

New SSW dean champions community, technology

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Patrick Bordnick, the new dean of the School of Social Work, hopes to blend the school's initiatives into the local community in order to improve the quality of life for all New Orleanians. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The newly relocated Tulane University School of Social Work helped win over Patrick Bordnick, the school's new dean, who took over in July. The downtown location offers the opportunity for community intervention events; heavy pedestrian traffic from nearby Canal Street could lend itself to getting the word out about health screenings, suicide prevention, addiction treatment and other services.

Bordnick's goal is to blend the school's initiatives and mission into the community so that it leads to a better quality of life for New Orleanians.

“As a university we have intellectual capital, and we have students who want to work in the community. So when we ... become partners with our community, great things really happen,” he said.

Before Tulane, Bordnick was a professor and associate dean for research at the University of Houston, where he studied addiction using technology like virtual reality to help people find support, practice coping skills and ultimately change unhealthy behaviors. Bordnick believes that portable virtual reality on smartphones can bridge the gap between the clinic and real world. He’ll continue that research at Tulane, working across disciplines.

Other priorities include improving the school’s ranking, instituting online learning, expanding the school’s reach and building a brand. The branding would include helping students develop strong clinical practice skills, an area in which Tulane already excels, expanding the curriculum to include nonprofit management, and emphasizing the school’s disaster mental health certificate and resilience program within local and global contexts

After Katrina, residents know they are resilient, Bordnick said, adding that New Orleans is well positioned to keep moving forward with issues like education and health care because so many people already love living here.

“I think you really build upon that synergy of the richness of the city and warmth of the city and the resiliency,” he said. “I see that as a plus, in that we can really provide community awareness” about social services.

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Patrick Bordnick, dean of the School of Social Work**