Runsdorf recipients have a track record of service

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Margaret Conrad and Amna Ashraf, who are graduating with the Class of 2021, are recipients of the Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award, given by the Center for Public Service. (Photo by Rusty Costanza)

The Center for Public Service (CPS) announced that Amna Ashraf and Margaret Conrad have received the Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award for 2021. Ashraf and Conrad are both graduating with the Class of 2021.

The Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award identifies and recognizes students who demonstrate social responsibility and awareness of the needs of the community through
significant contributions during their undergraduate tenure at Tulane. These students should
embody the best practices of civic engagement, be committed, compassionate leaders and show
dedication to the rebuilding efforts in the city of New Orleans.

Both of this year’s Runsdorf recipients are from the New Orleans area and came to Tulane with
previous volunteer experience and a commitment to serve the city.

Amna Ashraf is graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health. While a freshman, she
joined the CACTUS Academy and eventually transitioned into other roles at CPS such as the service
learning assistant position and a Public Service Advisory Board member. Off-campus, Ashraf also
volunteered with the Crisis Textline, the HandsOn New Orleans Volunteer Center, and other
nonprofits in a variety of capacities.

“As a public health major, and also being in New Orleans for so long, I witnessed a lot growing up,
but I didn’t have the toolbox to be able to talk about these issues. Service has allowed me to speak
about my truth and my experiences,” she said. “When I started off at CPS, my approach towards
service was a bit broad, over time I was given the tools and experiences to develop my
understanding on key issues. As I continued my degree, I think I developed more of an awareness
of service through a public health lens.”

Ashraf, who also worked as a research assistant in the School of Public Health, plans to take a gap
year so that she can continue volunteering around New Orleans, but plans to apply to medical
school in the future.

“I definitely want to contribute more,” she said. “I definitely want to be here for New Orleans. I’ve
learned a lot from the city and I’m honored that I’ve won the award.”

Conrad is graduating with a Bachelor of Science in ecology and evolutionary biology and a Bachelor
of Arts in classics. Conrad completed a variety of service projects while at Tulane, including
Outreach Tulane. This academic year, Conrad helped redefine Outreach Tulane to accommodate
COVID-19 protocols, which meant organizing hundreds of volunteer students into socially distant
and outdoor settings to complete their service projects. In a typical year, Outreach Tulane
participants take part in service projects off campus.

“We had to adapt this well-established program to COVID-19,” she said. “We kept everything on
campus — we had virtual projects, we also had in-person projects. And we ended up having around
500 volunteers, 400 in person and about 100 online.”

“It was the first big service project that Tulane does every year,” she added, “and we really wanted
to give freshmen the opportunity to help out New Orleans a little bit, even if we couldn’t send them
[off campus] as we normally do.”

Conrad has also taught Latin to schoolchildren, volunteered in a local hospital, organized food
drives after the Baton Rouge floods, and worked in food banks. She said Outreach Tulane helped
her develop her leadership skills. She served as the chair of that organization’s 2020 event and also
as president of Tulane’s Green Medicine Club.

After Commencement, Conrad will attend medical school at LSU Health New Orleans.