

Educator gives new perspective on education reform

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Mary Pattillo speaks frankly about how urban school systems may alienate parents and students with their selective admission process. She gave the keynote address for the Social Justice and the City: Implications for Race and Equity symposium Thursday, March 10, on the Tulane University uptown campus. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Tulane University is no stranger to the ongoing debates about education reform. Many students have public service assignments within charter schools in the New Orleans community, and since Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans has been ground zero for the charter school movement.

When [Mary Pattillo](#), a professor of sociology and African American studies at Northwestern University, came to Tulane to discuss these issues, students flocked to her speech to hear a fresh opinion.

“I partially pick where I go to give my speeches based on the city I’d be going to,” Pattillo began, kicking off a symposium, [Social Justice and the City: Implications for Race and Equity](#) on March 10–11.

Pattillo’s discussion was about the effects and implications of this movement for low-income and African American families in urban settings such as her hometown of Chicago.

“A quality education isn’t a privilege; it’s a right,” Pattillo said.

“Peoples’ complaints that they got no replies from the schools they applied to is more than a social grievance. It is a political critique.”

Her recent studies focus on how much power these lower-income families have over the placement of their children within either neighborhood or charter schools in their district. Pattillo found that many parents were powerless when faced with the school systems’ application process.

“Combining school-erected barriers with everything else make it so parents don’t get to choose at all.”

Her work focuses on raising awareness about these empowerment issues, and how they affect the education system.

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The symposium was organized by the [City, Culture and Community program](#), an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program of the Tulane Department of Sociology, the School of Social Work and Urban Studies program.

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