

MS-DRL grad represents Disaster Resilience Leadership in Alumni Association

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Max Palmer

Before Max Palmer became the first Master of Science in Disaster Resilience Leadership (MS-DRL) graduate to become a board member of the TSSW Alumni Association, he was a wildland firefighter in the Pacific Northwest.

“I would leave when the fire was put out, and all I could see was scorched earth,” Palmer said. “I could never imagine what happens behind the scenes as the next step – what happens to these marginalized populations who just lost everything? How quickly are they going to be able to get back on their feet?”

That curiosity about the long-term recovery system is what led Palmer to Tulane’s Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy (DRLA). He was looking for more than just an Emergency Management degree – he wanted to know what it would take to make his community more prepared for disaster, stronger in the face of climate emergencies, and less vulnerable to devastation. And he knew that New Orleans was the best place to do that.

“People look at New Orleans and Louisiana as the Super Bowl of emergency management. Learning about how Louisiana got the smallest voices to the table during coastal restoration efforts was extremely valuable,” Palmer said. “I learned a lot about community organizing, equitable disaster response, and inclusion during my MS-DRL.”

Now, Palmer is a Local Preparedness Coordinator at the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM), where he says he’s able to implement the knowledge he gained while at DRLA into accessible assistance programs. Right now, for example, Palmer is helping DHSEM develop an access and functional needs university for emergency managers in New Mexico.

Leveraging TSSW resources

Since joining DHSEM, Palmer has used Tulane’s extensive alumni network to find answers to difficult questions and share resources.

“I’ve reached out to quite a few DRLA alumni and did a lot of professional networking. Since getting my job in New Mexico, I have reached out and been able to share a bunch of best practices across state lines with other DRLA alumni doing great work in places like Portland and Colorado,” Palmer said. “My goal is to show DRLA alumni – and all TSSW alumni – that those social networks are there and help

them tap into them.”

That’s why Palmer joined TSSW’s Alumni Association. The first non-social worker to join the group, Palmer hopes to represent DRLA as a valuable part of the School of Social Work. Palmer says he wants to help the Alumni Association, which supports and promotes TSSW's programs and community, to evolve its career development programs.

“I decided to join the Alumni Association because it’s a place where you can have your voice heard,” Palmer said. “I’m really proud to have gotten my Master’s degree at Tulane, and I’m hoping to use my membership on the alumni board to be a champion for the DRLA. I want to make a little bit more noise about this amazing program.”

If you’re an alumnus looking to join the Alumni Association, you can do so [here](#).