

Public-Service Scholars Head to Crescent City

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The Tulane Center for Public Service is hosting the eighth annual International Research Conference on Service Learning and Community Engagement from Saturday through Tuesday (Oct. 25-28).



Tulane students are involved with community organizations as part of classroom work and as volunteers, including this group that spent time at the Green Project during an Outreach Tulane service day. (Photo by Sally Asher)

The conference brings together scholars and practitioners to discuss topics organized around the theme "The Scholarship of Engagement: Dimensions of Reciprocal Partnerships."

More than 400 conference attendees will converge in downtown New Orleans to explore the variety of partnerships that flourish among educational institutions and their communities through service-learning courses, community-based research projects and student-led activities. Attendees also will be sharing research.

"The university has made a clear commitment to community engagement through its establishment of the Center for Public Service and is obviously engaged in working as a partner in New Orleans," says Sherril Gelmon, chair of the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement.

"Like many other organizations, we are eager to show support for the rebuilding of New Orleans post-Katrina and this was a way of helping to bring people to New Orleans to contribute to the economy."

Gelmon pointed to program chair Barbara Moely, professor of psychology, as one of many Tulane faculty "who have a track record of research on service learning and community engagement, and are leaders in our fields."

During the conference, Tulane will be named the administrative home for the International

Tulane University

Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement for six consecutive years beginning in 2009.

According to Vincent Ilustre, executive director of the [Tulane Center for Public Service](#), “This will allow Tulane to further solidify our position as a leader in the field, keep abreast of the latest research in service learning and civic engagement, and access the best researchers to assist and guide us in further improving our programs.”

Conference attendees are invited to participate in a paint rally for the New Orleans Recovery School District. The rally is part of an ongoing initiative designed to restore New Orleans public schools. Tulane has organized the paint rally since 2002, and since then, more than 3,000 volunteers have spent more than 20,000 hours painting, repairing and landscaping schools.

One of the plenary speakers will be James Wright, formerly a professor in the Tulane Department of Sociology, who will speak on “The World's Third Biggest Lie: 'Hi, I'm from the university and I'm here to help you.'” Wright, who Ilustre says was one of the first at Tulane to become involved in civic engagement through his work with the Tulane-Xavier Campus Affiliates Program, is now the Provost's Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Central Florida.

“Hosting conferences around service learning and civic engagement is part of our promise to the Clinton Global Initiative,” Ilustre says.

President Bill Clinton brought his [Clinton Global Initiative University](#) to the Tulane campus this past March. As part of the commitments that all participants were required to make toward positive global change, Tulane committed to have its Center for Public Service be a resource and clearinghouse for information for other universities who wish to implement a public-service requirement.

Conferences such as the international event starting tomorrow allow Tulane faculty and staff to learn about ongoing research in the field, Ilustre says, but additionally, it's always a good thing when visitors take back stories of New Orleans to their own hometowns.

“Although we are on our way to recovery, we still need help here,” he says.