

Two students receive Dr. King Student Leadership Award

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From left to right: Provost Robin Foreman, DSW student Karen Miller, Dean Susan Davies, MSW student Janae Dean, and Associate Provost/Chief Officer of Academic Excellence and Opportunity Anneliese Singh.

Tulane University has honored Master of Social Work (MSW) student Janae Dean and Doctor of Social Work (DSW) student Karen Miller with the Dr. King Student Leadership Award. The award honors students whose leadership and service embody Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision, Tulane's core values of academic excellence, collaborative engagement, and a welcoming community, and the School of Social Work's commitment to doing work that matters.

Janae Dean

“It’s an honor to have received the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom award. It means that others recognize my work and understand what I am trying to accomplish in my community. It means that I am on the right path,” said Dean.

Janae Dean is an online MSW student living in New Orleans. She says working at her practicum placement site, Covenant House New Orleans, has pushed her to bridge theory and practice – approaching service with cultural humility, understanding, and compassion. Her work with youth experiencing homelessness and navigating systemic trauma has taught her to model patience, challenge assumptions, and honor the dignity of every person she meets.

“Whether in clinical practice, advocacy, or leadership, I strive to challenge systems that perpetuate harm while offering compassion, dignity, and hope to those navigating them,” said Dean. “Like Dr. King, I believe that service is not about recognition, but about responsibility, to stand in the gap, to lead with love, and to remain committed to the long work of collective liberation.”

In addition to pursuing her MSW, Dean represents Tulane as a Track & Field athlete, setting program records for both the 800m indoor and outdoor in the 24-25 season. In 2024, she was named a Stephen Martin Scholar, honoring the legacy of Stephen Martin Sr., the first Black athlete to play a varsity sport in the Southeastern Conference. As an accomplished student-athlete, she knows consistency and good sportsmanship are essential to doing work that matters.

“You don’t need to have everything figured out to be an effective leader. What matters most is your willingness to listen, learn, and consistently show up,” Dean said. “Let the people and communities you serve guide you, especially when the work feels uncomfortable or goes unseen. Leadership rooted in service is relational and ongoing, and the most meaningful impact comes from doing the work with integrity, compassion, and accountability over time.”

Karen Miller

“Receiving the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Award is deeply humbling,” Miller said. “Dr. King’s legacy reminds us that freedom is not abstract; it is lived, protected, and advanced through consistent action. This award feels less like a personal achievement and more like a charge to continue doing work that centers justice, humanity, and courage.”

Karen Miller is a DSW student whose research centers women – particularly Black women – experiencing burnout from high-stress environments like the child welfare system. At her private practice, she serves predominantly women, many of whom shoulder the responsibilities of their families, workplaces, and communities.

Miller says she struggled for a long time to speak proudly out of fear of being judged or misunderstood due to her Texas dialect. Much of her clinical practice helps women like herself believe that they can be courageous, take up space, and show up fully as they are. She developed The Therapy Jar®, a therapeutic tool that creates intentional space for women to pause, process, and reconnect with themselves.

“Dr. King’s legacy reminds us that justice does not require perfection – it requires courage,” said Miller. “I honor that by using my voice to advocate for equity, to challenge harmful systems, and to center those whose experiences are often overlooked. Whether in clinical spaces, academic settings, or leadership roles, I choose authenticity over assimilation and service over silence.”

Like Dr. King, Miller is motivated by her Christian faith, her belief in justice and equity, and her desire to create a legacy for her children and grandchildren.

“Leadership is about making history quietly and consistently – so future generations inherit not just opportunity, but courage, integrity, and possibility,” she said.