

## SoPA student speaker and father paves the way for New Orleans youth

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Derick Houston Jr., who will receive his Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences with a minor in small business development, is the 2021 Commencement speaker for SoPA's diploma ceremony and a recipient of the prestigious Tulane 34 Award. Houston volunteers with local organizations to teach financial literacy at high

schools and universities in the Greater New Orleans area. (Photo by Rusty Constanza)

Derick Houston Jr.'s journey to — and through — the Tulane University School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) isn't unusual. But his motivation and work ethic are in a league of their own.

Houston said he did not immediately consider Tulane as a teenager due to the financial burden he worried it would place on his family. But in 2014, nearly 10 years after high school, he made the decision to earn a degree at his own pace. And SoPA, he said, was a perfect match.

This month, Houston will not only receive his [Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences](#) with a minor in small business development, he also is the 2021 Commencement speaker for SoPA's diploma ceremony and a recipient of the prestigious Tulane 34 Award.

"I came from humble beginnings," said Houston of his upbringing on the West Bank of New Orleans. "The sacrifices my parents made to put my sister and I through private schools were definitely part of my motivation to keep going."

Though his parents were part of his motivation, Houston also has a 16-year-old son who maintains his own list of impressive accomplishments.

"In 2005, I was hit with two curveballs," recalled Houston. "Hurricane Katrina interrupted my college education and I found out that I was going to be a father. It was through a combination of blessings and hard work that I was able to find a career and really excel at it."

Unlike traditional college students who earn degrees that'll help them enter the workforce, Houston arrived at SoPA with an already flourishing career as a financial adviser. He currently works as a private client adviser and vice president of investments at JP Morgan.

"I always thought that the most direct path to financial success was to become a doctor," said Houston. "Now that I know this isn't the case, I want to do all that I can to help young people understand that there is more than one road to wealth."

Houston accomplishes this mission by volunteering with local organizations to teach financial literacy at high schools and universities in the Greater New Orleans area.

“I’ve overcome great odds as a Black man in this country, at Tulane, and in my profession,” said Houston. “I’m truly honored and humbled to be living in this moment and I’m so thankful to everyone at SoPA who has helped me along the way.”