

Tulane professor helps deaf guests feel the beat at Jazz Fest

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Tulane alumna and linguistics professor Denise Crochet signs for the hearing impaired during a New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival performance by Bonnie Raitt. (Photo provided by Denise Crochet)

When Sting took the stage to perform during week one of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, a Tulane University linguistics professor was on hand to play a role that some don't notice, but many greatly appreciate.

Tulane graduate Denise Crochet, who is an adjunct professor in the Tulane School of Liberal Arts' [linguistics program](#), is a certified American Sign Language interpreter who has served for 13 years as an interpreter for the popular festival.

“As the interpreting coordinator for Jazz Fest, I assemble the team of interpreters, I’m a member of the team, and I set the schedule for which acts will be interpreted,” said Crochet, who adds that not all acts are covered, but special preference is given when guests request a specific act.

While covering the extensive list of performances noted on the [Jazz Fest cubes](#) may seem like a daunting endeavor, Crochet said a little planning goes a long way in her team’s preparation.

“There’s a very different vibe between a Snoop Dogg concert, a Gospel Tent performance and a cooking demonstration, but we’ve covered them all,” said Crochet. “It’s important that people understand that accessibility is not just about interpreters. It is the hard surfaces around the festival, the availability of braille signage and much more.”

In the weeks leading up to Sting’s April 27 performance on the Acura stage, Crochet listened repeatedly to Sting’s musical catalog to become familiar with his song lyrics. If the team is lucky, a set list is provided to help interpreters more easily prepare for the show.

Crochet’s students are also getting in on the experience. While not advanced enough to interpret live music yet, several students enrolled in Tulane’s American Sign Language courses receive the opportunity to shadow interpreters and assist at the festival’s accessibility tent.

In June, Crochet will travel to Pittsburgh for the National Americans with Disabilities Act Symposium where she will make a presentation on the importance of providing accessibility at short-term venues — like festivals.

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