

From finance and engineering to theater and AI, students partner with nonprofits to turn coursework into community change

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Donning lab coats, goggles and gloves, fifth graders at Esperanza Middle School had a mystery on their hands. They had to figure out how one of their classmates became ill after eating a cookie at lunch.

It was all part the fictional “Case of the Poisoned Cookie,” a hands-on forensics lesson led by four Tulane University science students as part of Tulane’s STEM program in partnership with the Tulane Center for Public Service. Playing the role of investigators, the Esperanza students performed simple tests using substances such as vinegar, iodine and water to identify a strange powder that had been detected on the cookie crumbs.

Similar scenes play out almost daily as Tulane students leave campus to fulfill service-learning hours and, in the process, make a difference in the city they call home. Equipped with knowledge they gained in Tulane’s classrooms, lecture halls and research labs, they head to community gardens, public schools, hospitals, arts centers and other venues, where they put their education to work in ways that matter.

They teach financial literacy to high school students. They prepare young music students for community performances. They design assistive technology devices for people with disabilities. They take water samples to monitor the health of the water ecology system. They provide consulting services to nonprofits.

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