

Mark Waller writing sample President's letter in Tulane Magazine December 2015

P R E S I D E N T ' S L E T T E R



MIKE A. ROE/ISTOCK

Global Learning

by Mike Fitts

Few experiences are more enlightening than immersing yourself in different cultures and viewing the world in other ways. Just ask Tulane senior Kasey Smith, who is back on campus after spending her junior year in Argentina and Spain.

In fall 2014, Smith worked for a nonprofit in Buenos Aires that helps people recover their ability to communicate after suffering strokes. In spring 2015, she went to Madrid and worked in sales and marketing for an animation studio. She took classes at partner universities in both places. She is majoring in marketing and political economy as a dual-degree scholar in the Altman Program in International Studies and Business.

"I have a better understanding of where other people are coming from and a broader picture," Smith said. "How I think isn't the only way of thinking."

She is articulating one of the guiding principles at Tulane as we chart our vision for a vibrant future. I describe it as "Crossing Boundaries" between backgrounds, perspectives, fields, ideas and, yes, countries. This is how we'll create great leaders and change the world. It's the essential skill of the 21st century.

When I convened a team to define how Tulane can truly distinguish itself with creative research collaborations between different schools and people, the resulting Academic Collaborations Task Force identified global studies as one of the fundamental strengths for Tulane to accentuate.

The task force members found Tulane excelling with its work in Africa, Latin America and across the Gulf region of the United States. They cited the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, the Murphy Institute on political economy, the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South and other programs.

Tulane has about 70 faculty members with Latin American expertise across the university. It has 40 major academic programs running in 20 countries. Faculty members work in multiple fields in 30 countries in Africa. Tulane has more than 1,000 international students from more

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Global studies offer other ways to view the world.

than 85 countries. It has graduates living in 177 countries.

Global education and research provide a double-edged benefit. They enrich Tulane internally by offering our students and professors mindset-expanding, idea-inspiring experiences abroad. They also establish Tulane as a positive force externally when Tulanians tackle some of the biggest problems of our time. The ultimate measure of a great university, after all, is the good it does for society at large and the world.

Tulane's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine is global at its core and always confronting urgent needs. Its faculty members continually fight disease outbreaks worldwide. A recent example was Tulane joining a consortium to eliminate malaria in Haiti, with Tulane's role funded by a \$2.9 million grant from the CDC Foundation.

Another example comes from the work of Mark VanLandingham, Thomas C. Keller Professor at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, who has taken insights from his extensive research on cultures in Asia to understand how the Vietnamese community in eastern New Orleans proved to be impressively resilient after Hurricane Katrina.

Despite suffering devastation as severe as any place and lacking any particular advantage in wealth, the enclave soon thrived. Professor VanLandingham attributes that to a strong sense of belonging and a cohesive, hierarchical culture emanating from Vietnam. The community cultivates leaders and then works in harmony behind them toward a common goal.

Studying one culture, he said, gives you tools for understanding what strategies would—or would not—apply in helping other communities.

He argues Tulane is among the best at this. The School of Public Health provides students extraordinary international experiences through the Peace Corps Master's International Program and the Minority Health International Research Training Program.

"You have to be out there in the field before you really get an understanding of what's making this place work," he said. Then, he said, "These lessons are going to stay with you for the rest of your life."

At Tulane, we want to make studying abroad one of our hallmarks. We want to make our ability to attract international students and faculty a major appeal. With the world as our classroom, there are no boundaries on what we can achieve.