

Longtime academic adviser now has time for art and travel

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"I have been fortunate to work with some wonderful people," says Joan Kay, who took the university's Voluntary Separation Program after 26 years as an academic adviser at Tulane. She retired on Jan. 29 and now has plans to revive her art practice. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

After 26 years as an academic adviser at Tulane University, Joan Kay will miss working with students and interaction with her colleagues, but she is already planning to revive her art practice as she settles in to retired life without a demanding daily schedule.

Kay is one of the longtime Tulane University employees who are exiting the university payroll to pursue new lives and take on new challenges through a [Voluntary Separation Program](#). Jan. 29 was the final day for some of those employees, like Kay, while others will delay their departure over the next 12 months, but all will earn benefits such as Tulane tuition waivers and a financial package.

In this article, part of a series on these valued employees, she looks back on this career and what's ahead.

Q. What was your job at Tulane and how long did you work here?

A. I was senior academic adviser and worked at Tulane for 26 years.

Q. What will you miss most about working at Tulane?

A. I have been fortunate to work with some wonderful people, both at the [Academic Advising Center](#) and across the campus who have taught me something new each day. And I will miss working with students whose energy and enthusiasm has made me hopeful for the future.

Q. What are your favorite memories of your career here?

A. During a rainstorm that completely flooded the grounds prohibiting entrance or exit for students and staff at the Academic Advising Center, housed at that time in two trailers, the staff devised games to take their minds off being trapped. Someone just happened to have a set of plastic bowling pins and balls, which were fun for awhile. But the highlight was a chair race down the length of the hall while sitting and pushing with our feet, much harder to do than you would think. I lost that race to the assistant dean.

One of my advisees tried to balance school with working to pay for her tuition and housing. Over eight years she took several semesters off to work, then, with just three credits left to graduate, she disappeared. Three years ago I ran into her at a drugstore and suggested she return to complete her degree, offering her several options on how to do that. She returned the following summer and graduated.

Q. Now that you've retired, what are your plans?

A. I'm hoping to revive my art practice, which ended with my last show at Carol Robinson Gallery in 2009 for lack of energy after work each day and adjustment to a smaller work space. I'm also looking forward to attending a full schedule of movies during the New Orleans Film Festival, and perhaps travel to other film festivals — maybe Cannes Film Festival? I intend to add bodybuilding to my exercise regime of

walking, biking, water aerobics and yoga.

And now I will be able to take advantage of cooler summer temperatures in Wisconsin, Washington state, Maine and New Hampshire. Luckily I have family and friends who live in states at latitudes that offer relief from New Orleans' hot summers.

Q. Is there anything you want to say to your colleagues at Tulane?

A. Thank you to all who made the work day feel less like work over the past 20-plus years, and thank you for the friendships that will continue.

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Joan Kay