

Zydeco Rhythm to New Student Orientation

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fsimon@tulane.edu

There's a little lagniappe ? something extra ? for students participating in New Student Orientation this summer at Tulane: a trip to Rock 'n' Bowl for Zydeco Night. The excursions are a way for first-year students to experience zydeco, the hard-driving, Cajun-style dance music of Southwest Louisiana that has been influenced by rhythm and blues.



As part of New Student Orientation this summer, students dance and listen to zydeco music at Rock 'n' Bowl. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Kevin Fontenot, an adjunct faculty member in the Tulane School of Continuing Studies, says, "I like to introduce the students to Rock 'n' Bowl and its place in the history of zydeco music." He will be teaching "Music and Culture of New Orleans," a Tulane Interdisciplinary Experience Seminar, in the fall, and he is on a panel during orientation in which the [TIDES](#) program is presented, along with other aspects of campus life.

Rock 'n' Bowl, a bowling alley and music venue on Carrollton Avenue, has played a central role in maintaining the presence of zydeco music in New Orleans, says Fontenot.

After the 1987 death of the “king of zydeco,” Clifton Chenier, Rock 'n' Bowl was the site of many zydeco battles of the bands to determine Chenier's successor.

On a recent Thursday night, before students boarded buses for the short ride to Rock 'n' Bowl, Fontenot told them that zydeco dancing is a good first step to begin to understand Louisiana culture.

Rock 'n' Bowl “is a place to get out of your comfort zone in a place that's comfortable,” he says. “If there's one word to describe Louisiana culture, it's participatory.”

It's the fourth year that Tulane has offered [New Student Orientation](#) in the summer. This year, first-year students and their parents were invited to choose among nine two-day sessions (from June 3rd–4 through June 29th–30). Almost 75 percent of the incoming class ? 1,157 students ? is participating, along with 1,004 parents, says Penny Wyatt, director of orientation and student transitions.