

Graduate focuses on education in New Orleans

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Sheldon "Ryan" Hitchens graduates from Tulane on May 14 and plans to make an impact on K-12 education in New Orleans. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

When Sheldon Hitchens took a seat in his Race and Urban Education course, he didn't know it would lead him to a pivotal summer internship and eventually to a master's program at Harvard University.

Hitchens completed his summer internship with the Akili Academy of New Orleans. He started out as an operations intern and quickly moved up the ladder to become an after-school kindergarten teacher and then an expanded learning teacher.

"The best part about choosing Tulane has been choosing New Orleans," says Hitchens, a graduating senior at Tulane University, double-majoring in English and Africana studies. "I've really been focused on being in the community and doing work in the community."

He now works at the school 30 per week in between classes and has established and developed the curriculum for the school's 7th and 8th grade leadership classes.

He loves what he does. Most days of the week Hitchens is at Akili at 7:20 a.m. to start the school day.

"I never have to question whether or not I'm doing meaningful work. I really believe that if kids can have a quality K-12 experience and be prepared to succeed in college, they can do anything," says Hitchens.

Hitchens credits his professors and mentors at Tulane for always challenging him to think critically.

"My courses in the Africana studies department have been very formative and the Office of Multicultural Affairs has really been my propelling force since I've been here," he says.

Hitchens is a recipient of the Tulane 34 award, Martin Luther King Jr. Week for Peace Community Service Award, and the Donald Mintz Community Involvement Award. After graduation he will begin a master's degree program in education policy and management at Harvard where he will focus on equity in urban education.

"I definitely want to come back to New Orleans," says Hitchens. "I always say, 'if not immediately, then eventually.'"

Samah Ahmed is a sophomore majoring in public health and political science at Tulane University.

The 2016 Commencement ceremony will be streamed live [online](#). Follow us on social media at #tulane16.

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