

Tulane University Special Olympics recognized by ESPN as Top 5 national program

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Tulane University's Special Olympic (TUSO) program has reached new heights with a pair of national accolades for its meaningful and inclusive work with Special Olympic athletes. ESPN selected the TUSO program as one of the Top 5 Unified Special Olympics Sports groups in the nation and also named TUSO to its [2021 Honor Roll, which features the top 25 schools from across the country.](#)

Tulane was one of just three universities recognized on the 2021 ESPN Honor Roll, joining Florida State University and Texas Christian University.

ESPN's Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is a program for schools ranging from pre-K through university that intentionally promotes meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities to create accepting environments. The core of this program is Special Olympics Unified Sports and activities where students of all abilities play on the same court and same field. With sports as the foundation, the three-component model of Unified Champion Schools offers a unique combination of effective activities that equip young people with tools and training to create sports, classrooms and school climates of acceptance.

Gabe Feldman, the Sher Garner Professor of Sports Law, director of the [Tulane Sports Law program](#) and co-founder and co-director for the [Tulane Center for Sport](#), is also the director of the [Special Olympics in New Orleans](#).

"We're honored to receive this recognition. It is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Tulane students and Special Olympics athletes who came together to capture and celebrate the spirit of competition and inclusion that is such a key part of Special Olympics and Unified Sports. We share this recognition with the Goldman family. Their enduring support has empowered us to offer programs of this caliber to so many deserving athletes. We're excited to continue building our unified sports programs and to continue striving to create a better world by fostering acceptance and inclusion of all people," Feldman said.

Senior Sarah Donato is the current president of the Tulane Special Olympics Club and oversaw club events through the current pandemic. Donato said the group has prospered despite the restrictions and is excited to be back in person this fall for the Tulane-Special Olympics Unified Flag Football Intramural League and swim practices.

"We are so grateful for the growth we've seen in our program the last few years. Even throughout the pandemic, we've maintained a tight-knit connection with the local intellectual disability community. Our practices and events are a much-needed source of positivity for everyone involved, and we're excited to see the growing presence of Special Olympics on campus. We're humbled by this honor and hope to continue to create an inclusive community that is accessible for everyone," Donato said.

Before the pandemic, TUSO offered swimming, tennis, track and field and basketball and hosted unified flag football, fall and spring basketball leagues and a field day, where athletes and volunteers could play together. TUSO has been able to offer virtual practices and expanded programming during the current pandemic. According to Donato, practices were divided by sport, and many of the workouts were similar and well attended by many athletes.

The mission of the Tulane Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in sharing the gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

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