

## Innovative Program Focuses on Leadership during Disasters

### Orleans Parish, Louisiana

New Orleans, LA – When educators at Tulane University returned to campus after Hurricane Katrina evacuations, they faced the storm’s devastation. Like other colleges and universities in and around New Orleans, Tulane sustained millions of dollars in damages and halted academics for months after the storm. Faculty, staff, and students faced serious disruptions in their work, classes, and lives.

But in the Tulane community’s recovery, administrators saw academic opportunity. They realized their campus had become an ideal setting for disaster management students as a living laboratory of resilience and rebuilding.

With a focus on leadership at the local level, Tulane administrators developed a new academic program to educate graduate students on planning for, responding to, and reducing the risks of future disasters. The program became the new Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy (DRLA).

“Katrina was the turning point for all who do disaster risk management,” said Ky Luu, DRLA’s executive director and an expert in disaster resilience and humanitarian assistance. “We realized that we needed to focus locally first. Strengthening and building leadership begins in our backyard.”

The program launched in 2009 and now offers graduate coursework toward a certificate or Masters of Science in disaster resilience leadership.

“DRLA’s programs are designed to protect communities by educating leaders who are experts in disaster planning, response, and risk reduction”, Luu says. “Developing strong leaders is an essential task because of the frequency and seriousness of disasters and events occurring around the globe.”

What distinguishes the DRLA from other emergency management programs is that leadership is a main theme in all the courses. If a course is centered on disaster operations, for example, the class lectures, reading assignments, and discussions combine to comprehensively emphasize the leadership aspect of disaster operations. DRLA’s program also uniquely integrates education, research, and application. The students work case studies in real time.

An additional bonus of the program is its visitors who bring global issues and perspectives directly to Tulane. “Every other week we host a delegation from outside. Whether it’s Singapore or South Korea, they come, and we tell them about our experiences in New Orleans, and they tell us what they are doing in their country,” said Luu.

To complete the program students need 36 credit hours, half in the core requirements. After those are completed, students tailor their studies to their particular interests. For example, a student may want to focus on public health, and the DRLA degree program has the flexibility for them to enroll in 18 hours of public health classes.

In the 12-credit certificate program, students interested in disaster resilience and humanitarian assistance will focus specifically on leadership development. The DRLA certificate will better prepare



them to successfully lead organizations and communities through the stages of the disaster/recovery cycle.

“We cannot prevent natural hazards, but we certainly can reduce their negative impacts by planning smart, being well-prepared, and responding quickly and effectively, all of which require strong local leadership,” Luu said. “These strategies will save lives, protect livelihoods, and alleviate suffering in vulnerable communities.”

DRLA’s efforts are having a global impact thanks to funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. First, a \$762,198 grant awarded in 2010 funded an 18-month study in partnership with the University of Haiti to assess the impact of humanitarian aid in the island nation following the 2010 earthquake. In 2012, the Gates Foundation awarded DRLA a \$5 million grant to help universities in disaster-prone regions of Africa and Asia establish programs in disaster resilience and leadership.

DRLA’s partners include the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, Yale University, World Bank Disaster Risk Reduction Facility, State of Louisiana Lieutenant Governor’s Office, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Office of International Health Affairs, State of Louisiana Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, and Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action.