

National Academies selects Tulane for new undergraduate Gulf Scholars Program

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Tulane University has been selected by the National Academies' Gulf Research Program to join the newly launched Gulf Scholars Program. The five-year, \$12.7 million pilot program will prepare graduates to address some of the biggest challenges in the Gulf of Mexico region. (Photo from Shutterstock)

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The National Academies' Gulf Research Program (GRP) has selected Tulane University to join the newly launched Gulf Scholars Program (GSP), a five-year, \$12.7 million pilot program that prepares graduates to address the most pressing environmental, health, energy and infrastructure challenges in the Gulf of Mexico region.

The program aims to cultivate future leaders who will serve the region as scientists, engineers, educators, community leaders, policymakers, designers and innovators in local communities.

All GSP participants will complete a comprehensive research or creative project, ideally in partnership with a community organization. In addition, the GSP will host an annual conference, allowing students to share their research projects, exchange ideas and hear from academic, civic and industry leaders.

The program will establish its inaugural cohort in the Gulf states with Tulane, Xavier University of Louisiana, Florida A&M University, Florida State University, Jackson State University, Rice University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Up to seven additional colleges and universities will be added annually through 2025, reaching more than 25 members in the pilot phase alone.

"The Gulf Scholars Program is filling a niche — because few undergraduate programs are dedicated to equipping students with the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to solve challenges in the Gulf. These students, many of whom have home ties to the Gulf, are getting rigorous education and training in issues that directly impact their communities," said Karena Mothershed, senior program manager of the GRP's Board on Gulf Education and Engagement. "We hope this new program inspires students to envision a career in the Gulf and work to make it an even better place."

Marie Dillon Dahleh, PhD, associate dean for strategic innovation and program development and a senior professor of the practice in mathematics for the Tulane University School of Science and Engineering, will be the faculty director for the program.

"The Gulf Scholars Program at Tulane University in partnership with the Gulf Scholars program at Xavier University will unite undergraduate students, faculty and researchers across multiple schools and centers to investigate and propose solutions

for designated research threads in community health and resilience, environmental protection and stewardship and offshore energy and safety in the Gulf of Mexico,” Dahleh said. “The program is a fantastic opportunity for Tulane and Xavier to create cross-campus research threads which include faculty and students from both schools.”

Each participating university will receive funds to create academic, co-curricular and extracurricular experiences related to the GRP’s core focus areas — community health and resilience, environmental protection and stewardship and offshore energy safety. Funds are also used to provide faculty and staff support, engage evaluation specialists and secure undergraduate research experiences.

“The Gulf Scholars Program’s university partners are in a unique position to drive a curriculum and learning experience that truly incorporates the voices and needs of Gulf communities. We hope the program creates a diverse cadre of students, universities, and community organizations who are committed to the Gulf’s safety, sustainability and resilience. We also hope it will create an alumni network that continues to uplift, support, and mentor participants — because that legacy will last far beyond the life of the program,” said Marcia McNutt, president of the National Academy of Sciences.

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-Marie Dillon Dahleh, faculty director for the Gulf Scholars Program