

Woman with a vision

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After graduating from high school in 2009, Mwende Katwiwa took a year off before beginning college to volunteer through City Year’s AmeriCorps in the New Orleans area. It changed the path of her life.



Mwende Katwiwa is a 2014 graduate of Tulane University where she has been recognized for her commitment to service. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Upon arriving in New Orleans, she was already scheduled to attend a different university in the Chicago area, but Katwiwa says she saw value in continuing to serve the New Orleans community. Tulane University provided the opportunity for Katwiwa, who will graduate on Saturday (May 17) with a degree in [political economy](#) and [African and African Diaspora studies](#).

“I took a service-learning course at Tulane called Education in a Diverse Environment, taught by Carol Whelan,” says Katwiwa. “I could tell the professor really cared about service and that really inspired me.”

That inspiration coupled with self-motivation continued to fuel her desire for volunteerism throughout her Tulane years. She has been recognized with a [Jim](#)

[Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award](#), the [Bruce J. Heim Foundation Fellowship](#) and a Public Service Fellowship with the Tulane [Center for Public Service](#), where she has served as a student advisory board member, among other honors.

The long list of academic accomplishments and community service is complimented by her ever-present involvement in student engagement on the uptown campus.

In 2014, Katwiwa, who was born in Kenya and moved to the U.S. at age 6, chaired the largest-ever [Tulane Black Arts Festival](#) and produced the Tulane *Vagina Monologues*, a production that explores the impact of gender-based violence.

Locally, Katwiwa has garnered a reputation as a [spoken-word](#) artist.

“Choosing to attend college at an institution like Tulane that supports service as one of its core values has allowed me to enhance my understanding of the impact of service in communities as well as in individuals like myself,” Katwiwa says.

She has accepted a post-graduate VISTA fellowship to work for [Women with a Vision](#) in New Orleans.