

Graduate reflects with gratitude on her time as student leader at Tulane

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Graduating student and Tulane 34 recipient Akira Shelton, a political science major and Africana Studies minor, has been a part of several student organizations. Each has given her profound lessons and friendships she will carry beyond Tulane. (Photo by Kacie Fayard)

When Akira Shelton, a political science major and Africana Studies minor, graduates this month, she will do so grateful for her eclectic Tulane experiences and accomplishments that have cultivated friendships, mentors and lessons along the way.

“Tulane is a decision I made as a 17-year-old and a decision that I made that I have zero regrets about,” she said.

Shelton, a Los Angeles native, credits the support of the Los Angeles Tulane POSSE 12 cohort, of which she is a scholar, with her ability to transition to college as a first-year student. The POSSE Foundation selects students who show promising leadership and academic potential to attend four-year colleges and universities as a cohort or “POSSE.” Each year, Tulane welcomes a New Orleans and Los Angeles POSSE.

“The success that I’ve had and the way I was able to acclimate to campus, find my footing and just feeling secure here wouldn’t have been possible without my POSSE,” she said.

Shelton also received a Tulane 34 Award, given to 34 graduating students annually, recognizing their excellence in leadership, service and academics. It is one of the highest university honors awarded to students.

Shelton has been part of several organizations while at Tulane. She is the co-chair of the Tulane Undergraduate Assembly and a member of the Sexual Aggression Peer Hotline and Education (SAPHE) group, which supports sexual violence survivors through a peer-run hotline and works to dismantle sexual assault culture on campus. She is a disk jockey at WTUL, Tulane’s radio station, and part of the Tulane Performing Arts Society, for which she directed the society’s spring musical. She has also participated in several productions with the Tulane theater and music departments.

“I have a 17-year theater background and even though I made the choice not to study theater, I wanted it to be a part of my life,” she said.

One of her mentors is John “Ray” Proctor, assistant professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance in the School of Liberal Arts (SLA) and faculty member of Africana Studies Program. “I will always credit Dr. Proctor with being the person that

made me realize that I could act,” Shelton said. Proctor, along with Andrea Boyles, associate professor of sociology and Africana Studies at SLA, have been influential during her collegiate life.

“They both empowered me to be the Black academic that I am, but to also be the person that I am,” she said. They were key to Shelton’s thriving as a first-generation college graduate and allowing her to “feel like I fit in this academic space.”

Shelton acknowledged that her former faculty advisor at SAPHE, Jennifer Hunt, and Kaitlyn Poe, assistant director of student governance and TUA advisor, have also been guiding figures to her.

Following graduation, Shelton will return to Los Angeles to start in the entry level training program at United Talent Agency. She plans to eventually pursue a law degree and practice entertainment law, handling legal affairs for studios and productions.

Of what she is most proud of throughout her undergraduate years, she said, “My entire Tulane experience is something I’m extremely proud of.”

“Just the sheer amount of things I was able to do during my time here, extracurricular, academically, also studying abroad last fall (in Tokyo) ... just the experiences I was able to have and each lesson they all gave me.”