Tulane prepares students to become agents of social change

|
Mary Cross mcross3@tulane.edu

View PDF

Julia Lang, program manager of student programming at Taylor, walks prospective changemakers through an exercise at an information session in October. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

The Changemaker Institute (CI), housed at the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking, is creating a more streamlined experience for students by offering two new paths: the Changemaker Institute, which helps students focus their interest in changemaking, and the CI Plus (CI+) Social Venture Accelerator, which develops students' social entrepreneurial ideas.

The goal is to cultivate a network of Tulane students who will use their skills, expertise, talents and power in a way that creates positive social change and affirms the humanity of all people.

Those students are known as "changemakers."

> "At Taylor, we define changemakers as people who use their skills … in a way that creates positive social change."
>
> **— Julia Lang, program manager of the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking**

Past changemaker ventures include Fund 17, a nonprofit that empowers micro-entrepreneurs in New Orleans, and Sanitation and Health Rights in India, an organization that converts human waste into energy, founded by School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine alumnus Anoop Jain.

"The Changemaker Institute empowers students with the skills, networks and toolkits to become and remain active change agents throughout their lives," said Julia Lang, program manager at the Taylor Center.

The revamped CI allows students to engage in immersive community-learning experiences and to collaborate with local activists and social entrepreneurs through apprenticeships. Participants focus their curiosities and interests to develop a deeper understanding of the social issues they wish to tackle, and join communities of other changemakers in their field.

"For this redesign, our team collaborated with alumni to define and differentiate the CI program from the CI+ Social Venture Accelerator," said Changemaker Institute fellow Carolyn Isaacson.

"We wanted to offer a program that would help students better understand social issues they wish to tackle before jumping in to propose and create a solution," added Lang.

CI+ is a social venture incubator for a small cohort of mostly graduate students who already understand their interests and the social issues they want to address.

Throughout CI+, students develop ideas and build long-term plans for their ventures by interacting with local innovators, mentors, peers, alumni and community leaders while building social entrepreneurial skills through business model development and pilot testing.

Isaacson, a graduate student within the [School of Architecture](#), worked closely with [Freeman School of Business](#) student Josh Christian and [School of Public Health](#) student Olivia Evans to redevelop the curriculum for the CI program, which launches this month.

"We've worked to assess the experience of past CI participants and mentors and used that data to shape the new program," said Isaacson.

One of 40 [Ashoka-U](#) designated Changemaker Campuses around the world, the CI redesign represents Tulane's commitment to help students identify their changemaking path, where their academic interests and career aspirations intersect with the commitment to make a positive social impact throughout their lives.

Like this article? Keep reading: [Taylor Center offers a lecture for doers](#).