights cases at one of the country's largest law firms.

In 2020, Nora founded Justice Lab: Putting Racist Policing on Trial, mobilizing 50 law firms, 19 legal clinics, and hundreds of pro bono attorneys to challenge discriminatory policing in the nation's most conservative federal circuit. Profiled by Bloomberg Law and the Harvard Law School Center on the Legal Profession, the program has secured nearly $1.5 million in reparations for clients and achieved landmark wins. Under Nora's legal expertise, the ACLU of Louisiana successfully achieved an extension of Louisiana's civil rights statute of limitations from one to two years, expanding access to justice for potentially tens of thousands of Louisianans.

Nora oversees the ACLU of Louisiana's voting rights docket, including Louisiana v. Callais, which went before the U.S. Supreme Court. Nora also built the ACLU of Louisiana's Immigrants' Rights docket from the ground up, launching the organization's Know Your Rights program, taking on nationally significant student protest cases, and securing the first successful bond hearings for detained immigrants in Louisiana. She also leads the affiliate's First Amendment docket too, most prominently Roake v. Brumley, the challenge to Louisiana's Ten Commandments classroom mandate.



Robin Barnes

Adjunct Lecturer, John Lewis Public Administration Program

Robin Barnes is an economic recovery and resilience expert with nearly four decades of on-the-ground experience helping cities, small businesses, and nonprofits recover from and prepare for economic and climate-based disasters and working closely with nonprofit organizations on strategy, performance measurement & management and resource development. As a consultant, Robin partners with philanthropy and nonprofit organizations to rebuild economies, create jobs, and help communities face impending environmental and economic changes with strength and security. As a coach, Robin works with mission-driven individuals to expand their professional opportunities and impact.

Robin has a proven track record of bringing diverse people and ideas together to meaningfully and measurably improve distressed communities, economies, and environments across the country—from "boots on the ground" technical assistance work with small businesses rebuilding across New York City after 9/11, to developing a gold-standard post-Katrina small business recovery program for Gulf Coast fisheries, to writing the chapter on small business and entrepreneurship for President Obama's Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Strategy, to leading the creation of the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan, a roadmap to guide policymakers, public and private leaders, businesses, and community stakeholders through improved management of stormwater, subsidence, and other threats of climate change. As the former EVP and COO at Greater New Orleans, Inc., Robin has operated at the intersections of practice and policy and environment and economics and has overseen several major initiatives designed to create and protect jobs in the region and to turn environmental threats into economic opportunity and job creation.

With a BA in Anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania and a MPA from NYU Wagner, Robin has a strong academic foundation that undergirds her practice.



CAPT Melanie Burnham, USCG

Commander, U.S. Coast Guard Sector New Orleans

Captain Melanie A. Burnham assumed the duties as Commander, Sector New Orleans, LA in June 2026. In this capacity, she oversees over 1,000 active duty, reserve, civilian, and auxiliary Coast Guard personnel who serve over 300 miles of the Lower Mississippi River, 230 miles of the Intracoastal Waterway, and almost 4,000 miles of coastline in an area of responsibility totaling over 100,000 square nautical miles.

Captain Burnham's previous assignments include Deputy Commander, Sector New Orleans from 2024–2026. Commanding Officer of Gulf Strike Team in Mobile, Alabama from 2022–2024 where she was responsible for the oversight, management, and execution of response to oil discharges,hazardous substance releases, weapons of mass destruction events, natural disasters, and other emergencies throughout the southcentral and southeast regions of the United States and internationally in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. From 2018–2022 she was the Coast Guard Pacific Area Section Chief of Incident Management and Boat Forces Section Supervisor for Shore Forces (PAC-3SF) in Alameda, California. There she oversaw Marine Environmental Response, Search and Rescue, and Emergency Management functions and policy, and managed 97 cutters, 87 DSF boats, and 153 Station/ATON assets. From 2016–2018 she was assigned to Sector Maryland – National Capital Region in Baltimore, Maryland where she served as the Emergency Management & Force Readiness Branch Chief. From 2012–2016 she served as a Requirements Duty Officer at Coast Guard Headquarters (CG-771) in Washington D.C.

From 2007–2010 she served as the Commanding Officer of Station Seattle, Washington executing Search and Rescue, Homeland Security, and Law Enforcement small boat operations and unit readiness. From 2004–2007 she served as Command Duty Officer at the District One Command Center in Boston, Massachusetts. From 2002–2004 she was the Assistant Operations Officer at Coast Guard Group Boston, Massachusetts, and proudly achieved the enlisted rank of Yeoman First Class having served in positions at Group Fort Macon, North Carolina, Integrated Support Command Honolulu, Hawaii, and Reserve Training Center Yorktown, Virginia between 1995–2002.

Captain Burnham graduated USCG Basic Training in 1995 and Officer Candidate School in 2002. She holds a B.A. in

Applied Computing from University of Washington and a M.A. in Security Studies, Homeland Security and Defense from Naval Postgraduate School. She is certified as a Project Management Professional, has earned numerous National Incident Command System certifications such as Type I Incident Commander and Type I Planning Section Chief, and was selected as the International Association of Emergency Managers 2021 Military Uniformed Services Emergency Manager of the Year. She served as Incident Commander and Federal On-Scene Coordinator Representative for the Maui Wildfire (2023) and Hurricane Ian (2022) responses under ESF-10 operations. Captain Burnham is a Search and Rescue subject matter expert holding past SAR Mission Coordinator designation and current Active Search Suspension authorities.

Her personal awards include the Meritorious Service Medal (four awards), Coast Guard Commendation Medal (six awards), Coast Guard Achievement Medal (three awards), Letter of Commendation (three awards), and Good Conduct Medal (two awards). She is married to Kurt Lautenschlager (ENG4, USCG Retired), and between them they have five children: Elissa, Kelsey, Lauren, Noelle, and Breandan (GM2, USCG).



LCDR Jacob Gamble, USCG

Waterways Division Chief, U.S. Coast Guard Sector New Orleans

Lieutenant Commander Gamble assumed the duties as Chief of Waterways, Sector New Orleans, Louisiana in July 2025. In this capacity, he oversees over 50 personnel across four branches including: Waterways Management, Vessel Traffic Service, Facilities, and Aids to Navigation. The Sector New Orleans Waterways Management Division is responsible for overseeing the $900B/yr Marine Transportation System, $28M Vessel Traffic Center, our nation's largest facility inspection's program, four Aids to Navigation Teams and two vessel inland construction tenders that service over 1,800 aids to navigation across the Sector New Orleans area of responsibility.

Lieutenant Commander Gamble's previous assignments include Marine Safety Assignment Officer, for the Officer Personnel Management Division at USCG Headquarters in Washington, D.C. from 2022–2025 where he was responsible for the assignment and career management of the Coast Guard's active duty Marine Safety officers. He was the Supervisor of Marine Safety Team Maui in Kahului, Hawaii from 2020–2022 where he led a small team and was the senior representative for the Captain of the Port executing marine safety missions and emergency disaster response covering the three islands of Maui County.

From 2017 to 2020 he served as a Marine Casualty Investigator at Sector Anchorage, Alaska responsible for the promotion of the safety of life at sea in our nation's largest geographical area of responsibility, enforcing federal regulations through enforcement actions and representing the government in credentialed mariner Suspension and Revocation proceedings. From 2014–2017 he began his Marine Safety career as an Apprentice Marine Inspector at Marine Safety Unit Morgan City, Louisiana. During this tour, he served as the Port State Control supervisor responsible for conducting Certificate of Compliance exams on oil tankers at the largest oil import facility in the U.S., the Louisiana Offshore Oil Platform (LOOP). His first assignment was as an Engineer Officer in Training on USCGC RUSH (WHEC-723), homeported in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he served as the Assistant Engineer Officer from 2012–2014.

A native of Lockport, Louisiana, Lieutenant Commander Gamble is a 2012 graduate from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy with a B.S. in Government: International Affairs and a 2022 graduate from Norwich University with a M.P.A. in Public Administration Leadership and Crisis Management. LCDR Gamble's military awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Coast Guard Commendation Medal (two awards) and Coast Guard Achievement Medal (two awards). In 2018, he was a recipient of the Congressman James Sener Gold Award for excellence in Marine Casualty Investigations. He is married to his wife Devin, and together they have four children: Jolie, Arlo, Mila and Owen.



Lamar Gardere

Executive Director, The Data Center

Lamar Gardere is Executive Director. Lamar is responsible for guiding The Data Center's mission of democratizing actionable data, ensuring quality standards, and the continued impact of the organization. He leads The Data Center's ongoing efforts to transform local culture to one that embraces data as an intrinsic component of sound decisionmaking and serves as its chief advocate for technology designed to enable greater data sharing and advanced statistical methods in New Orleans.

Lamar joined The Data Center after six years with the City of New Orleans Office of Information Technology and Innovation, most recently as the Chief Information Officer. As CIO, he was responsible for delivering stable, value-added IT services to City of New Orleans employees and constituents — a task accomplished through development of sustainable, forward looking strategies for growth, and expansion of IT services.

Lamar is nationally recognized for his work implementing and developing the open data policy for the City of New Orleans. This work facilitated release and upkeep of many of the City's most valuable datasets and led to the development of extensive data sharing resources, now available through the City of New Orleans' Open Data portal.

In the years directly preceding his service with the City of New Orleans, Lamar owned and operated a manufacturing business where he gained an appreciation for maximizing budgets, responding to market pressures, and managing teams of people towards more efficient operations. Earlier years were spent as a research scientist with Georgia Tech and with Intel Corporation's research division, developing solutions for the challenges associated with an increasingly mobile, connected and computationally rich society.

Lamar's previous work provides him with a solid understanding of the importance of rigorous and highly credible data analysis to enable decisionmakers to set priorities and develop strategies. A New Orleans native, Lamar earned a Master of Science in Computer Science degree, with concentrations in Ubiquitous Computing, Networking and Graphics, from the Georgia Institute of Technology. He also holds a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science degree from Xavier University of Louisiana.



Ashley Givens

MPA Student, Policy Pitch Presenter

Ashley M. Givens is the City Council Liaison for the City of New Orleans Department of Code Enforcement, where she serves as the primary point of contact between the department, City Council, the Mayor's Office, and neighborhood associations. She has spent 11 years in New Orleans city government, with prior experience in property management, and has advocated for the creation of a compliance division within Code Enforcement. She is currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration at Tulane University's School of Professional Advancement,where her graduate work focuses on blight remediation and multi-agency collaboration.



Sharon Goldsmith

Executive Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Programs
Policy Pitch Judge

Sharon Goldsmith brings over eleven years of experience in higher education and twelve years of experience in the entertainment industry to her role as Executive Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Programs at Tulane University's Innovation Institute. In this role, she is committed to helping Tulane students, faculty, and community innovators throughout Greater New Orleans develop their ideas, launch startups, and attract the resources needed to fuel innovation and strengthen the region's economy.

Prior to joining Tulane, Sharon spent more than eight years at Hofstra University, where she began her work with the Center for Entrepreneurship in 2016. She provided students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members with the skills, training, and resources needed to become accomplished entrepreneurs. During her time at Hofstra, Sharon also earned an MBA.

Before transitioning to higher education, Sharon built a successful career in the entertainment industry. She joined G-Unit Records, Inc. as Director of Finance and Human Resources at the request of her client, 50 Cent, following her work at LL Business Management, Inc., where she served as a business manager for recording artists, professional athletes, and other high-net-worth individuals. Over the course of more than ten years, Sharon contributed to the success of multi-platinum music releases while also supporting 50 Cent's entrepreneurial ventures. During this period, she earned an M.A. in Speech Communication and Rhetoric Studies from Hofstra University and an M.B.A. in Management.

Sharon began her professional career after graduating from the University of Rhode Island with a degree in Public Relations.

In addition to her professional work, Sharon serves as an E-Advisory Council Member for the National Center for Disability Entrepreneurship (NCDE) at the Viscardi Center.



Dr. Philip C. Harris, D.B.A., MEDP

Director of Economic Development, City of Greenacres, FL

Dr. Philip C. Harris, D.B.A., MEDP, is a public administration executive, economic development practitioner, educator, and national professional association leader with 24 years of experience in the field of public administration. He currently serves as Director of Economic Development for the City of Greenacres, Florida, where he leads initiatives focused on business attraction and retention, redevelopment, strategic partnerships, workforce development, and expanding economic opportunities within the community. He also serves as a professor in Tulane University's John Lewis Public Administration Program, helping prepare the next generation of public service leaders.

Throughout his career, Dr. Harris has served communities across South Florida in progressively responsible public-sector leadership roles. His experience includes economic and community development, organizational leadership, strategic planning, cross-sector collaboration, securing critical funding, strengthening local government operations, and supporting community recovery efforts following tragedy. His work reflects a commitment to building partnerships among government, business, nonprofit, educational, and community organizations to advance sustainable and inclusive economic development.

Dr. Harris has also demonstrated extensive leadership within the public administration profession. His service includes leadership roles with the National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA), the Local Government Hispanic Network (LGHN), and the International Network of Asian Public Administrators (I-NAPA), as well as longstanding involvement with the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). His professional contributions have been recognized nationally, including being named a LocalGov 250 honoree, recognizing influential leaders in local government. He has also received the distinction of Honorary Membership in Pi Alpha Alpha, the Global Honor Society for Public Affairs and Administration, in recognition of his commitment to public service and the profession.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Dr. Harris is deeply committed to mentorship, leadership development, and creating pathways for emerging public administrators. Whether working in local government, the classroom, or through national professional organizations, he emphasizes

collaboration, innovation, servant leadership, and the importance of developing economic development strategies that translate into stronger and more thriving communities.



Michael Ince

Director for the Mayor's Office of Nighttime Economy, City of New Orleans

Mike Ince, acting Director for the Mayor's Office of Nighttime Economy since 2023, brings to Tulane over 15 years of experience in state and local government with a focus on community development, legislative affairs, and small business support.

Most recently, Ince served as Director of Intergovernmental Affairs in the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, where he worked closely on programs under the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism and managed legislative initiatives on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor.

Prior to that, he served as Director of Community Development for the City of Kenner, leading housing and community revitalization strategies. Ince was instrumental in founding the Rivertown Main Street Program and the Rivertown Arts Council, initiatives that continue to strengthen Kenner's cultural and economic landscape.



Michelle Jackson

Adjunct Lecturer, John Lewis Public Administration Program

School of Professional Advancement
Adjunct Faculty

Michelle D. Jackson is an experienced public policy and economic development professional with a demonstrated track record working cross-functionally with federal, state, academic, and private industry leaders on highly-publicized initiatives. Jackson has worked with key leaders on economic development programs to assist traditional businesses and start-up ventures with long-term economic growth. Before joining the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) in 2009 as a Governor's Policy Fellow, she worked in the commercial real estate industry as a shopping center manager, corporate lease negotiator, and marketing director for over ten years.

In 2010, Jackson was selected to lead the state of Maryland's effort to develop the InvestMaryland Program (Senate Bill 180 | House Bill 173), a first-of-its-kind Governor supported legislative initiative designed to raise funds for seed and early-stage high-tech businesses by selling tax credits to the state's largest insurance companies. After building support

for the InvestMaryland Program with the state's business leaders and legislators, Jackson provided executive-level project management, advocated for, and testified on behalf of the bill before the General Assembly. Her dedication played a key role in its passage.

Because of her work, the state made history by raising $84 million dollars using a web-based tax auction platform. She was also instrumental in the development and staffing of the governing arm of the initiative - the Maryland Venture Fund Authority. Media sources, colleges, and state governments have recognized Jackson's work throughout the years. InvestMaryland was ultimately considered a national best practice by the National Governors' Association.

In 2011, Jackson was assigned to the position of DBED's Acting Director for the Office of Policy and Government. Affairs. While in this role, she reviewed and advocated (for and against) economic development legislation.

Jackson was promoted several times to key positions while working for the state of Maryland. She was the economic development agency's first Federal Facilities Director within the Office of Military and Federal Affairs (OMFA). During her time with OMFA, she provided executive-level leadership for the Federal Facilities Advisory Board (FFAB) and took the lead on coordinating high-level federal agency briefings, meetings, and tours. These events were attended by state and federal public officials, including Governor Martin O'Malley, U.S. Senators Barbara Mikulski and Benjamin Cardin, and U.S. Representatives Steny Hoyer and Chris Van Hollen, as well as federal agency and military leaders. She also co-wrote the Strategic Business Plan: Supporting Maryland's Federal Facilities.

Jackson was appointed as Director of Boards and Commissions. In this role, she provided direct oversight for the Maryland Economic Development Commission (MEDC) and Maryland Venture Fund Authority (MVFA) and indirect support for the Taskforce on Industrial Job Creation in Baltimore County and the Governor's Commission on Small Business. Jackson oversaw the appointment/replacement of 200+ Governor appointees on 15+ DBED-administered boards and commissions. She wrote strategic plans with statewide implications in this position and represented the Agency on several economic development committees.

In 2012, Jackson was selected to lead the Agency's first division focused on innovation and entrepreneurship - the Office of Strategic Industries and Innovations (OSII).

The new division's role was to create partnerships with the state's tech community and nurture economic growth.

She currently lives in New Orleans, LA, and is the owner of PR Solutions LLC, a strategic marketing firm, the author of three books, the executive director of LifeSkills Foundation, and the founder of the Black Writers Workspace Online Community.

She is a graduate of The University of Alabama, Central Michigan University, and a current doctoral student at Southern University's Executive Public Policy Program.



Amiyah King

Juvenile Justice Policy Advisor, City of New Orleans Office of Violence Prevention, Policy Pitch Judge

Amiyah King is a Juvenile Justice Policy Advisor with the City of New Orleans Office of Violence Prevention. Her work informs evidence-based, trauma-informed policies to strengthen systems serving young people and communities impacted by violence. She is a graduate of Howard University and a doctoral candidate at Southern University A&M College, studying public policy.



Halima Leak Francis

Program Director and Senior Professor of Practice for John Lewis Public Administration Program

Dr. Halima Leak Francis is a nationally accomplished educator, practitioner, and scholar whose career spanning more than 20 years has focused on strengthening capacity, sustainability, and equitable practices within nonprofits, philanthropy, and higher education administration. She joined Tulane SoPA in 2019 to lead the development of the school's Public Administration program. As the program's founding Director and Professor of Practice, she worked with school leadership and advisors to steer curriculum design; recruit a nationally accomplished faculty; and secure Southern Association of Colleges, and Schools Commission on Colleges accreditation. Under her leadership, the program exceeded launch expectations by tripling initial enrollment projections, and was later named in honor of the late U.S. Congressman John Lewis – reinforcing its role as a contemporary voice for advancing inclusive public service and community leadership.

Dr. Leak Francis joined Tulane from Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, a multi-sector, ethnically and culturally diverse civic organization specializing in providing culturally specialized social services, and she has a proven track record of strengthening of communities through meaningful collaboration, strategic leadership, and philanthropic investment. Along with her work at Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, she has developed programming and engaged public and private supporters on behalf of institutions such as CUNY School of Professional Studies, New York University, Barnard College, and Communities in Schools of Wake County (North Carolina). Throughout her career, Dr. Leak Francis has also taught diverse populations of students, increasing educational and professional development access in public service related fields through online and blended learning environments.

Leak Francis holds a B.A. in English from Hampton University, as well as an M.A. in Sociology of Education and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from New York University – Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development. A dedicated community volunteer, she prioritizes advancing systemic equity and inclusion by supporting organizations and programs that are committed to the same. She serves as a founding co-chair of the HERitage Giving Fund, Tulane History Project co-chair, Greater New Orleans Foundation's Impact 100 co-chair, and Foundation for Louisiana board member. Additionally, Leak Francis holds the Carnegie Corporation of NY Professorship in Social Entrepreneurship at Tulane's Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking, and is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

Born and raised in Winston-Salem, N.C., she has lived and worked in cities throughout Virginia, New York, and Texas. She now enjoys her home in the New Orleans area with husband Eddie, who is an award-winning mass media veteran and New Orleans native. Her favorite times are spent with her husband, her amazing bonus son, other family members, friends, and pets.



Danielle Martin

MPA Student, Policy Pitch Presenter

Danielle F. Martin is a higher education and economic development leader with more than a decade of experience advancing strategy, workforce development, partnerships, organizational effectiveness, and enrollment growth. She currently serves as Director of Recruitment Operations at Tulane University's A.B. Freeman School of Business, overseeing recruitment operations for the school's graduate and post-graduate programs.

Danielle brings expertise in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, partnership development, data-informed decision-making, and program

development, with a particular ability to connect people, resources, and opportunities to advance shared goals.

She holds a Bachelor of Architecture from Louisiana State University with a focus in Community Design and Development, an MBA from Tulane University's Freeman School of Business with concentrations in Finance and Business Analytics, and is currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration after completing a Graduate Certificate in Economic Development.

A committed civic leader, Danielle serves on the Nunez Community College Foundation Board and the Tulane Association of Business Alumni Board of Directors. She has also served on several nonprofit boards and advisory committees, including the Young Leadership Council, the St. Bernard Chamber of Commerce, and GNO Inc.'s Emerge Summit, supporting workforce development, economic vitality, small business growth, and community advancement throughout the Greater New Orleans region.



Brian McNamara

Senior Professor of Practice

Dr. Brian McNamara joined the School of Professional Advancement after 25 years of active duty service with the U.S. Coast Guard. In his legal tours, Brian served as the chief of the service's marine safety law practice group, deputy counsel for regional operations along the Gulf Coast and Western Rivers, and attorney-advisor for the Marine Casualty Investigations National Center of Expertise. Based on his military criminal law experience, the Judge Advocate General appointed Brian to the bench as a collateral duty court-martial judge from 2017-2020.

Brian developed his passion for teaching as an instructor with the Coast Guard's Maritime Law Enforcement School and began his career as a Deck Watch Officer for a Coast Guard cutter conducting North Atlantic fisheries patrols and Caribbean counter-narcotics operations. He finished his career as the Logistics Department Head and Commanding Officer of Military Personnel for Coast Guard Sector New Orleans, where he led the teams providing personnel, budget, weapons, and engineering support for all service operations in Southeast Louisiana. He has taught law as an adjunct professor for Tulane Law School and Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida.

He is currently fulfilling a three-year appointment to the National Academies Marine Board, which began on Nov. 1, 2024.



Joshua Montrel

Filmmaker/Policy Analyst, MPA, John Lewis Public Administration Program

Joshua Montrel is a filmmaker originally from New Orleans and currently based in LA. He is an alumnus of Howard & Tulane University.

His work aspires to tell innovative, socially conscious, and relatable stories that enrich audiences' experiences.



Kimberly S. O'Neil

Adjunct Lecturer, John Lewis Public Administration Program
Policy Pitch Judge

Kimberly O'Neil is an award-winning professor and community capacity builder with 30+ years of experience across government, nonprofit leadership, philanthropy, and higher education.

As Founder and CEO of Giving Blueprint, Ms. O'Neil advises nonprofit and philanthropic leaders on community-centered engagement. Through the consultancy's Nonprofit Capacity Lab, she has trained more than 7,500 nonprofit professionals. She has also generated more than $22 million in impact. Ms. O'Neil has also designed and restructured community-centered grantmaking programs for private foundations, helped financial institutions align their corporate grantmaking with the Community Reinvestment Act, and trained corporate community engagement teams nationally to strengthen community partnerships.

As City Manager of Glenarden, Maryland, Ms. O'Neil led negotiations for a 245-acre mixed-use economic development project now known as Woodmore Towne Center at Glenarden. She later served as President and CEO of a youth development organization founded by Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee Darrell Green, and also oversaw a $33 million court operation for the City of Fort Worth, the 5th-largest court in Texas. As Chair of the City of Plano, Texas, Community Relations Commission, she led the restructuring of the Community Development Block Grant and municipal grantmaking process, which recommended nonprofits for more than $1 million in grants annually.

A higher education faculty member for more than 20 years, Ms. O'Neil joined the John Lewis Public Administration Program in 2020 as an inaugural adjunct faculty member and served on

the committee that renamed the program to honor the late Congressman John Lewis.

She is a graduate of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (BA), Brooklyn College, City University of New York (MA), and Baruch College, City University of New York (MPA). She is pursuing a PhD in Leadership and Change at Antioch University, where she researches the impact of social justice change through mid-20th century Black-led movements. She is a Certified Public Manager and a Licensed Nonprofit Consultant. Ms. O'Neil has been a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. for more than 30 years.



Theron Pride

Senior Attorney, Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)

Theron Pride, Jr. is a nationally recognized leader who has spent more than two decades advancing justice, strengthening public institutions, and helping communities build safer, more equitable futures. He currently serves as a Senior Attorney at the Equal Justice Initiative, where he leads education and public engagement efforts that help communities confront the history of racial injustice in the United States and explore pathways toward repair and reconciliation. Previously, Theron served as Managing Director of National Initiatives and Research at the Center for Justice Innovation and as Deputy Associate Attorney General at the U.S. Department of Justice, where he oversaw the Department's grantmaking agencies and helped guide federal investments in public safety, victim services, behavioral health, and community well-being. He has also served in senior public safety and criminal justice leadership roles for the mayors of New York City and Philadelphia. As a social worker and attorney, at the heart of Theron's work is a simple hope: that his daughter will grow up in a world that is more loving, more merciful, and more just. Inspired by that hope, he remains committed to bringing people together across differences to create transformative change.



Claire Reifschneider

MPA Graduate, MPA Student, Policy Pitch Presenter

Claire Reifschneider is a 2026 graduate of the Tulane University John Lewis Public Administration program. This past summer, she graduated with her MPA and certificate in Environmental Management and Resilience, focusing most of her coursework on environmental justice efforts and energy accessibility in both New Orleans and her hometown, St. Louis. She recently stepped into the role of legal support staff for the Louisiana Department of Justice, and plans to attend law school in the coming years.



William "Bill" Rials

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, School of Professional Advancement

Dr. William "Bill" Rials serves as Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at Tulane University's School of Professional Advancement As Senior Associate Dean, Dr. Rials is a member of SoPA's senior leadership team and provides strategic and operational leadership for the school's academic enterprise. His responsibilities include academic program development and review, curriculum, faculty affairs, academic policy, learning outcomes assessment, accreditation and regulatory compliance, and academic success. He works closely with the dean, program directors, faculty, and university partners to maintain the quality and integrity of SoPA's undergraduate and graduate programs.

A central focus of Dr. Rials' leadership is ensuring that SoPA's academic programs remain high-quality, relevant, and responsive to the needs of working adults and other nontraditional learners. He leads efforts to strengthen existing programs, develop new academic offerings, evaluate program effectiveness, and align curricula with changing workforce and industry needs. He also supports faculty recruitment, appointment, evaluation, and professional development and provides leadership for academic governance and continuous improvement across the school.

Dr. Rials also serves as a Senior Professor of Practice in the school's Information Technology program. He remains active in the classroom, teaching graduate and undergraduate courses in information technology, cybersecurity, technology leadership, and IT governance. His approachto academic leadership and teaching is by his experience as both as an academic and technology executive, with an emphasis on connecting academic theory to professional practice.

Dr. Rials is a nationally recognized expert in information technology, cybersecurity, digital government, and emerging technologies. He is a frequent national-level keynote speaker at conferences and professional events. He also regularly contributes analysis and commentary to national media. His continued service to the professional community is through his appointment as a Senior Fellow for the Center for Digital Government, Center for Digital Education, and Center for Public Sector AI where he provides research, guidance, and thought leadership to public-sector organizations working to modernize government services and adopt emerging technologies. Including contributing to national advisory boards about the responsible and effective use of artificial intelligence in government and education. He continues to contribute to the profession through service as a higher education accreditation, ABET program evaluator.

Before joining Tulane, Dr. Rials held executive and senior leadership positions in state government, local governments, and law enforcement organizations, including roles as chiefinformation officer, chief technology officer, and chief information security officer. His last government appointment was serving as State Chief Enterprise Architect and Deputy Chief Information Officer for the State of Mississippi. In that role, he helped develop the state's first hybrid cloud strategy and chaired the statewide Chief Information Officers Council. In 2017 he was named among the nation's top 50 government technology professionals.

Dr. Rials military service included serving in the Mississippi State Guard and completed Officer Candidate School through the Mississippi Military Department. His assignments included conducting cybersecurity analysis and training with the Army Assistant Chief of Staff G6 Office and commanding a military police company. He received the Emergency Service Medal from the Adjutant General of Mississippi for leading the unit responsible for the Joint Force Headquarters security mission during Hurricane Isaac.

Dr. Rials earned a Ph.D. in higher education leadership and public administration from Jackson State University, an M.S. in computer information systems and cybersecurity from Missouri State University, and a bachelor's degree in business administration and leadership from Belhaven University.



Melissa Schigoda

CEO, Melissa Schigoda, LLC

Melissa is the CEO and Founder of Melissa Schigoda LLC, a public impact consulting firm. She has over 20 years of experience in local government, higher education, and nonprofits, specializing in performance management, analytics, and evaluation. Prior to her current role, Melissa served as a Director at the Bloomberg Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University. She led the organization′s efforts on the Bloomberg Philanthropies' City Data Alliance, an initiative to help mayors and their senior teams from cities across the Americas to develop data strategies, accelerate their data practice, and deliver exceptional results for residents. Before that, Melissa served as the Director of the Office of Performance and Accountability in the City of New Orleans, where she led performance management, analytics, and other data-driven projects to drive evidence-based decision-making across City departments. She also coordinated the City's Data Governance Committee, the creation of the City's Data Policy, and the City'sWhat Works Cities certification, the standard for

data-driven, well-managed local governance. Melissa has been recognized as a Results for America Local Government Fellow and an EmergingLeader by the American Political Science Association's Center for Accountability and Performance. She also serves as Tulane's International City/County Management Association Student Chapters Professional Advisor. She holds a B.A. in Political Science and a Ph.D. in International Development from Tulane University.



Marco Tejeda-Kemp

MPA Graduate/Host

Marco Tejeda-Kemp is a Senior Career Advisor at Tulane University's A.B. Freeman School of Business, where he advises undergraduate students on career exploration, professional development, and pathways to meaningful employment. His work focuses on helping students connect their education and experiences to careers that align with their goals and interests.

Marco's professional experience spans higher education, talent acquisition, workforce development, and economic development. Prior to returning to Tulane, he served as Director of Talent and Workforce at Greater New Orleans, Inc., where he worked across sectors to advance regional workforce initiatives, industry partnerships, and talent development strategies. He previously served in Freeman's Career Management Center as a Career Consultant and Assistant Director and began his career in recruiting and talent development with Farmers Insurance.

A graduate of Tulane's John Lewis Public Administration Program, Marco earned his Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Economic Development. He also holds a B.S. in International Relations from Florida International University. His professional interests center on the intersection of education, workforce development, economic opportunity, and community impact.

As a JLPA alumnus, Marco is excited to return to the program's residency and continue learning alongside fellow public service professionals while contributing his perspective from higher education, workforce development, and the Greater New Orleans community.

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Thank you for attending the 2026
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SHAPING THE FUTURE: Preparing Ethical, Innovative, and Inclusive Public Service Leaders

Friday, October 23rd–Sunday, October 25th, 2026
Kendall Cram Room #213, Lavin-Bernick Center, Uptown Campus, Tulane University