Tulane professor wins STEM educator award for work with New Orleans area students and teachers

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Michelle Sanchez, center, a senior professor of practice at Tulane and director of the Center for K-12 STEM Education, teaches a workshop on LEGO robotics. Teachers had to program a robot to autonomously accomplish certain tasks. (Photo by Rusty Costanza)

Michelle Sanchez, a senior professor of practice in the Tulane University School of Science and Engineering, has been named the winner of the Ada Lovelace STEM Educator Award for her contributions in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The awards committee cited Sanchez's work in connecting New Orleans area school children to hands-on experiences in STEM careers, for working to increase the number of students pursuing STEM careers from historically underrepresented groups and for serving as a role model for female engineering undergraduate students.

The Ada Lovelace Awards honor women and their contributions to technology-based education in the Gulf South from Texas to Florida. The awards also recognize digital marketers, software engineers, product managers, product designers and tech founders.

Sanchez is director of the Center for K-12 STEM Education and the Levy Professor for Integrated Discovery and Community Engagement at Tulane. She holds a PhD in electrical engineering from Stanford University.

Sanchez said she is passionate about her work in the community, and she thanked the School of Science and Engineering for supporting her passion since joining the faculty in 2012.

"It is a testament to that support and the help of my current and former colleagues that the impactful work that the Tulane Center for K-12 STEM Education is doing is being recognized throughout the entire Gulf Coast," Sanchez said. "Each year, we continue to receive more grants, sponsorships and donations, which enable us to keep expanding our programs and outreach, including virtually since the pandemic began."

Sanchez said quality STEM education programs should be accessible to all youth, and she and her team are working diligently to make that happen.

As director of the Tulane's Center for K-12 STEM Education, Sanchez and her team of students, faculty and staff have led a wide range of programs benefitting students of all ages. Among the programs is one through which Tulane students teach STEM activities in local public schools at no cost. There is also a K-12 teacher professional

development program on both science and engineering content for teachers across Louisiana. In addition, Sanchez teaches a service-learning course that includes the teaching of pedagogy for young students and opportunities to volunteer with the Center’s programs.

Girls in STEM, also known as GiST, offers girls in grades 5-7 the opportunity meet and work with female role models in STEM careers. Through hands-on workshops, girls are encouraged and empowered to inquire, investigate and discover in a positive environment. A similar program for boys — Boys at Tulane in STEM, or BATS — encourages creative thinking, promotes self-esteem and increases awareness of opportunities in STEM for middle school boys.

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