Civil engineering minor among new programs in Tulane University’s River-Coastal Science and Engineering department

June 1st, 2023

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The new Civil Engineering – Water Resources and Environmental undergraduate minor will be the first to bring a civil engineering degree back to Tulane since 2005. Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano.

Already one of the nation's leading universities in water and coastal studies, Tulane University is adding a civil engineering minor to its offerings for the upcoming 2023-24 academic year.

The Civil Engineering – Water Resources and Environmental minor for undergraduates will be offered through the Department of River-Coastal Science and Engineering. It will be the first program to bring civil engineering back to Tulane since instruction in the field was discontinued in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina.

"There is a real desire to bring this type of engineering back to Tulane," said Mead Allison, PhD, chair of the River-Coastal Science and Engineering department, which is housed in Tulane's School of Science and Engineering. "When I told the School of Science and Engineering board that we were going to roll out a minor that has 'civil engineering' in the name, there were cheers."

This minor is the latest development by the department to increase its offerings to undergraduates. "It's a great stepping stone, as the faculty continues to grow, to rolling out a similar major," Allison said.

The new minor will join other nationally recognized programs and centers at Tulane that are focused on water and coastal issues. These include The ByWater Institute, a leading environmental research institute which uses the Mississippi River as its laboratory. In 2021, Tulane was also chosen as a member of the Gulf Scholars Program, part of the National Academies' Gulf Research Program, which funds studies and projects on the future of the Gulf of Mexico. These initiatives and more, including Tulane's location in New Orleans, position it as a highly sought-after spot for river and coastal research, an essential component of addressing climate change-related issues.

For prospective graduate students, Tulane will also offer a PhD program and both resident and non-resident Master of Science programs in River-Coastal Science and Engineering. The non-resident program will allow professionals to get a top-rated advanced degree from Tulane while continuing their careers.

"The non-resident master's will not be any different from the resident master's in terms of coursework or requirements," said Allison. "It's just that it is designed to serve folks where it is not possible to be physically in New Orleans due to their job."

This non-resident master’s program is one of the first of its type at the School of Science and Engineering. It is a continuation of the non-residential option that has been available for the graduate certificate in River Science and Engineering since 2017, and Allison is excited about the opportunities it will provide for professionals working in fields pertaining to water sciences and engineering.

These programs are meant to fill a niche in modern civil engineering. Students who want to follow this career path need proper training to prepare them for the unique challenges in water resources that the world will face in the coming years.

“You really have an opportunity in a new department to be in the 21st century and create programs that weld the theoretical of science to the practical, solution-oriented focus of engineering to meet complex challenges surrounding water, and to create healthy communities and ecosystems in a rapidly changing world,” Allison said.

“We are by nature a very interdisciplinary department,” added Allison. “Water is a nexus issue that shapes everything, from the food we eat, to the energy we use, to the safety of our communities in an uncertain climate future.”

The Department of River-Coastal Science and Engineering is currently accepting graduate applications for the 2023-24 academic year. Visit their website for more information.