

Tulane University announces start date for fall 2020 semester

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Tulane University's fall 2020 semester will begin on Wednesday, Aug. 19, with the return of on-ground teaching, learning living and working. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Tulane University President Michael Fitts [announced today](#) that the university's fall 2020 semester will begin on Wednesday, Aug. 19, with the return of on-ground teaching, learning living and working. The semester, which will begin five days earlier than originally scheduled, will continue through Tuesday, Nov. 24, with classes ending right before Thanksgiving. This accelerated semester is intended to reduce travel in order to promote health and safety.

Six committees of university leaders, faculty, staff and student representatives have been working for weeks to provide recommendations to map the path forward to resume on-site classes and operations for the fall of 2020.

Tulane University

“Their deliberations have been guided by two fundamental principles,” Fitts said. “First, and foremost, the health and safety of the Tulane community. Secondly, the continuation of our educational, research, and clinical mission is critical to preparing the leaders of a post-COVID-19 world, as well as continuing our current battle against this global pandemic.”

Fitts emphasized that planning for the fall 2020 semester is still in progress and will continue through the summer with feedback from the Tulane community. He added that the university’s plans are contingent on local, state and federal directives and could change based on these.

“The university’s effort to protect the health and safety of returning Tulane students, faculty and staff is aided by the fact that we have access to some of the best medical and public health minds in the world at Tulane,” Fitts said. “We are also making decisions about actions that will occur several months in the future, when testing and public health protections are expected to continue to improve,” he said.

The university’s plan includes the goal of testing individuals as they return to campus as well as frequent testing during the school year. Tulane will also implement a university-wide policy of social distancing in campus activities. On-campus housing will be de-densified with some off-campus single room options available. An on-campus infirmary will also be established to quarantine and care for ill or test-positive students.

Classrooms will also be adjusted to reduce density, and remote teaching and learning options will be offered. Face coverings, social distancing, plexiglass shields and hand sanitizers in classrooms and public areas will contribute to creating a safe learning environment. Tulane employees will follow a similar pattern of social distancing, and, where appropriate, continue to work remotely.

“We are grateful that our financial position is such, at this time, that we are able to undertake these efforts and bring back our full contingent of dedicated employees, who are so central to our success,” Fitts said.

Although much of Tulane’s planning is focused on health, Fitts said that university leaders have not lost sight of safeguarding Tulane’s unique relational culture.

“As we prepare to welcome students back to campus in fall, we are also planning for opportunities to connect with peers and faculty to develop those bonds that are such an important part of Tulane life,” he said.

While planning a return to campus is complex, Fitts said it is the exact type of challenge for which Tulane was created.

“We were established to combat an epidemic – the seasonal bouts of yellow fever that devastated coastal regions like ours. We triumphed over that challenge and more than a century and a half later were confronted by Hurricane Katrina, from which we emerged a stronger, wiser, more resilient community. We draw on this history, experience and knowledge, as well as our collective will to meet the challenge of COVID-19 today.”