

Graduating students honored for commitment to public service with 2024 Runsdorf Award

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William Bai (left) and Mickey Mickle (right) are the 2024 recipients of the the Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award. (Photos by Kacie Fayard and Vincent Postle)

Both William Bai and Mickey Mickle understood early on in their time at Tulane that to make the most pronounced impact, it's important to listen, learn and engage directly with community members.

As the 2024 recipients of the [Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award](#), Bai and Mickle have left their mark in unique ways. The Center for Public Service gives the award annually to undergraduate students who have distinguished themselves through their commitment to public service.

When William Bai arrived at Tulane four years ago, he wanted to find a way to combine public service with his background in robotics, which began in the sixth grade while growing up in San Jose, California, and attending many tech camps.

"Robotics is something that requires a lot of commitment," Bai said. "You build the robot, you fail and you continue working on it. It hones those skills that make a lot of great scientists and engineers," he said.

When he struggled to find robotics teams to volunteer with at New Orleans charter schools, he landed on the idea to start his own initiative.

He launched the nonprofit [RoboRecovery](#). Over the course of three years, the organization has facilitated free robotics programs in schools across the New Orleans area. Through the Tulane Center for Public Service Tier I and Tier II service internship programs, they have brought in 52 Tulane student participants to mentor at local schools, Bai said.

Additionally, the organization created an inventory of over \$40,000 worth of donated robotics equipment in partnership with the STEM Library Lab in Metairie, which helps increase access to science equipment for local educators. In total, RoboRecovery has worked with 12 schools and two after-school organizations over the last three years, including local nonprofit Son of a Saint.

Bai will graduate with a bachelor's degree in cell and molecular biology. He will take a year off before going to medical school and will be working at Duke University as a medical researcher.

Public service has equally been a focal point of Mickle's college experience, she said. Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, she knew she especially enjoyed working in local communities and making a tangible impact.

She spent two years as the vice president of community engagement for Tulane's Residence Hall Association (RHA), where she worked with the local nonprofit and Tulane alumni-founded Glass Half Full and the Tulane administration to bring glass recycling to campus.

In this role, she found she was most successful when working directly with community members to share resources and ideas to address areas of concern. In her time with the RHA, the organization coordinated significant donations to local nonprofits and groups like The United Houma Nation, Students Against Food Insecurity and the ARC of Greater New Orleans.

Mickle reflected on other significant experiences she had while at Tulane, including interning with the Senegalese organization [KITAMBAA](#) to develop the Flow For All Period Project. She helped to facilitate the distribution of 9,000 menstrual products to those in need across Senegal and Tulane.

She also drew on her experience collaborating with researchers as an intern on the Black Women's Congressional Caucus research team and working directly with teachers across the country at Vocal Justice to identify social justice issues affecting their students.

Mickle is graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science and plans to go to law school, where she wants to continue working on issues pertaining to Black women's health, reproductive justice and birthing rights.