

President's Excellence Awards honor dedication and commitment

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With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and multiple hurricane threats, including a direct hit from Zeta, 2020 was one of the most challenging years in the nearly 187-year history of Tulane University. In recognition of the extraordinary effort by the Tulane community during these most difficult times, President Michael Fitts has honored more than 60 individuals and two dozen departmental teams with the 2020 President's Excellence Awards.

"Who could have imagined that we could do all of this?" said Fitts. "But people worked tirelessly and found ways to adapt. I am in sheer awe of the inventiveness and agility that allowed us to have an on-ground, on-campus academic experience — and positioned Tulane as a model for what coming back on ground successfully could look like."

Throughout the year, the Tulane community has stepped up in bold and innovative ways, handling the uncertainty and adapting to changing protocols and situations while continuing to support the university's educational and research mission to "make our community and world better."

With the year drawing to a close, Fitts decided to acknowledge the award recipients in a special way. By courier, over a three-day period, from Sunday, Dec. 6, to Tuesday, Dec. 8, the honorees were presented with cash prizes and Tulane memorabilia delivered to their homes.

"This has not been your average fall semester, or your average year," said Fitts. "These awards go to individuals and teams who have gone above and beyond in

their service to Tulane University during a most challenging and unprecedented time.”

In the video [announcing the awards](#), Fitts noted that staff members and faculty had to reinvent how they did their jobs. “Tulanians did what they do best,” he said. “You adapted. You connected. You served. You discovered. You innovated. You planned.”

This outstanding work was accomplished with “renewed determination this year,” said Fitts. “2020 has not been easy, but it made one thing crystal clear: Tulane matters more than ever.”

Erica Woodley, dean of students at Tulane, is one of the individual recipients of the award.

“This year has been one big professional challenge,” said Woodley. “The thing that got me through was having great colleagues and people who, when you’re feeling down, pick you up and push you forward.”

She added, “The way that our students have responded gives me hope, not only for Tulane’s future but for the future of our country.”

Ana Lopez, another individual award recipient, said, “One of the things that made me proud about Tulane is our resilience. It’s faculty and staff and students. It’s not just one sector. It’s everybody. Everybody has put in an incredible amount of work.”

Lopez, associate provost for faculty affairs, is also a professor in the Department of Communication in the School of Liberal Arts and director of the Cuban and Caribbean Studies Institute at the Stone Center for Latin American Studies.

Her year began with arranging for students studying abroad to return to the United States as the coronavirus spread internationally. Then all Tulane instruction moved online in March, presenting numerous challenges.

In order for students to be able to return safely to campus for the fall semester, a comprehensive plan of rigorous COVID testing, social distancing, mask-wearing and other safety protocols, along with enhanced learning technology, was implemented.

Students have been “so thankful for the fact that we were able to come back in person this fall,” said Lopez. “They have had to make significant sacrifices for us to be able to do this.”

A [2020 President’s Excellence Awards webpage](#) includes photos and names of all the recipients.