

# Students pass first hurdle in flagship leadership program

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*Kaitlin Potts, Scotlyn Sunkel, and Ellie Morrissey are all finalists in the competitive Presidential Management Fellows program.*

Three students from the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine have been named as finalists in the prestigious Presidential Management Fellows Program, a leadership development program for advanced degree holders coordinated by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

As finalists, students are eligible to apply for federal positions at close to fifty different U.S. agencies through the organization's Pathways Program. If selected, they'll participate in a two-year fellowship that provides formal interactive training, mentorship, at least one 4- to 6-month developmental assignment, and the potential to transition to a permanent or term position.

Kaitlin Potts is one of the SPHTM finalists and says she has been connected to the school for ten years, first as an MPH student, then as research staff, and now as a doctoral student. She plans to graduate in May 2022 with a PhD in epidemiology. She's excited about the opportunities the fellowship could present.

"It feels like my work in a federal agency could have widespread immediate impact since it is imbedded in policy implementation and can impact the lives of many Americans," she says. "I also like the idea of a program that has built-in leadership training opportunities. I have a lot of academic training in public health and epidemiology but almost no formal training in leadership and management. This aligns well with my mentorship goals."

Scotlyn Sunkel also plans to graduate in May, with an MPH in maternal and child health. She was surprised by the application process, which relies heavily on assessments. "The first two covered workplace etiquette and role play scenarios," she says. "The third was an essay question. The assessments had to be completed in one sitting and were timed. Once submitted, I did not hear back until I found out I was a finalist. The most interesting aspect was there were no formal interviews during the application process."

Ellie Morrissey, who will graduate with an MPH in international health and sustainable development, appreciated the help she got from the Career Services Office. "Abby Lukens has been a godsend, helping me build my federal resume and looking at even the smallest details to make my application even stronger for the positions I'm interested in," she says. She hopes to find positions that would use her academic focus on data analysis and program design, but is also interested in working with health policy, communications, or emergency response.

She also feels the program will be a good bridge between academia and the work world. "This program is a bit like halfway between school and working," Morrissey adds. "Someone is still holding your hand through the process and making sure you build on the skills that will be most critical for you, but you're also working a legitimate federal position with a lot of responsibility. I also am very excited that no matter where you work (for the most part) there will be a network of other PMFs who are brand new as well. You can adapt to this new way of life with a bunch of people going through the exact same thing. It's nice to know that the minute you arrive at your new job (wherever that is), you already have some support."

"It is a huge accomplishment to be named a PMF finalist, as the application process is highly competitive. Students selected as finalists have already advanced through a rigorous process and now have a strong chance to be placed in a federal agency," said Career Advisor Abby Lukens. Students learned about the opportunity from an announcement shared by the SPHTM Career Services Office.

All three students have 12 months in which to secure an appointment, and some positions could offer loan forgiveness.