

President Fitts welcomes historic Class of 2023, challenges students to ‘think different’

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Members of the Original Liberty Jazz Band play as Tulane's new class of first-year students gather near McAlister Auditorium on Convocation Day, Aug. 23, 2020.
(Photo by Sally Asher)

The Class of 2023 filled McAlister Auditorium for the President's Convocation Friday, Aug. 23. Students were greeted by warm welcomes from New Student Orientation leaders, the Tulane University Marching Band, faculty, staff and other members of the Tulane community.

Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band kicked off Convocation, ushering in Tulane's deans, President Mike Fitts and his cabinet, with Fitts showing off his school spirit with a few dance moves as the procession made its way to the stage.

[Satyajit Dattagupta](#), vice president of enrollment management and dean of admission, was first to take the stage and welcome the class with a few statistics. The class, he noted, is historic.

"We received 42,000 applications for admission for 1,800 spots. More applications than Tulane has ever received in its history. You are the most selective, the most diverse and the most global class in the history of Tulane."

Dattagupta shared that the most popular names in the class are Julia, Sarah, Matthew and William and recognized that three students were celebrating their birthdays.

He noted that Tulane, "can transform your life and I cannot wait to see how this journey goes for all of you." Before introducing President Fitts, Dattagupta shared that a student who graduated from Tulane two years ago wrote a blog listing her top 10 reasons why she thinks Tulane is special – and President Fitts was one of them.

"He is someone that truly cares about undergraduate students and their experience," Dattagupta said, and reminded the class not to be surprised when they see Fitts on campus shaking hands, giving hugs or high-fives.

Fitts then took the stage and addressed the Class of 2023 by first saying, "I don't want to just welcome you to Tulane, I want to welcome you home." He reminded students that the Tulane community is family and their family also includes the city of New Orleans.

"As a community, we prize both our many points of diversity and our many points of commonality," he said. He reassured students that whether they are first-generation students or are a part of a long-line of Tulanians, or from a different country, they belong at Tulane.

"You have earned your place here," he said. "Remember, Tulane does not make mistakes."

He encouraged students to "think different" and referenced how Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, credited a college course in calligraphy - a course that he didn't

deem important when he took it - for inspiring the elegance of Apple.

“That innovative thinking should be at the core of your education at Tulane.”

Fitts also noted how a group of Tulanians’ innovative thinking resulted in them winning NASA’s nation-wide competition, the “Big Idea Challenge.” The goal was to figure out a way to send bigger payloads to the space station in more compact shuttles.

The students, from backgrounds in economics, physics and architecture, came up with a new shuttle design that NASA had never seen.

“Never hesitate to try something new. If you don't succeed the first time, know that your effort and attitude will ultimately define your success,” he urged.

And in the vein of trying new things, Fitts left students with a challenge of his own – find a new adventure.

“Seek out something different: Pack a picnic lunch and head out to The Fly, check out a Tulane-Aspen Institute speaker event, or volunteer for Outreach Tulane.”

He then asked students to post their photos on Instagram by September 20th, and tag Fitts’ account, [@fittstagramtu](#), with a caption of what they tried and learned.

“I’ll repost and I’ll choose five winners to take to dinner at one of New Orleans’ best restaurants — my treat,” he said.

Fitts then concluded with sharing a unified “Roll Wave!” with the class.

To read President Fitts' full speech, [click here](#).

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Tulane President Mike Fitts