

Tulane professor wins Coastal Stewardship Award for work with students on coastal restoration projects

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mmcrory@tulane.edu



D. Jelagat Cheruiyot stands in front of a wall in her office covered in signatures from the students she has mentored over the years. (Photo by Rusty Costanza)

D. Jelagat Cheruiyot has a wall in her office covered in signatures from students. The names, in black Sharpie, grow upward and outward, a visual representation of the many students she has inspired since arriving at Tulane University in 2017.

Her work with students as a professor of practice in ecology and evolutionary biology in the School of Science and Engineering has recently earned her a 2025 Coastal Stewardship Award from the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL).

Cheruiyot, who is also the Kylene and Brad Beers II Professor of Social Entrepreneurship in the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking, has worked on many projects with the coalition. She initially assumed a recent call from the group earlier this year was an invitation to bring her students to help bag oysters from local restaurants to create oyster reefs.

Instead, it was to let her know she had won a 2025 Coastal Stewardship Award from CRCL for her work to inspire hundreds of students to work on coastal restoration and storm water projects.

“I didn’t even know that I was nominated,” she said.

In a letter of nomination, Franziska Trautmann, a Tulane alum and co-founder and CEO of Glass Half Full, said, “Her innovative teaching style, such as the integration of service learning and enforcement of no phones or computers, brought her lessons to life and gave back to the community in the process.”

Cheruiyot has served as a mentor for Trautmann and is still on the board of advisors for Glass Half Full.

“In addition to being an award-winning teacher for many hundreds of Tulane students, through her service-learning courses and community outreach projects Dr. Cheruiyot has played an important role in helping to restore coastal Louisiana,” said Keith Clay, professor and chair of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. In 2023, Cheruiyot also received the [Suzanne & Stephen Weiss Tulane Presidential Fellowship for Teaching Excellence](#), an award to recognize excellence in undergraduate teaching, student advising and instructional improvement and development.

Cheruiyot has involved her service-learning students in coastal work for nearly a decade. They have packed bags with oysters from local restaurants to help build natural shoreline features and create new reefs, and they have also built community gardens from New Orleans to Pointe-aux-Chenes.

“Working with students is amazing,” Cheruiyot said. “It brings me a lot of joy, because they’re so excited to learn and so energized.”

She laughed as she recalled one year when she accidentally planned an oyster-bagging outing over Wave Weekend, when her students’ families would be in town.

Although some students understandably skipped the field trip, many excitedly dragged their parents and siblings along.

“It’s not just [ecology and evolutionary biology] students,” said Cheruiyot of her classes. “It’s business and political science students, students who will go to law school, students who will go into politics.”

She encourages them to consider their potential impact, both here in Louisiana and wherever they go next.

“Her lectures through her role as a Professor of Practice at Tulane University ... have inspired hundreds, if not thousands, of people to work in the coastal restoration field,” said former student Sara Good-Chanmugam in nominating Cheruiyot.