Commencement student speaker realizes long-held dream

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Corley A. Miller served as Tulane University’s student commencement speaker for 2017. Her address was based on ideas proposed in the book ‘Outliers’: “What do your 10,000 hours at Tulane look like?” (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Before ever setting foot on Tulane’s campus, two things sparked Corley A. Miller’s interest — being a resident adviser and being the student commencement speaker (at least in theory, if not in practice).

On May 20, Miller accomplished both goals, capping off years at Tulane as a resident adviser with a speech delivered to the class of 2017 at the Unified Commencement Ceremony in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

“From the time that I went to my brother’s graduation from college — Binghamton University — four years ago and saw the student commencement speaker, that idea stuck with me in the fact that
that student gave a great speech, and was able to convey how much they learned and appreciated from their four years there,” Miller said.

Miller earned a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in English and Environmental Studies. The Farmingville, New York, native’s speech was based on Malcolm Gladwell’s 10,000-hour rule — the belief that 10,000 hours of practicing something will make you a master at that subject — as suggested in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*. Miller posed the question, “What do your 10,000 hours at Tulane look like?”

As a first-year student, Miller pushed past the boundaries of self-doubt to become more active in campus life.

“That change was realizing that personally, for me, I would have been uncomfortable anywhere if I didn’t have [campus and community] involvement. I knew I had to make that ‘home’ for myself,” Miller said.

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*Corley A. Miller*

This embracing of uncertain situations led to lasting friendships and revealed Miller's inner leader. From there, Miller’s achievements have included working as head writer and producer of an original student-run stage production, “Hers, Theirs, Ours,” serving as an Undergraduate Student Government director and committee chair organizing student health initiatives, and founding Tulinked, a program that pairs first-year students with campus leaders.

After commencement, Miller plans to pursue a career in creative writing.

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