

SPHTM alumnus directing international food and cooking education nonprofit

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Naomi King Englar nking2@tulane.edu

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Robert Palestina, a 2018 graduate of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, is the new executive director of The Cookbook Project, a New Orleans-based nonprofit organization that promotes food justice and educates youth about healthy eating. (Photograph provided by the Cookbook Project)

Recent Tulane graduate Robert Palestina has his sights set on taking [The Cookbook Project](#), an international nonprofit based in New Orleans, to the next level.

Palestina, a 2018 graduate of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, took over as executive director of The Cookbook Project this summer, after completing a 300-hour internship with the nonprofit in 2017. That internship was facilitated by the Tulane Prevention Research Center's [Health Promotion Practicum Program](#). One of his responsibilities was helping the organization redevelop its online training program as well as its food literacy and cooking education curriculum.

“We used to only offer a single curriculum for food and cooking education, but over the last year, we restructured to offer four age-specific curricula, which expanded our market,” Palestina said.

Founded in 2010, The Cookbook Project combines youth education with food justice and the slow food movement’s goals of preserving local food cultures, all while reversing chronic disease. The organization facilitates food-oriented experiential workshops in conjunction with nonprofit youth organizations worldwide. These workshops focus on educating youth experientially about sustainable consumption, food geography, nutrition, hygiene, cooking preparation and fun.

Palestina is also working on new partnerships for the nonprofit. "One of my priorities is to tap into the culinary industry here in New Orleans, seeing how they can support us and we can support them," Palestina said.

Taking courses at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Palestina said, helped him have a different perspective when it came to the work of planning health-related programs. For example, he said, he's able to take into account all the barriers when helping different populations address their eating behaviors.

"Changing eating behaviors presents a unique challenge," Palestina said. "You can't approach this without understanding the factors that influence dietary patterns, and Tulane gave me the tools to assess that."

Palestina will share his work at The Cookbook Project with the American Public Health Association's annual meeting in November. [Click here](#) to read about his upcoming APHA presentation.