

Grads Teach America

May 07, 2010 11:00 AM Joseph Halm
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Nicole Spoelma will be in Washington, D.C., this summer working for Teach For America as an elementary special education teacher, but her post-Tulane career might never have happened if not for social work professor Fred Buttell.



Nicole Spoelma, who is graduating with a coordinate major in social policy and practice, is heading to Washington, D.C., this summer to work for Teach For America. (Photo by Guillermo Cabrera-Rojo)

Spoelma is one of five Tulane students in the [social policy and practice program](#) who are graduating from Tulane on May 15. The future educational policymaker says her career was charted after a freshman class with Buttell.

"My hope is to one day work in the education policy field. However, I didn't know this until I took my first social policy class with professor Buttell," she says. "His passion for the field and amazing experiences inspired me to follow in his footsteps."

The social policy and practice program provided her with several applicable skills that married well with her primary major, sociology. The multidisciplinary coordinate major in social policy and practice, directed by [Kevin Gotham](#), professor of sociology and associate dean of academic affairs in the School of Liberal Arts, is a collaboration between liberal arts and social work faculty.

Spoelma says, "It gave me the opportunity to take the skills I learned in my sociology courses and apply them to a relevant field. The experience and knowledge I've gained from the program prepared me for an internship working at a national healthcare organization in the policy-making department last summer and has inspired me to pursue a master's degree in public policy following my two-year commitment to Teach For America."

Among other students in the program is Ellyn Crane, who hopes to earn her Ph.D. in education policy or obtain a master's in social work, after serving her two years with Teach For America.

Crane says the program helped her narrow her interests. "I chose to be a part of the changes that were happening in New Orleans after Katrina, such as the renaissance of education programs and policies."

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