

Incoming students latch onto adventure

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The best way to break the ice among a group of jittery pre-freshmen is to throw them into a tent in the backwoods of Mississippi and pit them against each other in contests of swimming, canoeing and hiking. At least, that's according to rising sophomore Alle Ehrhardt.

Gator

On a previous NOLA Experience outing, a group of incoming Tulane students spot an alligator during an airboat swamp tour in Jean Lafitte National Park. (Photo by Sally Asher)

No, this isn't "Survivor: Tulane Edition." It's [NOLA Experience](#), a five-day, extended orientation program for incoming first-year students, that will begin on Sunday (Aug. 19), before the official Tulane University move-in on the uptown campus Aug. 25.

NOLA Experience has blossomed from when the program began about 16 years ago, with incoming students now clamoring for one of 240 spots in 12 different [tracks](#). Not all are as rough and tumble as Ehrhardt's experience ? she participated in Down and Dirty, in the Outdoor Adventure track. NOLA Experience also offers the leadership-focused Lagniappe track, and the culturally minded Native Style track.

All tracks offer students an introduction to the unique flavor of New Orleans and the opportunity to complete a service project. Groups volunteer with community organizations throughout the city, including City Park, the New Orleans Museum of Art, Second Harvest and Children's Hospital.

Students spend most of the week with their smaller groups, but the entire NOLA Experience crew reconvenes for nighttime activities. NOLA Experience coordinator Rachel Spencer's favorite part of the week is the large group excursion to Michoud's for Cajun dinner and dancing.

“We've met the capacity at many of our favorite New Orleans venues for the program,” Spencer says. The exotic excursions and N'awlins food are certainly fun, but the intimate size is what delivers the real point of orientation ? connections with peers.

“It's such a good way to jump into college life,” Ehrhardt says. “They're some of my best friends today.”

Johanna Gretschel received a bachelor's degree with an English major from Tulane in 2012 and she is in the master's degree program.