

## Sweet treats, guilty pleasure

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Italian ice, pralines, beignets. Red velvet cake, doberge cake, bananas Foster, bread pudding. Sno-balls. The Big Easy abounds in sweet delights. And partaking of these sweets can lead to a better understanding of society, students are learning in a course at Tulane University entitled "The Sweet Life."



On one of the field trips in the course “The Sweet Life,” students will venture into the “candyland” of Angelo Brocato’s. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The course looks at the political, historical, cultural and culinary ties between sugar and New Orleans. Through the study and eating of these regional sweets, the students examine the complicated and sticky ways sugar informs the culture of southern Louisiana.

Each Thursday evening, Michelle Kohler, an assistant professor of English, and Shannon Payne, a postdoctoral teaching fellow, entice the first-year students in the [TIDES](#) course to sample one of these sweet treats.

On a field trip to Angelo Brocato's Ice Cream Parlor that has been in business in New Orleans for more than 100 years, each student is given an allowance and set loose

in the “candyland,” Kohler says. The founder's father, an immigrant from Palermo, Italy, worked for a while on a sugar plantation until he saved enough money to open a tiny ice cream shop in the French Quarter.



An employee at Brocato's shakes plenty of the sweet stuff onto cannoli.

On another field trip, the class will tour Laura Plantation, where slaves once harvested sugar cane. “Where does the tour guide talk or not talk about slavery?” [Kohler](#) asks. “Both can be revelatory.” Her expertise is 19th-century American literature, and she addresses slavery in other courses that she teaches.

“We try to open up the discussion about the ways that sugar and sweetness have affected lives. It is not so simple,” she says.

Designed to introduce students to New Orleans and the Tulane community, TIDES (Tulane Interdisciplinary Experience Seminars) are one-credit classes offered each fall to first-year students.