

Runsdorf Award winners share interest in health equity

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Chandler Brock (left) and Michael Yang (right) share an interest in health equity and access. They are the 2023 recipients of the Runsdorf Award.

Chandler Brock and Michael Yang both have a common interest in health equity and expanding access to resources and information that will help improve the health of individuals in the long run. It's a goal each has worked towards in their own way throughout their time at Tulane.

As the 2023 recipients of the Jim Runsdorf Excellence in Public Service Student Award, both graduates have exemplified a commitment to the well-being of their community, both at Tulane and throughout New Orleans. Given by the Center for

Public Service, this award recognizes students that have made significant contributions to the community while at Tulane.

Brock will receive a Bachelor of Science in Public Health, and Yang will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Cell and Molecular Biology and a minor in Public Health.

A career in public health, however, wasn't on Brock's radar when she arrived as a freshman.

But after taking an Introduction to Public Health course with professor Eva Silvestre in 2019, she switched majors.

"I truly love everything about public health from how expansive and broad a field it is to how, fundamentally, human-centered and solution-driven it is. I look forward to incorporating my public health expertise into my future career as a physician," she said.

After graduation, Brock will pursue a Master's Degree in Public Health with a concentration in Maternal and Child Health and an epidemiology certificate from Tulane's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

While at Tulane, Brock was most proud of her time with the Tulane Black Student Union. She was president of the organization her junior year right after it had achieved a string of successes, including winning the Student Organization of the Year prize and working with the university to address racial concerns following the murder of George Floyd.

"I was forced to step out of my comfort zone numerous times and felt the pressure of continuing the recent success tBSU had received while maintaining my other commitments. I reflect back on that time with happiness and growth," she said.

Meanwhile, Michael Yang spent much of his time at Tulane learning how to promote health and wellness through cooking.

His interest in nutrition and food science started at home in his family's kitchen.

He is first-generation Chinese-American, and his family would celebrate the holidays cooking traditional food at home in Los Angeles.

When he started his college search, Yang became interested in Tulane as a research institution. He visited the school in October of his senior year of high school as part of PreviewTU, Tulane's multicultural fly-out program. After speaking with professors and fellow students, "I fell in love with the school," he said.

After three years of college, he is graduating as part of the William Wallace Peery Society, an award "recognizing exceptional seniors who represent the top 1% of their graduating class for academic achievement."

Throughout his years at Tulane, Yang has invested time promoting access to resources and education about nutrition by dedicating hours to volunteering in local community gardens, working as a medical assistant in an allergy/immunology clinic, and helping lead free community cooking classes at the Goldring Center for Culinary Medicine.

He founded the Culinary Medicine Initiative, a cooking and STEM program aiming to increase early access to health and wellness education. The program has reached 76 local elementary school students from 25 different schools across the New Orleans area.

He will follow this passion to England for the next year as a Fulbright Scholar and pursue a Master of Science in Nutrition and Food Science as part of the Fulbright/University of Reading Award in Food Security.

"After three years at Tulane, New Orleans has become a second home," said Yang. Upon returning to the United States, he plans to attend Tulane University School of Medicine.

"I've received so much from interacting with community members, friends and professors. I know I want to be able to continue contributing to whichever community I am a part of," he said.