Tulane joins national program to improve graduate student diversity in earth sciences

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Horseshoe Bend overlooks the Colorado River and is one of the most visited places in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Arizona. (Shutterstock photo)

The Tulane University Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences has been accepted into the AGU Bridge Program, an initiative designed to recruit and retain underrepresented students who are applying to geoscience graduate schools. AGU (American Geophysical Union) is the nation's largest scientific society in earth sciences.

Tulane is one of 18 universities from across the country selected as a Bridge partner. When an institution is accepted as a partner, it gains access to the organization's growing database of AGU Bridge student applications and is invited to join other partners engaged in holistic admission practices.

The AGU Bridge Program was initiated in 2019 to develop, adopt and share inclusive practices for recruiting, admitting and retaining women and underrepresented students in earth science graduate programs. Under the program, African American, Hispanic, American Indian, Pacific Islander, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian students who join the Bridge Program can take advantage of a free common graduate school application that will be shared with multiple partner institutions.

Kyle Straub, an associate professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences of the Tulane School of Science and Engineering, spearheaded the application but credited associate professor Nicole Gasparini for her contribution in the process. Gasparini has worked closely with Tulane's chapter of GeoLatinas, an undergraduate student organization that supports Latinas and other underrepresented groups by providing social and outreach activities, emotional and academic support and mentorship.

Jennifer Whitten and Colin Jackson, the department's newest assistant professors, also helped craft the proposal and will play an active role in mentoring students from the Bridge program.

"I'm looking forward to working with Nicole, Jennifer, Colin and the rest of the department in implementing this program at Tulane and working towards a more diverse, equitable and inclusive setting for graduate students," Straub said.

Straub said the earth sciences rank at the bottom nationally in its diversity of graduate students.

"Efforts like the AGU Bridge program are important for changing this and producing a new generation of earth and environmental scientists, one that is more diverse and inclusive," Straub said. "Collaborating with AGU and the other partner institutes will aid our efforts to recruit and support a diverse graduate student population."

Other schools accepted into the program include Cornell University, Dartmouth University, Johns Hopkins University and Georgia Tech. For a complete list of this year's partner schools, click here.