

Tulane receives \$12.5 million gift in support of data science

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pdavis14@tulane.edu



Alumna and Board of Tulane member Libby Alexander (NC '84) and her husband, Robert, are donating \$12.5 million to advance data science at Tulane. The university's Data Hub will be renamed the Connolly Alexander Institute for Data Science. (Photo by Payton Alexander)

Longtime Tulane supporters Libby and Robert Alexander are donating more than \$12 million to advance a university-wide data science initiative that will transform teaching and research across all disciplines at Tulane and position the university as a leader in data pedagogy.

[Tulane's Data Hub](#) will be renamed the Connolly Alexander Institute for Data Science. Connolly is the family name of Libby Alexander, a Tulane graduate [and member of the Board of Tulane](#). With data pervading almost every aspect of modern life, the Connolly Alexander Institute for Data Science will enable Tulane students across all disciplines to understand how data shapes our environment, to think critically about data-based arguments and to use data in their studies and careers.

The Alexanders' gift will elevate the institute as the university's centralized resource for fostering data literacy and data science through education, research and service to the community. As Tulane continues to grow as a powerhouse of research and scholarship, this institute will fuel an even more ambitious future of meaningful exploration and discovery.

"Understanding data in 2023 is as fundamental a skill as reading, writing and arithmetic, and its role in society will only grow in the coming years, especially with the emergence of artificial intelligence," the Alexanders said. "Whatever their majors, Tulane students must know how to navigate data, and integrating data science across the curricula will cultivate their data literacy. We are thrilled to play a role in Tulane's data-centered evolution."

Libby Alexander, a member of the club sailing team at Tulane, graduated with a bachelor's degree from the university in 1984. She and her husband, Robert, helped build Connolly, Inc. into a global leader in payment integrity solutions. Libby led Connolly's healthcare division and ultimately served as CEO of the parent company. The success of Connolly, Inc. under Libby's leadership led to its rebranding as Cotiviti, where Libby served as vice chair of the board until 2018.

A devoted alumnus, Libby joined the Board of Tulane in 2017 and also serves on the Executive Campaign Council and the Tri-State National Campaign Council as part of Tulane's [Only the Audacious campaign](#). She credits a programming course she took at Tulane for showing her the capabilities of data combined with computing technology. Robert, who majored in computer science at Boston University, ran his own computer company before joining Connolly, Inc. as its Chief Information Officer.

"If anyone understands the importance of data management and analytics to the present and to the future, it's Libby and Robert Alexander," Tulane President Michael Fitts said. "Through their expertise and generosity, they have been instrumental in furthering and developing Tulane's strategy for implementing data literacy and data

science at every level of the university. We're extremely grateful that the business success they achieved is now helping to drive this initiative at Tulane. Our students will reach new heights academically thanks to the support of this amazing Tulane couple."

[Tulane launched the Data Hub in 2021](#) as part of the university's reaccreditation process.

"The Connolly Alexander Institute for Data Science will make data fluency a defining characteristic of the Tulane experience," Tulane Provost Robin Forman said. "Libby and Robert's gift will energize and empower us to enrich our curriculum, provide opportunities for both students and faculty to carry out compelling data-intensive projects and create cocurricular programming that allows all members of our community to come together to share their interests and to learn from each other."

Under [Executive Director Patrick Button's leadership](#), the institute is adding staff and launching new programming, including an [Introduction to Data course \(DATA 1010\)](#) debuting this fall. The institute also provides data-related grants to undergraduates through [Newcomb-Tulane College's common grants application](#) and summer research grants for PhD students. In addition, it is incentivizing [TIDES](#) instructors to create or update TIDES courses to spotlight data.

"The Alexander gift will allow us to hire more professors, instructional designers and data scientists who can help us offer substantial additional programming and services, including establishing a data help desk for students and faculty, providing hands-on support for instructors developing new courses, and facilitating research collaborations," Button said.

The university will soon announce [another major gift from the Alexanders in support of Tulane's sailing program](#).