

## **School of Professional Advancement recounts great strides through first two years**

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Tulane University's School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) was relaunched in 2017 with a new name, an updated look and a renewed focus on working adults, career advancement and applied and innovative programs that are relevant to the modern-day workplace. In less than two years, the results are nothing short of a renaissance for a school that traces its roots back to the late 1800s.

Under the leadership of Dean Suri Duitch, who arrived at Tulane in 2016, SoPA has revised, expanded and introduced new academic programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Five new online master's degrees have been launched, adding to the original online homeland security studies master's degree. The school is also offering several online graduate certificates, as well as undergraduate and post-baccalaureate certificates, both online and in the classroom. The school has also revised and expanded curricula and reinstated an exercise science program that was phased out after Hurricane Katrina.

"We have rethought every aspect of how the school operates, the offering of educational programs, student support services and how the school presents itself both in the general public and how it fits into Tulane's mission and history," Duitch said. "That was a lot of the impetus for the renaming and rebranding the school in the first place. Two years later, we're not done, but we've accomplished a great deal."

SoPA now offers 28 undergraduate programs of study and seven master's degree programs at Tulane's Uptown and Elmwood campuses. SoPA is one of six schools at Tulane that offer both undergraduate and graduate programs.

The school has also created more opportunities for members of the local community and Louisiana residents to obtain a four-year degree at Tulane. This past January, SoPA and Delgado Community College signed a transfer student agreement that

creates a pathway for Delgado graduates to complete bachelor's degrees at Tulane. The agreement offers Delgado graduates access to degrees in nine of SoPA's high-demand fields, including digital design and information technology.

Several of SoPA's fields have earned high marks at both the local and national level. Homeland security has ranked as one of the best online master's programs in the U.S. for the past three years, including the best online master's degree for intelligence officers in 2019.

"The last two years have been really exciting, but there are a lot of moving parts, and we are still in transition; we haven't quite become the school that we're going to be. Now that we have these incredible programs and really robust student services, we have much work to do to get the word out and to start attracting the numbers of students we want," Duitch said.

One of the newest additions to the line-up of offerings is digital design, revamped and re-introduced in fall 2018 but already creating a lot of buzz. Digital design students swept all but one of this year's ADDY awards at the Advertising Club of New Orleans' annual competition. The program features tracks in graphic design, game art and animation and interactive design.

Another program launched less than a year ago that has seen a steady growth of interest is the online master of professional studies in cybersecurity management.

In the student services areas, SoPA has created a unit of academic advisors and hired a dedicated career advisor. The school has even gone a step further with investments in technologies that track student progress and interactions with advisors and allows advisors to give students the best guidance in progressing toward their degrees.

"We have established a model of providing academic advisement and other supports to students that hadn't previously existed in quite this way. Strong advisement was historically a strength for the school, but we needed better systems in place to support the work, and an ability to ensure that all students know what they have access to. We've heard from our students that it has really made a difference," Duitch said.

With new programs comes the need for more faculty. Over the last two years, SoPA has expanded its full-time faculty from 4 to 22. According to Duitch,

faculty qualifications and experience are essential, but institutional fit and commitment to the mission are also crucial in hiring.

“The school's reputation and organizational culture are a part of what has started to attract our impressive new staff and faculty members. We hire faculty who want to be part of an enterprise that's growing and dynamic,” Dutch said.

Development of more new programs is underway, including a large restructuring of undergraduate IT curricula (including a concentration in cloud computing and virtualization) for the fall of 2019, a master's degree and graduate certificates in sports studies (developed with the Tulane Center for Sport) for spring 2020, and a master's of public administration for fall 2020. Going forward, the school also plans to create an undergraduate program in public safety, and a master's degree in sports administration.

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