

Architecture Students Master Old Crafts

July 28, 2009 11:30 AM Kathryn Hobgood
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A 19th-century tomb within New Orleans' Lafayette Cemetery No. 1 is undergoing significant restorative work this summer by students enrolled in the Preservation Studies Summer Field School at Tulane.

Working under the tutelage of master craftspeople, conservationists and architects, students are learning about historically appropriate treatments for restoring the decrepit aboveground tomb. Every morning for three weeks in July, the students worked in the cemetery, learning old techniques for applications such as plaster, mortar and masonry. In the last week of training, students are applying lime washing at another historic New Orleans structure, the [Pitot House](#).

"We can take young people, we can teach them how to do this work, and once they have developed those skills, now we have the people that we need to take care of our historic architecture," says Rudy Christian, executive director of the [Preservation Trades Network](#).

While the work in Lafayette Cemetery No. 1 has been under way for several years by Christian's agency and other groups, this is the first year that the Tulane [School of Architecture](#) has been a partner in the program.

"We're really excited about the opportunity the students have to work hands-on with local master craftspeople," says Heather Knight, director of the [summer field school](#) and an adjunct professor in the School of Architecture. "We're very lucky that we're working with a second-generation master plasterer, Tevis Vandergriff."

She adds, "People have written songs about the beauty of this work. When master craftspeople work, there's an art to it ? a poetic rhythm you can hear."

In the afternoons, students trade in their tools for books, conducting archival research and attending seminars on topics such as architectural history, landscape architecture, funerary iconography and the history of New Orleans cemeteries. Four students enrolled in the field school have been accepted into Tulane for the fall semester.