

Posse Scholars flourish with a little help from their friends

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Every academic year the Posse Program holds a Posse Big Meeting and Dinner in the fall and spring semesters, as well as a Posse Plus Retreat in the spring. The gatherings are an opportunity for all Tulane Posse students, mentors and staff to share information and build community. (Photo provided by the Center for Academic Equity)

The Posse Foundation program has served Tulane students for more than a decade, but new campus leadership and a robust calendar have injected some fresh energy into the program this academic year.

[J. Celeste Lay](#), senior associate dean of academic affairs for Newcomb-Tulane College (NTC) and professor in the Department of Political Science at the School of Liberal Arts, took over as Tulane's Posse liaison last spring. She is joined by two new mentors, Erick Valentine, professor of practice in the A. B. Freeman School of Business, and La' Tesha Hinton, director of community engagement and health equity for Campus Health.

More than just a scholarship program, Posse demonstrates the importance of a support system for students, particularly those who are first-generation college students. According to the university's Retention and Strategic Initiatives, 100% of students in Posse cohorts that entered in 2018, 2019 and 2020 were retained from year one to year two, even amidst a global pandemic — a promising statistic, Lay said. NTC and its Posse partners will be looking at maintaining the retention rates and improving overall graduation rates this year.

Although NTC's [Center for Academic Equity](#) administers Posse at Tulane, Lay's role as advocate and troubleshooter includes recruiting and meeting with mentors regularly, assisting with planning campus visits and events, and working with numerous NTC teams as well as many other campus partners.

Founded in 1989 by educator Deborah Bial, Posse now partners with 64 colleges and universities throughout the United States, including Tulane, which welcomed its first cohort of 10 students from Los Angeles in 2009 and a second cohort from New Orleans in 2012.

This year's first-year Posse students have already been meeting for several months in their home communities and were introduced to their mentors over the summer.

Valentine is the mentor for the first-year LA Posse.

"Occasionally, highly qualified students do not succeed for a variety of reasons. Posse allows me the opportunity to be a buffer, mentor, and resource for students, and to possibly mitigate the effects of the workload, culture shock, etc. on their Tulane experience. My objective is to help them navigate this process and to be as successful as their potential!" he said.

"I absolutely love being a Posse mentor!" added Hinton, who is the mentor for the NOLA Posse. "I enjoy and take much pride in serving as a catalyst and a venue that sparks and empowers our students to be change agents, do self-reflection, and seek

feedback as well as develop skill sets allowing them to interact with each other positively.”

This week, all the Tulane Posse cohorts — four from LA and four from NOLA will convene for a Posse Big Meeting and Dinner as well as a Posse Plus Retreat in the spring.

“Students, mentors, Tulane staff and Posse staff from both cities gather to build community and share information and resources that help students to succeed academically and build a force for good as campus leaders,” Lay said.

To learn more about the Posse Program at Tulane, visit the Center for Academic Equity [website](#), and for information about the Posse Foundation see their [website](#).