

New students challenged at unique Convocation to contemplate their 'one wild and precious life'

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This year's President's Convocation may have had a different look due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it still provided the same warm and excited welcome for the 1,800 new Tulane students who make up the Class of 2024.

Traditionally, Convocation is held in McAlister Auditorium the day before fall classes begin. This year, it was held over a span of four days, Aug. 11-14. There were several viewing sessions of the virtual event which were held in the Avron B. Fogelman Arena in the Devlin Fieldhouse. This historic Tulane setting allowed the university to accommodate small groups of students in a socially distanced manner.

Convocation was entirely in a video format projected on massive screens for students to watch. The video began with Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band — staying true to how the traditional, in-person ceremony usually kicks off — and a procession of the university's gonfalons representing each academic discipline. Then the Tulane Choir accompanied by the Tulane University Marching Band performed the alma mater.

First to greet the Class of 2024 on video was Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Undergraduate Admission Satya Dattagupta, who stated that things this year may have gone off-course, but one thing has gone right.

"Tulane chose you, and you chose Tulane."

Dattagupta listed facts and figures about the new class, the most "academically accomplished, most diverse, and most selective class in the history of Tulane." He highlighted that 9% of the class are international students with the top countries represented being China, India and Panama.

Dattagupta shared that he can relate to the students far from home as he, too, was once an international student who moved from India to attend college in the United States. This move eventually led to his career path to Tulane. The university, he

said, will “profoundly change your life.”

“Whether you’re from Mumbai or Metairie, Boston or Beijing, right here, right now, is where your future begins as part of the Tulane family.”

After Dattagupta’s remarks, President Michael Fitts welcomed the class to their “new home” and then quickly posed the question, “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

Fitts said that last year the class was tasked with writing an admission essay about why Tulane was the right fit for them.

“And even though it was only a few months ago, the world in which you chose Tulane is different now and may be changed forever.”

He said the current state of the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic is “all uncharted territory,” acknowledging that while the pandemic continues, a national reckoning is also occurring regarding systemic racism and inequality.

“It is the beginning of hard conversations and much-needed change, here at Tulane, as well as around the world.”

Although many things are new and evolving, the Class of 2024 is equipped to handle it because they have already witnessed “seismic changes” such as technology, historic elections, economic collapse and the rise of global awareness, Fitts said.

“So, while the rest of us are trying to make sense of this new chaos, you’ve already adapted. Change is already who you are.”

He emphasized that Tulane was born during the fight against the yellow fever pandemic, and now university researchers and doctors are leading the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The students embarking on their education at Tulane will be doing so in new ways that protect their health and that of the community as they wear masks, social distance and more.

“You do not know if your classmate is a cancer survivor, if your professor has a heart condition, or if a staff member is caring for elderly parents at home. It’s up to all of us to protect every one of us. It’s right there in Tulane’s motto: Not for one’s self, but for one’s own.”

Fitts closed out his speech by asking students to rethink the question “Why Tulane?” from their admission essay. He said he hoped students’ answers evolve throughout their time at the university.

“You’ve got one wild and precious life. What it looks like is up to you.”

Provost Robin Forman and Newcomb-Tulane College Dean Lee Skinner followed Fitts’ remarks with Forman discussing the role and importance of a well-rounded education that Tulane provides, and Skinner challenging students to “be amazed, be confused, be engaged.”

Fitts ended the ceremony by asking students to look at the back of their Tulane-themed Mardi Gras beads placed at their seats. Students who saw a QR code sticker on the back of their beads are invited to join Fitts for a virtual brunch next month.

“I will deliver all of you a delicious meal from one of my favorite restaurants here in the city, and we will meet up on Zoom to enjoy some great food and conversation.”

Fitts also invited students to use their umbrella, also placed at their seats, to join in on the Tulane tradition of a second-line.

“So, grab that umbrella and open it up. Class of 2024, your future starts right here. Roll Wave!”

To watch the Convocation video, [click here](#).

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President Michael Fitts

Before students arrive, Tulane accessories, including a second-line umbrella, are placed on the bleachers of the Avron B. Fogelman Arena in the Devlin Fieldhouse. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Students enter a darkened Fogelman Arena for the Convocation ceremony. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Socially distanced and wearing masks, students wait for the ceremony to begin. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Chloe Chace from London checks her phone before silencing it at the start of the event. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A performance of the alma mater by the Tulane Chorus accompanied by the Tulane University Marching Band welcomes students at the start of the virtual celebration. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Larger-than-life video versions of Newcomb-Tulane College Dean Lee Skinner, Provost Robin Forman, Tulane President Michael Fitts and Vice President of Enrollment Management and Dean of Admission Satyajit Dattagupta are introduced to the Class of 2024. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Through video and photography of campus life, the celebration highlights various opportunities awaiting the new Tulanians. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

With second-line umbrellas bouncing, New Student Orientation Leaders (aka Wave Leaders) set the tone for the semester ahead as the ceremony concludes. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)