

Exceptional student, artist, Newcomb Scholar will be missed

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The Tulane community mourns the loss of Meg Maurer, a Newcomb Scholar who was set to graduate on Saturday. Maurer was known for her skillful illustrations of nature, which will be on display in the new Commons building. (Illustration and photo courtesy of the Maurer family)

Margaret K. "Meg" Maurer of Forest Lake, Minnesota, a Newcomb Scholar and 2019 graduating senior, died in a tragic accident on March 5. The Tulane community mourns the loss of this truly exceptional person. Meg, an outstanding and dedicated student by any measure, was the recipient of numerous Newcomb College Institute and private foundation grants, collaborated with professors in their labs, and spent much of her free time in the Tulane greenhouse and local gardens.

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Her time at Tulane had changed her in fundamental ways. In the fall of her freshman year, she took a service-learning course with me, and worked with a Center for Public Service community partner, the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe. This experience was transformational for her. At the end of her first semester, Meg expressed to me her personal belief that “in taking the opportunity to learn, we take on the responsibility to do something with it.” Her actions during her time at Tulane were a testament to this belief.

In conjunction with her work with the tribe, she was awarded a research internship to help with the tribe’s petition for federal recognition, and she conducted an ethnobotanical study with the tribe, collecting oral histories from the elders and creating lesson plans for the tribe’s culture camp, to name but a few examples of her many accomplishments.

Her work with Dorothy Cheruiyot, her thesis and major advisor in ecology and evolutionary biology, exemplified Meg’s belief as well. She assisted, for example, with the research, designing and implementation of a community garden for the Mardi Gras Indians. Meg was also an inspiration to other students in Cheruiyot’s courses and often covered the board with her illustrations to engage everyone in upcoming labs.

Her skillful pen-and-ink drawings could be found around the EE-bio department, and in 2018 she began working with ecology and evolutionary biology professor Tom Sherry on illustrations for a book on the evolution of tropical bird-insect arms races. Meg was passionate about conveying nature through her art; examples of her work will later be installed in the new Commons building.

Meg was fluent in Spanish and had recently been awarded two post-graduation research grants to study spider monkeys in the Yucatan as well as to collect the oral histories of Mayan elders with the intention of creating lesson plans from this information for local Mayan schools. Her belief to do good works with the knowledge she gained remained her guiding principle.

She is deeply missed for her qualities that brought such vibrancy to her work and to her life. Her soul radiated compassion, creativity, courage, and a sense of adventure. As her friend Kelsey Williams recalled, Meg brought joy to every encounter and helped so many others to learn and to blossom. The repercussions of her kindness and generosity of time, mind and heart continue to reverberate. Meg amazed all of us in a thousand ways and inspired us a thousand more. The world was a richer place both with, and because of, Meg.

NOTE: See some of Meg Maurer's illustrations on display in the Lavin-Bernick Center, outside the Kendall Cram Room. The exhibit will be up through Commencement, May 18.

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