

THE TULANE HULLABALOO

Posse program helps under-served students Students from Los Angeles form a support system

By Caitlin Conley | Jan 29, 2010

Tulane welcomed its first group of Posse scholars this September, all of whom are from Los Angeles.

These students are part of a nationwide non-profit that aims to provide traditionally underserved and high-potential students with full scholarships, a tight-knit group of peers and university support to help them graduate from college.

The scholars were selected last January and met weekly in Los Angeles until school began. The Tulane Posse scholars said having an existing support group has been invaluable.

“One of my friends from home kept saying that everyone is really different, that it’s been really hard,” Posse scholar and Hullabaloo writer Erick Garcia said. “But I’ve already got my friends here, and they’ve got my back.”

Though the Foundation had its own rigorous application process, all the Tulane scholars first have to apply and be accepted at Tulane.

In 2008, more than 12,000 students applied for only 470 Posse openings across the country. By the time a team of Tulane administrators flew to Los Angeles for a day of interviews and evaluations, only 25 students remained in the running for Tulane’s scholarships.

The final evaluations were designed to highlight students’ intelligence and strengths in leadership and teamwork.

“We were able to really gauge their leadership skills,” said Faye Tydlaska, assistant vice president for enrollment management, who was part of the interview team. “We did group interviews, fun activities and micro-labs.”

At the end of the day, the Tulane team and Posse employees evaluated each student, made their decisions and called the selected students.

“When they told me, my first reaction was to cry, and I kept saying thank you,” Posse scholar Jasmin Hernandez said.

Hernandez, who is studying psychology and early childhood development, said she chose Tulane because she plans to teach in New Orleans after she graduates.

After being selected, the Tulane Posse scholars met weekly in Los Angeles until the team left for New Orleans in August. The meetings aimed to bond the students as a group before they got to campus.

“The stuff that you really wouldn’t want to discuss, we discussed,” Posse scholar Regina Popova said. “We talked about things that some friends never talk about.”

The scholars continue to meet each week, now led by faculty adviser and business school professor Kelly Grant, who said she has been thrilled by how well the scholars work with each other.

“I think they really support each other,” Grant said. “It can be daunting — making friends, learning the campus culture — and I think they’ve really come through for each other.”

The Posse scholars all said they knew their first semester at college would force them to grow and adapt, but the extent of their growth was not obvious until they headed home to Los Angeles for the winter break.

“Lots of my friends were still working the same jobs and still had the same friends,” Hernandez said. “They haven’t overcome the challenges that we have. They’ll do in a year what we did in a semester.”

In September, 11 new Posse scholars will arrive on campus. The current scholars said they are excited to welcome them to campus.

“We’ll be there for them as much as we can,” Posse scholar Johnny Saucedo said. “But they’ll still have their own group of friends.”