

SoPA dean defines vision for growth, expansion

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Amelia Manning, who joined the School of Professional Advancement as dean in August, is focusing on modernizing and strengthening programs and student support at the school. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

Amelia Manning has ambitious plans for the Tulane University School of Professional Advancement (SoPA). As dean, she is advancing a strategy focused on modernizing academic programs, strengthening student support and streamlining operations — all with the goal of positioning the school as a leader in professional and online education.

Manning, who joined the school as dean in August, developed those priorities after extensive conversations with faculty, staff, alumni and students, which revealed

both SoPA's strengths and its opportunities for growth. While she knows the school is deeply committed to its students and academic quality, she also saw clear potential for SoPA to expand its reach and impact in the rapidly evolving landscape of professional education.

"Amelia has been an extraordinary addition to the Tulane community," said Robin Forman, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost. "She brings an exciting combination of dedication to the SOPA mission of providing rewarding academic programs for working adults and others interested in advancing in their professions, a savviness about how to use all available information to find exactly the right programs to build and deep experience in creating cutting-edge systems to provide a world-class student experience. It has been a lot of fun to work with her this past semester, and I very much look forward to watching SOPA thrive under her leadership."

SoPA currently serves 1,447 students, including nearly 800 undergraduates and more than 650 graduate students — many enrolled fully online. Graduate enrollment is up 58 percent over the past two years thanks to new and expanding programs, while undergraduate numbers have climbed by 23 percent.

Building a more modern and relevant program portfolio

Manning and her team are exploring new approaches such as shorter terms and more flexible course structures to better meet the needs of working adults. She also wants to make SoPA's online programs more visible and accessible.

Growth opportunities include organizational leadership and high-demand fields such as information technology and cybersecurity. Her team is researching potential new areas for 2026 and beyond, including energy and sustainability, logistics, medical laboratory sciences and pre-health pathways.

"We need to approach this with a marketing mindset," she said. "People should know that Tulane has high-quality online programs, and we want to invite them to explore what we offer."

Improving student outcomes

With many SoPA students balancing classes, jobs and family responsibilities, Manning sees proactive advising as essential. Her goal is an interconnected system of support that helps students stay on track.

“If a student misses an assignment or receives a lower grade than expected, advisors should know right away so they can reach out and help,” she said.

Streamlining operations

Another pillar of her strategy is simplifying operational processes, starting with admissions.

“We want a more personalized approach,” she said.

As she listened during her early weeks on campus, Manning sensed how deeply SoPA’s leadership and faculty care about their students — a cultural strength she sees as essential to future growth.

“Strong cultures fuel growth and impact,” she said. “Tulane already had a strong foundation for that. The people care very deeply about the students and each other. The people I met have a real desire to have an even greater impact.”

Her own background positions her well to lead that growth as she did for nearly 20 years at Southern New Hampshire University.

And six months since starting, Manning said she couldn’t be happier with her move to Tulane.

“There is a real emphasis on the quality of the academic program, with faculty who are practitioners in their fields, who make learning relevant to the students and who have a real commitment to offering a personalized level of support,” she said.