Nelson honored for service learning teaching

May 6, 2022



Ashley Nelson, center, senior professor of practice at the A. B. Freeman School of Business, received the 2022 Barbara E. Moely Service Learning Teaching Award at a reception in Cudd Hall on April 15. Also pictured are Tulane Provost Robin Forman, left, and Freeman School Dean Paulo Goes, right.

Tulane University honored Ashley Keller Nelson (MBA ’98) with the 2022 Barbara E. Moely Service Learning Teaching Award. Nelson, a senior professor of practice in business and legal studies, received the award at a reception in Cudd Hall on April 15 along with fellow recipient Laurie McKinney, associate professor of sociology and environmental studies.

Named in honor of Barbara E. Moely, Professor Emerita of Psychology, who founded service learning at Tulane in the 1990s, the award recognizes Tulane faculty members who embrace Moely’s dedication to bringing classrooms to life through engaged community partnerships. At Tulane, service learning refers to educational experiences in which students apply their academic knowledge to meet real needs in the community. Service learning has been a required part of Tulane’s undergraduate curriculum since 2006.

“Ashley’s teaching has been a prime example of how integrating community partnerships into coursework can be mutually beneficial,” says Bridget Smith, assistant director for Academic Community Engagement at Tulane’s Center for Public Service. “She’s delivered a unique and hands-on learning experience for her students while making a huge impact with a great community partner. Her inventive spirit, positivity and initiative have really helped develop this collaboration from a simple event to a long-term, strategic partnership.”

A former director of marketing and external relations at the Freeman School and recipient of the Dean’s Service Award at her MBA graduation, Nelson began teaching as an adjunct professor in 2001 after running her own marketing company for several years.

“Before I began teaching full time, I did a lot of volunteer work and was on the boards of several nonprofits,” Nelson says. “Service learning is my way of continuing to give back to the community and support organizations that are doing valuable work in the community.”

Nelson first began connecting students with nonprofits in need of business assistance in 2008 through the business TIDES class, More Than Just Business. In 2010, she and Kelly Grant expanded service learning to Management Communication, partnering with Junior Achievement to have their classes teach business concepts to students at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in New Orleans.

A year later, Nelson incorporated service learning into her Social Media class, teaming students with non-profits such as the Audubon Institute, City Park and The Idea Village to develop social media marketing campaigns. In 2013, a social media campaign her class created for the Louisiana State Museum Foundation led to an $18,000 donation toward its effort to restore music legend Fats Domino's white Steinway piano, dramatically demonstrating the power of social media.

In 2013, Nelson began working with Upturn Arts, a nonprofit that provides after-school, holiday and summer arts programming to children in New Orleans, many from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since the start of that partnership, Nelson's TIDES students have provided more than 10,000 volunteer hours to the organization and helped it raise more than $350,000 to fund programming and art scholarships.

"The neat thing about my partnership with Upturn Arts is it's not just community service," Nelson says. "The students learn about the organization and then decide what business or professional skills they have that they can bring to the organization to help it succeed. Upturn Arts may be a nonprofit, but we treat it like a business."

After devoting nearly 15 years to service learning at Tulane, Nelson says she's sincerely grateful for the recognition.

"It's nice to know that what I'm doing is making a difference," she says. "I've had exceptional role models for giving back to the community. My mother, Julia Breitmeyer (BBA '62), is an active volunteer and my grandmother, Rosa Keller, was an incredible force in the community. To know I'm following in that tradition is very gratifying."