

'VirTUAL Visiting' earns praise from College Confidential website

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Because many prospective students could not and still cannot travel to New Orleans to visit Tulane, the Office of Undergraduate Admission offers a virtual campus tour led by Tulane students. The tour, part of "VirTUAL Visiting," was recognized by College Confidential as the best virtual campus tour in the South.

What started as the Office of Undergraduate Admission's effort to engage admitted students in university life while most of us were under lockdown, turned into an innovative and nationally respected program that recently received accolades from a popular college publication.

College Confidential, a website that offers parents and high school students college advice, recognized Tulane University as [Best Virtual Campus Tour in the South](#) in their feature, "Which Colleges Offer the Best Virtual Campus Visits?"

The article specifically called out Admission's 25-minute recorded tour, which "feels a lot like an actual campus walking tour" but also mentioned other virtual resources that replaced the in-person campus experiences during the early days of the pandemic.

Finding virtual opportunities to engage students was only part of the mission, said Vice President of Enrollment Management and Dean of Admission Satyajit Dattagupta.

"The pandemic forced us to think differently, be creative," he said. "And if you think about what a high school student is going through, a lot of them haven't been back in [in-person] school. And they've been on Zoom all day. When you provide a virtual event, you have to make sure that it's creative, interesting, different."

The staff started with a target audience of future Tulanians.

"When [the pandemic] happened, we were working with admitted seniors, and they've already applied, they've been admitted. They know they're interested in

Tulane,” said Director of Strategic Recruitment Leila Labens. “And so that was the population we really focused on. Within the first few weeks, we actually got virtual up and running within three days.”

Labens and Director of Admission Jeff Schiffman then led the Admission team in developing a broader range of virtual events, which included college guidance both in general and specifically for Tulane, as well as eclectic content like virtual cooking classes, workout sessions and trivia nights. They staged fictional admissions case studies and a “You’re the Dean” event to show students and parents how universities work. Admissions counselors appeared on screen and staffed events on the back end to answer questions immediately and provide information.

“We were really thinking out of the box with everything we did,” Schiffman said. “What we try to do is bring people in with the lighthearted stuff, and that's what keeps them coming back.”

The obvious benefit is that virtual events are open to a much wider audience, including students who may not otherwise have made a trip to New Orleans to see Tulane in person.

In a “normal” year, the Admissions staff might have engaged 5,000 students; in 2020 the total was well over 10,000.

As Schiffman and Labens prepared for a March parent webinar that attracted 700 parents on Twitch TV, Schiffman explained that virtual events help parents make informed decisions too.

“We're going to be giving all sorts of tips for how to be a good parent in the college application process,” Schiffman said. “We've done this presentation before on the road. But now, we've got parents from overseas, we've got parents who didn't go to college themselves. We're not just being able to provide this really great information, but we can cast such a wide net and provide really good college access information to anyone regardless of who you are or where you're coming from.”

In some ways, the personal touch isn't lost over Zoom, either. Events like “hangouts” allow students to meet and find out what they have in common before they arrive on campus.

“We found that when we allow them to be more engaged and get to know each other through chatting, and also, when we use Zoom and our own platform as a way to show our personalities too, it’s easier to do virtually than it’s ever been in a more formal setting,” Labens added.

Many of Tulane’s Virtual Visiting offerings are still available online. [Click here to see a selection of webinars, read Schiffman’s blog and take the online tour.](#)

[To read College Confidential’s feature on Tulane, click here.](#)

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