

Just do it - Runsdorf Award winners embody the spirit of public service

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The 2022 recipients of the Center for Public Service's Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award, Mollie Slotter (left) and Ron'Janiele "Nelly" Bruce. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Public service is a hallmark of the Tulane student experience; however, some students go above and beyond in achieving the Tulane ideal of excelling academically by using their skills and knowledge in service to the community. Two such students are Ron'Janiele "Nelly" Bruce and Mollie Sloter, the 2022 recipients of the Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award.

The Runsdorf Award is given by the Center for Public Service (CPS) to recognize students who have made significant contributions to the well-being of the community and demonstrated social responsibility throughout their tenure at Tulane. It is the highest award for community engagement given to graduating students.

"I spent a lot of time doing things through CPS, being a part of almost every program that's housed there," Bruce said. "So, the award is like a gift wrapped with a bow that says we love you and wish you the best."

Bruce, who grew up in New Orleans and attended high school in Baton Rouge, is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in political science, social policy and practice, and a minor in English. She has been engaged in service work since high school, earning the Presidential Service Award for her work with the Baton Rouge Youth Coalition.

At Tulane, Bruce got involved with the CPS Student Leadership Programs, was a Weatherhead Scholar and a Newman Civic Fellow, devoting herself to creating lasting change for other students, especially those who have experienced similar struggles to her own as a Black Queer woman. She also worked tirelessly to spread knowledge about local organizations doing crucial work that promotes equity and justice in the Greater New Orleans area.

"I originally thought I was going to be a senator or a legislator, but my service learning really helped clarify what I did and didn't want to get involved with," Bruce said. "I prefer working on the ground, working with people and the community."

Sloter, who is graduating with a Bachelor of Science in psychology and a Bachelor of Arts in sociology with minors in Spanish and social innovation and social entrepreneurship (SISE), was also very active as a volunteer during high school in her hometown of Fort Worth, Texas, working with the Community Service Club. She also volunteered every summer at Camp Impact, a free day camp for kids from homeless shelters and low-income families in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

After coming to Tulane, Sloter got involved with Outreach Tulane, volunteering during her freshman and sophomore years, becoming community partners coordinator her junior year and eventually becoming chair of the executive board during her senior year. In her leadership roles on campus, she has guided other students through major days of service, even during the height of the pandemic.

“I got to work with a lot of great people and great organizations, and I know that all of the nonprofits were really appreciative of the work that our students did,” said Sloter.

Sloter and Bruce encourage students who are beginning their journey at Tulane to make the choice to get involved.

“I would say to everyone, seek out those opportunities; go to the club fairs, look at the websites, read the emails and the newsletters,” said Sloter. “Information is constantly being sent out about ways to get involved — just do it.”

After Commencement, Bruce will move to Philadelphia to assume a full-time position with the educational equity nonprofit, Murmuration. She also plans to further her education by attending graduate school within the next five years. Sloter will remain at Tulane for a fifth year to complete the 4+1 Degree Program, graduating in 2023 with a master’s degree in psychology/behavioral health.