

School of Social Work remembers its role in desegregation

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When Tulane University integrated in 1963, some of the first African American students to matriculate did so through the [Tulane School of Social Work](#), a distinction celebrated last week during the school's annual field instructor workshop.



From left Gloria Bryant Banks (MSW '64), Pearlie Hardin Elloie (MSW '65), and Marilyn Piper Riley (MSW '64) were the first black students to graduate from the Tulane School of Social Work. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

“We are proud that social work students had a hand in integrating the school and they went on to have great careers,” says Heather Gillis, clinical assistant professor and director of field education at the school.

As part of the curriculum in the Master of Social Work Program, Stephanie Baus, clinical assistant professor, says that students are required to work with an agency “in the field” three days per week. The workshop allows field instructors, or those who oversee the students at the agencies, to receive additional training and continuing education units.

This year, the workshop focused on diversity with the title "Honoring Our History:

Building on Our legacy."

With 2013 marking 50 years since the university's integration, the workshop featured a panel of the first black students to enroll in social work. They were Gloria Bryant Banks (a 1964 graduate), retired secretary for the Louisiana State Department of Social Services; Pearlie Hardin Elloie (a 1965 graduate), director of the Office of Children, Youth and Families at Total Community Action, Inc.; and Marilyn Piper Riley (a 1964 graduate), retired head of child protection for the state of Louisiana and former adjunct professor at TSSW.

Elloie, one of two plaintiffs in the lawsuit seeking to desegregate the university in the early 1960s, responded to the audience's interest in how she became involved in the landmark case.

"People think we won the lawsuit, but we actually lost," Elloie explained. "After the suit, the Board of Tulane decided it was time to integrate, and it did."

Banks, Elloie and Riley are part of a documentary film about the university's desegregation that is currently in production. Workshop participants also viewed an excerpt of the film, which can be seen [here](#).