

Runsdorf Public Service awardees strive to change the world

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The recipients of this year's Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Award — Hanan Rimawi (left) and Amber Thorpe — are committed and compassionate leaders who've made significant contributions to the community and the university. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Hanan Rimawi and Amber Thorpe both want to change the world.

However, the recipients of this year's [Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Award](#) are going about it in different ways.

Thorpe has devoted countless hours to the Center for Public Service, working to make sure that the two-tiered service-learning graduation requirement — which every Tulane undergraduate must fulfill in order to graduate — can “embody effective, meaningful community engagement.”

Tulane University

"I'd like to think that I helped move us toward change, but I don't quite know if I've seen that change yet."

—Amber Thorpe

Thorpe has helped develop equitable service guidelines and led workshops. The goal is "to raise awareness and encourage students to consider the possible impacts of their involvement in public service."

"I'd like to think that I helped move us toward change," Thorpe said, "but I don't quite know if I've seen that change yet."

Thorpe will continue this work this summer helping run a CPS youth advisory council to get feedback from New Orleans youth about service-learning projects.

Thorpe will receive a Bachelor of Science in anthropology and a Bachelor of Arts in political science with a minor in Africana studies at commencement. In the fall, Thorpe starts a master's program in urban studies at the University of New Orleans.

Rimawi, on the other hand, co-founded the student organization Bridging Generations, an intergenerational project partnered with five different elderly centers.

She has done much of her volunteer work at Our Lady of Wisdom residential facility. "I've been able to experience the full gamut of human emotion there — joy, community, loss and grief," she said.

Rimawi has also worked with conflict-affected individuals in the Middle East. Via Skype, through a nonprofit organization, Paper Airplanes, she's tutored displaced Syrians, helping them learn English. She's also gone to refugee camps in the Middle East and led storytelling workshops.

"I have a real desire to make life better there," she said.

Rimawi is earning bachelor of science degrees in public health and neuroscience.

In the fall, she will be a Fulbright English teaching assistant in Jordan.

"I feel like all of my service commitments are a huge privilege in my life," she said. "There's genuine reciprocity in all my volunteer experiences."