

Tulane researchers awarded grant to develop environmental humanities minor

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(Left to right) Michelle Foa and Laura McKinney, both associate professors at Tulane, are developing a minor in environmental humanities. (Photos by Arielle Pentes)

Two Tulane University School of Liberal Arts professors have received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to develop an environmental humanities minor.

The planning grant will enable researchers Laura McKinney and Michelle Foa of the Environmental Studies Program (EVST) to build an interdisciplinary, environmentally

focused curriculum that will create meaningful experiential learning and community engagement opportunities for students.

“Our hope is that this minor will give Tulane students more opportunities for deep examination of people's relationship to the environment—and will showcase the value of the humanities and interpretive social sciences in better understanding this relationship,” said Foa, an associate professor of art history and a member of the Environmental Studies faculty advisory committee.

Currently, Tulane offers an environmental studies major, but the environmental humanities minor will be different, both in its focus and design. For example, it will feature a series of innovative, team-taught courses that pair humanities faculty in art history, literature, history, anthropology and related fields with colleagues in the schools of Science and Engineering, Architecture and other areas. Courses will also consistently include experiential learning.

The \$35,000 planning grant is part of the NEH's Humanities Connections program, which aims to expand the role of the humanities in undergraduate education at two- and four-year institutions. It supports innovative curricular approaches that encourage partnerships among humanities faculty and their counterparts in the social and natural sciences.

“This new program will demonstrate to students across the university the importance of the humanities for addressing our environmental challenges as well as the necessity of examining complex topics from a diversity of viewpoints,” Foa said. “It will also encourage students to make connections between what they learn in the classroom and the world around them, through the integration of experiential and place-based learning into the curriculum.”

“The environmental challenges we face at the global level and those we confront in the Louisiana Gulf Coast require incorporation of knowledge from diverse disciplines, perspectives and voices,” said McKinney, an associate professor of sociology and director of the Environmental Studies Program. “We are enthusiastic about forging connections across campus and building coalitions with community stakeholders to plan meaningful learning opportunities for students that address environmental history, sustainability, and justice both locally and globally.”

During the planning phase, McKinney and Foa will conduct strategic planning, develop the curriculum, recruit Tulane faculty, and partner with local nonprofits,

such as community-based health organization FARMacia and Green Light New Orleans, which focuses on climate change and sustainability issues.

McKinney said the minor is a perfect fit for the NEH initiative, and that she and Foa expect widespread interest among both students and faculty.

"We're looking forward to working closely with faculty, students and community partners over the next year to design a program that reflects students' passion for engaging with one of the most pressing issues of our time," Foa said.