

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of the Reilly Center,

It's hard to believe how quickly this semester has passed —time truly flies when you're doing work that inspires you! Since stepping into the role of Director of the Reilly Center in February, we hit the ground running and haven't slowed down. I've had the privilege of meeting with more than 80 stakeholders—from Manship School faculty and LSU colleagues across campus, to community leaders and national civic engagement directors—to help shape the Reilly Center's new strategic direction and forge collaborations and partnerships.

As we chart new paths forward, these conversations have also been guided by the Reilly Center's original mission statement, adopted in 2000 and just as relevant 25 years later, to explore “meaningful ways to enhance and elevate public discourse at the local, state, and national levels,” by deploying our “unique academic assets in service of productive public discourse, reinforcing the school’s core democratic ideals of good government, good citizenship, and informed civic engagement.”

We are also leaning in to build upon these directives within the Manship School's existing strategic plan:

- Develop a civic leadership program affiliated with the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs
- Expand the capacity of the Public Policy Research Lab (PPRL) to take advantage of opportunities for public service and public opinion measurement through survey research
- Establish a premier speaker series featuring renowned communication and political thought leaders to share insights with the university and local community
- Partner with the Office of Research and Economic Development to attract increased extramural funding to address industry-specific questions

That spirit of collaboration is at the heart of the Common Ground Project, our new partnership with the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (PAR). From the upcoming Common Ground



Survey, which will measure polarization and common values across the state, to new programs like Pizza & Public Affairs and Civic Sips, we're creating spaces where students and citizens can come together to understand and reduce polarization in Louisiana, while promoting civil discourse and civic thought. We've been truly grateful for the positive response to our work and for the invitations from local media to share more about the Common Ground Project through television, radio, and print!

We're also proud to launch the Louisiana Energy Survey, led by Dr. Catherine Chen and supported through the Future Use of Energy in Louisiana (FUEL) initiative, exploring how Louisianans perceive and engage with our state's energy future.

As we look ahead, the Reilly Center remains committed to promoting dialogue rooted in curiosity, civility, and shared purpose. Thank you for supporting our mission to strengthen public discourse and advance an informed, engaged Louisiana.

Warm regards,

Michael DiResto

Director, Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs

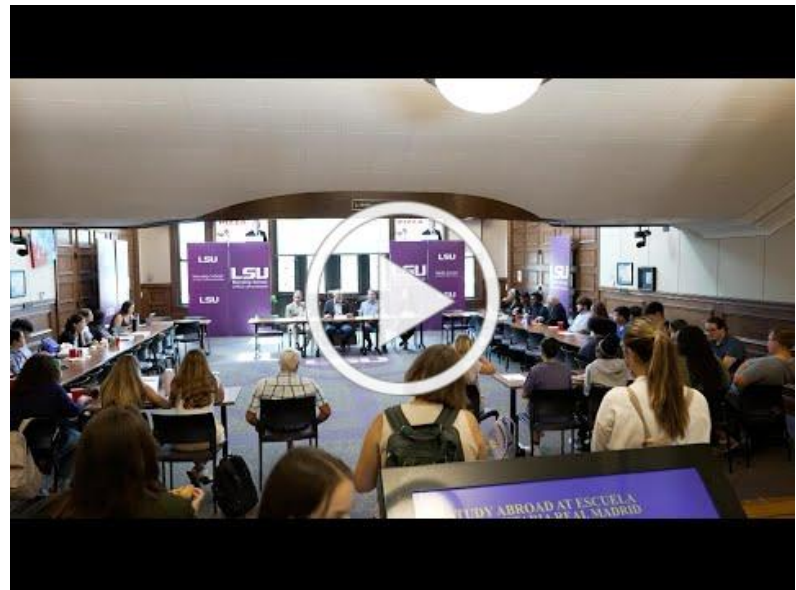
COMMON GROUND PROJECT

A partnership between the Reilly Center and PAR Louisiana

In response to rising polarization in Louisiana and across the country, the Common Ground Project, launched in August, brings together research, programming, and community engagement to help citizens and students communicate more constructively. Through this nonpartisan initiative, the Reilly Center's academic muscle and PAR's public policy expertise unite to foster civic trust, shared understanding, and meaningful conversation.

Key components include:

- Pizza & Public Affairs
- Civic Sips
- The Common Ground Survey



Check Out Our Guest Column in The Advocate

PIZZA & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

This monthly on-campus discussion series for LSU students features a guest speaker (such as a public official, civic leader, public affairs practitioner or expert on polarization), in a casual dialogue format over lunch. While each Pizza & Public Affairs event focuses on topics connected to the Manship School's four primary areas of study, speakers are also asked to be prepared to share with students how they have achieved successful policy or program outcomes by building coalitions and communicating in ways that bridge divides.

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Rep. Jack McFarland

In September, we kicked off Pizza & Public Affairs with an incredible conversation featuring State Rep. Jack McFarland, chairman of the Louisiana House Appropriations Committee, setting the tone for what this initiative is all about. With a packed room and plenty of pizza, students engaged in dialogue about policymaking, leadership, and finding common ground in a polarized environment.

McFarland encouraged students to hold firm beliefs but remain open to dialogue, reminding them that “you can have strong beliefs, but if you’re too strong in your convictions, you’ll be kicked out of the 'room where it happens'—and excluded from negotiations over practical solutions.”

A huge thank-you to Rep. McFarland for sharing his time and insight with our students.



Clay Young

In October, we welcomed Clay Young, Baton Rouge media personality, entrepreneur, and community leader, to speak with students about his career in media, entrepreneurship, and community impact. Young discussed the development of the new Inspiration Center in North Baton Rouge, noting how leaders from across party lines and administrations have supported the project—even if his “pitch” for it came from different perspectives. His message reinforced the value of collaboration and shared purpose in building stronger communities.

[Click here to learn more](#)

Liz Mangham

We wrapped up our final Pizza & Public Affairs of the semester with Liz Mangham, managing partner at Southern Strategy Group and one of Louisiana's top political professionals, who spoke with students about her career in politics, campaigns, and lobbying. Mangham shared her insights into the world of politics and how she brings people from across the aisle together to pass legislation. Mangham encouraged students and future public affairs practitioners to move beyond political preconceptions, dismantle barriers, and connect with one another on a



personal level.

We look forward to seeing students and faculty at our next Pizza & Public Affairs event in February!



CIVIC SIPS

This discussion series invites Louisiana citizens to join in casual but serious conversations about topics related to civic responsibility, media literacy, state policy issues and polarization's sources and remedies. Civic Sips launched this fall and was an incredible success, sparking lively conversations, thoughtful questions, and overwhelmingly positive feedback from students and community members alike. Participants shared perspectives on civic engagement, remedies for polarization, and the role of dialogue in strengthening Louisiana's civic culture.

"Let's cool things down," our event requested, and totally delivered!. ***Mark your calendars for our next Civic Sips on January 22, 2026!***



COMMON GROUND SURVEY

The Common Ground Survey is an upcoming opinion poll conducted by the Reilly Center's PPRL to measure polarization in Louisiana and identify areas of shared values among citizens.

Results coming soon!

PARTNERSHIPS

LOUISIANA ENERGY SURVEY

The Reilly Center and the PPRL are launching the Louisiana Energy Survey, led by Catherine Chen, Ph.D., and supported by the FUEL initiative. Backed by \$231,963 in funding, including \$100,000 from the Reilly Center for Energy Policy and Administration, the survey will explore Louisiana's energy future.

\$100,000 from the Institute for Energy Innovation, the project explores how Louisianans view the state's energy future, examining public perceptions, barriers to adoption, and the role of communication in shaping support for innovation.

This collaborative, statewide study bridges science, policy, and public understanding to help guide Louisiana's next chapter in energy.

Results coming soon!

LOUISIANA ENERGY RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: ENGAGING THE MEDIA

In October, the Reilly Center hosted an "Engaging the Media" panel as part of the LSU Center for Energy Studies' Louisiana Energy Research Symposium.

With energy issues like carbon capture and storage moving into the public spotlight, our conversation focused on how researchers can work effectively with journalists while maintaining credibility and clarity.

A special thank-you to our panelists—David Mitchell, environmental reporter for *The Advocate*, and Stephanie Malin, Public Affairs Manager at Dow—for offering insights on communicating with the media. Their guidance helped scholars from across Louisiana better understand how to share research in ways that inform, engage, and build trust.





TWENTY YEARS LATER: JOURNALISTS REFLECT ON COVERING HURRICANE KATRINA

In September, we welcomed journalists back to Baton Rouge to revisit one of the most defining moments in Gulf South history. Hosted in partnership with the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College, reporters who covered Hurricane Katrina in 2005 shared their frontline experiences and reflected on how the storm reshaped both journalism and their lives.

A special thank-you to LSU Manship School Professor Lisa Page for moderating the discussion and for originating this project through her senior journalism capstone course. We're grateful to our panelists for sharing their stories, and to the Honors College for providing such a beautiful setting. It was an evening of remembrance, reflection, and enduring responsibility in storytelling.





[Watch the Livestream](#)

MASTERING MEDIA: A WORKSHOP FOR LEADERS

Back in June, the Reilly Center collaborated with senior instructor and PR-area head Sadie Wilks to host a full-day, interactive media training workshop led by Manship alumna and seasoned media consultant Celeste Gehring. Designed for professionals, the program covered message development, interview skills, on-camera presence, and personalized coaching, with hands-on exercises and use of the Manship School's student media facilities. With Gehring's extensive experience at FOX Sports and CNN, the workshop offered Louisiana leaders a valuable opportunity to build confidence and strengthen their public-facing communications.



WHAT'S COMING NEXT

2026 JOHN BREAUX SYMPOSIUM

We're excited to share that the John Breaux Symposium is in the works! Coming your way in the Spring of 2026, so stay tuned for more details on the topic and speakers.

More to come soon—we can't wait to share what we're planning!

**COMING
SOON**
Stay Tuned!

INTERN SPOTLIGHT

We're excited to welcome three new faces to the Reilly Center team this semester: Dorene Hantzis, AnnMarie Bedard, and Grace Jones.

They've already hit the ground running, contributing to events, communications projects, and research efforts. We're so grateful for the energy and creativity they bring to our work, and we can't wait to see them continue to grow with us.



Dorene Hantzis

Dorene is a senior majoring in political communication with minors in applied statistics and leadership development. After graduation, she plans to take a gap year and pursue enriching opportunities

before attending law school, where she aspires to become a higher education Title IX and compliance attorney.



AnnMarie Bedard

AnnMarie is a senior majoring in political communication with a minor in public affairs. After graduation, AnnMarie, who is originally from Northern

Virginia, plans to take a break to gain political experience before attending law school.



Grace Jones

Grace is a junior majoring in political communication with a minor in political science. She spent half of her life living abroad in South Korea and Norway, and after graduation,

hopes to study public international law in hopes of working in global affairs.

SUPPORT THE REILLY CENTER

If you're inspired by any of our projects or would like to support initiatives like Civic Sips or the Common Ground Survey, please reach out directly to Michael DiResto at michaeldiresto@lsu.edu.

To make a gift, use the link below. When it asks for designation(s), scroll down to the Manship School of Mass Communication and, under that, select the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs Fund.

**Give
Now**

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