

Convocation provides 'jazzy' welcome to the Class of 2027

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Riptide leans in for fist bumps and high fives during President Michael A. Fitts' Convocation for first-year students, held yesterday in the Avron B. Fogelman Arena in the Devlin Fieldhouse. (Photo by Sabree Hill)

Anyone standing on the corner of Freret Street and McAlister Way on the sunny afternoon of Sunday, August 20, could hear joyous echoes of "Roll Wave!" and brass band music emanating from the Avron B. Fogelman Arena in the Devlin Fieldhouse. The Tulane community welcomed the incoming class of 2027 with music, cheers and a hullabaloo of excitement.

The 2023 President's Convocation for New Students is the ceremonial welcome for new students and is the first of many beloved Tulane traditions. This year, Convocation was a memorable milestone within [Hullabaloo Hello](#), a new, vibrant orientation program for incoming students. Convocation began — as Tulane Commencement begins — with the procession of the gonfalons, which represent all 10 of Tulane's schools. The Tulane University Marching Band performed the Tulane Alma Mater as students sang along. Tulane alumnus and renowned jazz musician Dr. Michael White led the Original Liberty Jazz Band as they strolled into the arena ahead of a procession of the university's leaders and deans. President Michael A. Fitts hyped up the students and gave out some fist bumps along the way.

Tulane senior Akira Shelton emceed the ceremony, welcoming the new students and introducing university leadership to the incoming class. Anneliese Singh, chief diversity officer and associate provost for faculty development and diversity, delivered the Tulane Land Acknowledgement before Fitts addressed the Class of 2027.

"You are quite literally at the start of something new: new beginnings, new friends and new opportunities," Fitts said.

He rhetorically asked students why they chose Tulane. Perhaps it's the world-class faculty, the groundbreaking research, or the life-saving discoveries, he suggested.

Or maybe another reason that can only be felt at Tulane: "It's our culture," Fitts said.

"And there is no better way to think about that culture and how you should approach Tulane than to think about the music of this city," Fitts added, referring to the fact that jazz music was created in New Orleans, R&B grew in the city, and the city created its own hip-hop sound.

Keeping with the musical theme, Fitts likened Tulane's strengths to one of the city's most iconic festivals — the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival.

"The [Tulane Class of 2027](#), like Jazz Fest, comes from all over the world, representing 49 states and 34 different countries," Fitts said, highlighting that members of the class represent many diverse perspectives, backgrounds and ideas.

“When you all come together, like Jazz Fest, you move multitudes and inspire something new.”

And just like the festival, Tulane also has a relational culture, sharing a common experience that bonds people together and builds a strong community, he said.

Students will have opportunities to try new things, step out of their comfort zones, and learn to find and refine their voices at Tulane, he said.

“And music, particularly jazz music, only succeeds when the musicians learn to listen and respond to each other,” Fitts said. “The power of jazz is the balance between expression and attention. Musicians and Tulanians have to learn to listen even when it’s hard to hear.”

Noting that listening requires engagement and investment, Fitts said students will learn more about each other and their commonalities. He encouraged them to discuss difficult topics, too, but to offer respect, understanding and grace while doing so.

“That engagement is the genius of education.”

He advised students to start conversations with others as they can create impactful, lifelong connections and possibilities during their time at Tulane.

“I can’t wait to meet you, I can’t wait to hear what you have to say, and I’d love to watch you change the world. Welcome to Tulane University, and welcome home,” he concluded.

Rounding out the musical vibe, the Tulane University Marching Band performed a jubilant interlude before [Provost Robin Forman](#) delivered remarks emphasizing the value of a liberal arts education. Forman then introduced university leadership and deans on stage, including [Mollye Demosthenidy](#), the new dean of Newcomb-Tulane College (NTC), who also addressed the class. In keeping with a tradition at Tulane Convocation, Dean Demosthenidy challenged the class of 2027: how can we do more, and be more, for each other and the world. The challenge echoes a motto known to all Tulanians, “Not for oneself, but for one’s own.”

As a send-off, Fitts asked students to grab their provided second-line umbrellas and explained that students are encouraged to decorate them and bring them to their Commencement ceremony — the culmination of their time at Tulane. He led an

ecstatic “Roll Wave!” cheer before students second lined behind Dr. White’s band onto McAlister Way, towards the Hullabaloo Hello block party – the perfect end to a memorable first week at Tulane.





Students wave second-line umbrellas, which they are encouraged to keep and decorate throughout their Tulane years. (Photo by Sabree Hill)

Anneliese Singh (right), associate provost for faculty development and diversity/chief diversity officer, second-lines with a member of The Original Liberty Jazz Band, as Michael Cunningham (left), associate provost for graduate and postdoctoral studies, looks on. (Photo by Sabree Hill)