

Dean of Student Experience honored with national student services award

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Dr. Erica Valenzuela, [assistant dean for student experience](#), will receive the [2026 ASPPH Student Services Excellence Award](#) at the annual meeting for the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH). The award recognizes innovative contributions in student services, inclusive service delivery models, leadership in targeting underserved populations, cross-unit collaboration, and excellence in staff

development and training.

In his nomination, Dean Thomas LaVeist highlighted Valenzuela's transformative impact on school services for students and the commitment she has shown to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

"When I arrived at Tulane, student affairs was one area I was keen to address quickly," said LaVeist. "Assistant Dean Erica Valenzuela has surpassed my greatest expectations for the role, and, thanks to her work, our student satisfaction surveys demonstrate that students are happy and thriving. She's done a great job!"

Valenzuela arrived at Tulane in 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of her first tasks was to rebrand student affairs to become the Office for Student Experience. Since then, she has built a committed team of professionals focused on student success, support, and engagement.

A significant addition has been the development of the [Office of Advising & Student Success](#). This team complements the support students receive from faculty advisors by providing direct, one-on-one guidance as students navigate the demands of graduate school. The advising team also coordinates a school-based writing and tutoring center, all with the goal of contributing to student success.

Under her purview, the Office of Student Experience now also operates a student food pantry called [Food for Thought](#). Recognizing that food insecurity was a significant problem among the graduate student population, Valenzuela initiated this supplemental support program that provides fresh and packaged foods along with personal care items, provided in a discreet, judgment-free manner.

The Office of Student Experience is responsible for a full slate of regular activities designed to engage and inform students, from Career Services workshops to Deans' Hours to the annual crawfish boil she initiated, an event attended by the entire school community.

Valenzuela holds a Doctor of Education from the University of South Dakota, where her research focus was on social justice and the retention of marginalized students in educational systems. Throughout her career, and especially at Tulane, she has focused on creating communities where all students feel welcome, supported, and engaged.