Change is at the heart of the Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking at Tulane University. And, thanks to The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, there’s a lot of change afoot, indeed.

“The short story is that the Phi Kappa Phi Innovation Award made a tremendously positive impact for all of us at the Phyllis Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking – and beyond as well,” said the Taylor Center’s director and dean of the Tulane School of Architecture, Kenneth Schwartz.

A NEW HOME
Some of the $100,000 Innovation Award went to helping the Taylor Center move into a spacious new facility at Tulane.

“Our new facility is beautiful,” Heather Marinaro, department administrator, and Julia Lang, program manager, student programming, wrote in an email, “with an incredible view of campus and the city. Our new space is not only more conducive to student learning, but it is also a much better working environment for the staff.”

The classroom is better situated for learning, with a projector and screen, more storage space, and cords rigged for easy charging of devices. Taylor staff also have more room and light, benefitting collaboration.

“We are thrilled with the design of our new space,” Marinaro and Lang wrote.

THE CHANGEMAKER INSTITUTE
The Innovation Award is also helping with a redesign of another sort. The Changemaker Institute supports social entrepreneurs, but is being reconfigured to be a true incubator, with Phi Kappa Phi’s award facilitating a prototype year as they reshape the Institute’s mission.

“CI will not necessarily incubate social venture ideas, but it will incubate the student changemakers themselves by

“IT has been an incredible honor to receive the award,” wrote Heather Marinaro, department administrator, and Julia Lang, program manager, student programming, “and the staff at Phi Kappa Phi have been an absolute delight to work with.”
empowering students with the skills, networks, and tool kits to become and remain active change agents throughout their lives,” Marinaro and Lang wrote. “Our hope is that CI graduates will have a more clear pathway for their unique role in advancing social change in their identified issue area.”

Some of the past ventures who passed through the Changemaker Institute are: SHRI, formerly Humanure Power, which works to build community toilet blocks in India that convert human waste to energy that can be sold to pay for more toilets; Fund 17, a nonprofit that empowers micro-entrepreneurs in New Orleans; ImpACT, which offers free ACT test preparation to underserved New Orleans students; and Textbooks Change, which hopes to reduce student debt associated with buying textbooks.

CI offers three funding opportunities:

• The NewDay Social Innovation Challenge, up to $20,000 in seed funding to launch student ventures.
• The Victor Alvarez Spark Innovation Award, up to $2,500 to pursue a social venture idea through prototyping and testing.
• The Changemaker Catalyst Award, up to $1,500 to participate in an engaged learning experience.

The last award, Lang and Marinaro said, was directly supported by the Excellence in Innovation Award.

“We received an unprecedented number of applications last spring and, thanks to the award, we were able to support more students in attending conferences, funding unpaid internships, and participating in other experiences that help them identify their changemaking path,” Marinaro and Lang wrote.

CHANGEMAKERS IN RESIDENCE

There are also Changemakers in Residence reaping the benefits. Fifty students, including four undergraduate Changemakers in Residence, live together, acting as peer mentors and leaders in a living-learning environment.

“This year, a lot of freshmen in Paterson (House) became close friends because many of us shared common interests in creating change to social problems and became involved in the same organizing work,” said Sonya Lew, a sophomore studying sociology. “Some of the sophomores, especially the current Changemakers in Residence, were great resources in sharing information about the events and clubs that are geared toward our interests.”

COMMUNITY INNOVATOR’S CIRCLE

Taylor also expanded the Community Innovator’s Circle, a cohort of innovative community organizations that work with students participating in Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship programs at Tulane. GrowDat Youth Farm was an inaugural partner and continues to work with Taylor, but the center has added PlayBuild and unCommon Construction.

PlayBuild is a nonprofit that transforms underutilized urban spaces in New Orleans into kid-friendly places for play and learning.
“Through this partnership, PlayBuild will continue its existing relationship as the host site for the Fast 48 bootcamp, hold lectures on various topics such as the application of design thinking to K-12 education, engage with the Changemaker (Residential Learning Community) through the TIDES classes, and host internships for up to three undergraduate students throughout the year,” Marinaro and Lang wrote. PlayBuild will also pilot a community-based residency program to engage students in understanding social problems, building ventures, and sustaining a social enterprise.

unCommon Construction uses the home construction process to enhance learning and empower youth through apprenticeships, shop classes, and job placement and recruitment.

“uCC will offer service-learning placements for sixty undergraduate students, guest lectures in three classes of the SISE intro course, and provide internship opportunities to undergraduate and graduate students,” Marinaro and Lang wrote. “The classroom collaboration will allow students to use uCC as a living case study of a social enterprise and to develop their individual leadership.”

A LASTING IMPACT

Finally, among the Tulane community, Marinaro and Lang wrote that the Innovation award helped validate Taylor’s work to administrators, faculty, and staff. “Students and faculty were very impressed that Tulane won this prestigious national award,” Marinaro and Lang wrote. “In many ways, it helped validate the work we are doing while sparking interest across campus to learn more about Taylor and become more involved in our work.”

Taylor and its staff also raked in a slew of other awards and recognition this year.

• Laura Murphy, clinical associate professor, global community health and behavioral sciences, Tulane’s School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, and also a campus ChangeLeader for Ashoka U, won $5,000 from the Ashoka U Collaboration Fund to support cross-campus collaboration and field-building. She and Cheryl Kiser, of Babson College, will organize a writing retreat for social innovation researchers in 2018.

• Murphy; Alessandra Bazzano, assistant professor, Department of Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences; and Maille Faughnan, SISE instructor, shared an article reviewing evidence of human-centered design for public health outcomes with the Glasgow Conference on Social Innovation Research in September 2016.

• Shannon Blady, professor of practice, teacher preparation and certification program, Newcomb-Tulane College, co-presented “Teaching Teachers Social and Emotional Learning: A Ripple Effect of Kindness” at the International Bullying Prevention Association Conference.

• Rebecca Otten, assistant director, student programming, was a spotlight coach and an Ashoka U Commons coach, sharing best practices and operational strategies around building curriculum in social innovation and social entrepreneurship, sequencing a minor, connecting with staff across the U.S. and Haiti.

• Lang co-presented at the Ashoka U Exchange on “Catalyzing First Year Changemakers” and at the National Association of Colleges and Employers on the Taylor Your Life course, which applies methods and mindsets of design thinking to career development for undergraduate and graduate students. She is overseeing the scale of Taylor Your Life by supervising five staff sections of the class.
YOUR INVITATION TO APPLY
Deadline is December 12, 2017!

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