

Environmental studies professor and author dives into big questions at NOLA Book Fest at Tulane University

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Nathaniel Rich, professor of practice in the School of Liberal Arts' Program of Environmental Studies, has been a speaker at every New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University since its inception and moderated panels since 2024. (Photo by Jared Lyons)

Although it is perhaps best known for music and food, New Orleans has a rich literary history and a strong community of writers. As a writer living in New Orleans, Nathaniel Rich, professor of practice in the School of Liberal Arts' Program of Environmental Studies, thought for many years that the city should have a great

book festival worthy of that literary tradition.

Now in its fifth year, the [New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University](#) has become just that. In those five years, the festival has grown from 6,000 attendees in 2022 to 18,000 last year, including Rich, who has been a speaker at every festival since it was first hosted at Tulane and moderated panels since 2024.

Noting the people travel from across the country to attend the New Orleans Book Festival, Rich said, “It has earned a place in the cultural calendar of the city.”

Rich will be moderating two panels on Friday, March 13, [one at 1 p.m. in Stibbs](#) and [the other at 4 p.m. in Kendall Cram Lecture Hall](#), both on the second floor of the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life. One is on climate and the other on moral complexity in fiction.

This year Rich will also welcome his younger brother, [Simon Rich](#), a humorist, former writer for “Saturday Night Live” and author. Simon Rich will be speaking at a [session](#) on Friday, March 13, at 11 a.m. in the ROTC building.

“I see a lot of similarities in our sensibilities, of course, but the kind of writing we do is very different, in form and subject matter,” Nathaniel Rich said.

The elder Rich’s work focuses on environmental writing, both in fiction and nonfiction. A movie adaptation of his book, “Losing Earth,” is currently in production in New Orleans. The book is a nonfiction account of the scientists, politicians and strategists who tried to convince the world to act on climate change between 1979 and 1989.

Rich teaches classes at Tulane in environmental journalism and literature. In his writing and teaching, Rich is focused on asking questions and examining stories that don’t have clear right or wrong answers but encourage reflection and self-discovery.

The festival is a great place to dive into those ambiguities, he said, because the panel format allows for more in-depth discussions.

“In a roomful of readers, if the moderator does their job well and asks follow-up questions and tries to bring the speakers into conversation with each other, you can get to some interesting places,” he said.

“The festival draws smart, engaged people who have their own points of view and are there for a reason,” he added. “To have the opportunity to speak together and think together is a magical thing.”

As well as his brother, Nathaniel Rich is looking forward to seeing friends, colleagues and writers he admires at the festival.

“It’s nice to see a lot of New Orleanian authors on the list,” he said. “I think it’s healthy for the festival to continue to involve and promote local authors, since we have a lot of important ones doing impressive work.”

The [New Orleans Book Festival at Tulane University](#) will take place March 12-15 on Tulane’s uptown campus and will bring together authors, scholars, journalists and community members for discussions spanning literature, history, politics and culture.