

Sociology professor to receive service award

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Stephen F. Ostertag teaches service-learning courses that center on criminology and criminal justice. He will receive the Barbara E. Moely Service Learning Teaching Award on Tuesday (Dec. 1). (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

On Tuesday night (Dec. 1), assistant professor of sociology [Stephen F. Ostertag](#) will receive the [Barbara E. Moely Service Learning Teaching Award](#) from the Center for Public Service for giving Tulane University students a chance to work within a little-seen part of the criminal-justice system.

Ostertag teaches two sociology courses: Criminology, and Race, Crime and Control, which allow Tulane students to research crime statistics and trends, witness the local legal system in action, and analyze its processes. Student duties include working as pretrial assistants with Orleans Public Defenders and providing post-conviction support services.

Ostertag says students often are surprised by the number of people sent to court for drugs and domestic violence. Students also are surprised that the people accused of crimes often are very young ? their own age.

The goal is “to get the students to see these folks going in [court] as people,” Ostertag says. “The idea is to see nobody"s all good or all bad. They understand, hopefully, the broader theoretical context within which some of this crime happens, and then they can think of more humane and effective solutions,” especially in regard to violent crime.

Ostertag consistently gets more applicants than are able to register for the classes.

“As an enthusiastic proponent of service-learning, Stephen serves as an excellent example of a hands-on faculty member who combines teaching, engagement and activism in the community,” wrote Nick Tringali, senior program coordinator at the [Center for Public Service](#), in his letter nominating Ostertag.

Ostertag is the director of the [social policy and practice coordinate major](#). His current research project involves the rise of New Orleans blogs after Hurricane Katrina.

The award honors professors who demonstrate service learning leadership, create meaningful activities that benefit the community, and employ innovative approaches to research and student experiences. Ostertag will be honored at a faculty appreciation reception.