

LeShawn Simplis-Barnes bringing passion to new SOPHAS appointment

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As director of admissions at the Tulane University [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#), LeShawn Simplis-Barnes understands the importance of advocacy.

Advocacy for Tulane's students - and future students - is an important part of the job.

And as the new chair-elect for the Schools of Public Health Application Service ([SOPHAS](#)) Recruitment Advisory Council (SRAC), Simplis-Barnes is taking that responsibility to another level.

“We need public health. Public health is everything, and public health is everywhere.”

— LeShawn Simplis-Barnes

“It's important for us to continue to bring bright, capable, competent students into the public health realm who want to do better for their communities, who want to make sure that public health continues in a way that is fulfilling for the people they serve,” Simplis-Barnes says.

SOPHAS is the centralized application service for public health degrees established by the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health ([ASPPH](#)), a non-profit organization representing more than 150 institutions in the field. SOPHAS creates governance for the application process and recruitment initiatives through the actions of the Recruitment Advisory Council.

The council works on the specific challenges inherent in the application process. One of the biggest gulfs that Simplis-Barnes has identified is within communication, particularly as it relates to application rates.

She notes that masters applications are down over 20% across the country, and yet few people are aware of that fact or willing to engage with it.

“That information isn't widely disseminated, but I think it should be,” Simplis-Barnes says. “SRAC is instrumental in spreading the word regarding these pertinent national trends. For those who don't have the opportunity to be on this council, they should be able to go talk to their deans and the higher administration, and say, ‘Hey, these are the issues,’ and then create more initiatives to combat them.”

Simplis-Barnes has served on the committee for the past two years. Her election to chair-elect will put her in a position to become chair for 2027.

She sees those crucial roles as being opportunities to make a bigger impact for students.

“We need public health. Public health is everything, and public health is everywhere. And if we don't recognize that, and don't recognize that soon, when another catastrophe happens -- and it's not if, it's when -- we won't have enough of the right people in place.”

“We're not being serious enough about the things that matter.”

It's with the current climate in mind that Simplis-Barnes sees the committee as being especially vital. For this time and moment, public health needs more advocacy. And the committee can continue to help with that.

“The ASPPH has seen the importance of this committee, and has continued to fund them, and I appreciate how ASPPH sees the value of this work. I'm hoping that they continue to support us in the way that they have.”

She points to the leadership within the organization --ASPPH staffers Johnston King and Mary Beth Carroll -- as being hugely important, not only to the mission of public health, but also to her own development.

“They deserve their kudos, because they work really hard. They don't just talk the talk, they walk the walk.”

For Simplis-Barnes, the mission of public health, and the students who are committed to that ideal, remain the focus.

“I'm very grateful to be on this committee, and I'm very grateful to continue the work that I'm doing. ... It is important work, very important work.”