

Webinars provide details on Tulane's return to normal

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A faculty/staff webinar provided the university update following Hurricane Ida. The webinar, which took place on Sept. 10, is now available online. A student/parent webinar is also available to watch.

In two recent webinars, President Michael Fitts provided the university community with updates on the resumption of normal operations at Tulane following Hurricane Ida.

Tulane's Downtown campus is now open to faculty, students and research staff. The National Primate Research Center in Covington is also open. Buildings on the Uptown campus will reopen for on-site work on Sept. 20 and for in-person classes on Sept. 27. Students will move into residence halls between Friday, Sept. 24, and Sunday, Sept. 26.

While Hurricane Ida and the resulting loss of power throughout the city prompted closure of Tulane campuses, the storm caused far less damage to Tulane and New Orleans than it did in other parishes and communities. The city and campuses were also spared catastrophic flooding.

In the webinar for faculty and staff members, President Fitts thanked everyone for their resilience and patience while the campus was secured and repaired after the storm. During a time when many members of the university's workforce were dealing with their own home damages, interruptions in child care, connectivity issues and numerous other challenges, Fitts said they stepped up to the plate and enabled the university to return more quickly than had been predicted. Dedicated faculty and staff also inspired the student body to return as quickly as possible as they anticipate the return to in-person learning, living and work.

"I've heard from so many students and faculty about their desire to get back, to ... undertake the educational mission that is really critical to what we are and who we are at Tulane University," Fitts said.

“I’m so proud of this community and how it’s responded, obviously the last year and a half with COVID, and now with Ida,” Fitts said. “ ... I have to have a shout-out to the staff who’ve done an extraordinary job in keeping both this campus and this community safe during this period ... It really is a sign of the spirit of this university.”

After brief updates about the state of the city, Fitts reminded employees that the university’s reopening date took into consideration factors such as power availability, which is mostly restored around New Orleans, the number of faculty and staff who have returned after evacuation, and the overwhelming number of students who are eager to return to in-person learning.

Until the restarting of in-person classes on Sept. 27, faculty and staff may eat free at The Commons Sept. 20-24. They may also charge electronic devices there or at the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life. Meantime, Downtown Tulane employees may eat lunch free in the Hutchinson Building cafeteria this week through Sept. 17 and from Sept. 20 to 24. Remote teaching space is also available for faculty who need it.

COVID-19 testing will continue for faculty and staff as well, starting on Sept. 20 on the Uptown campus. Testing availability is already underway for Downtown faculty and staff.

Additional updates were provided by Patrick J. Norton, senior vice president and chief operating officer; Robin Forman, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost; Jonathan Small, associate vice president for Human Resources & Institutional Equity; and Scott Tims, assistant vice president, Campus Health.

Questions from webinar viewers included the [criteria for Tulane’s hurricane-relief grants](#); on-campus child care availability, which resumed Downtown this week and will resume Uptown on Sept. 27; shuttle service, which resumes Sept. 20; and parking, which resumes at Diboll Parking Garage on Sept. 20 and elsewhere on the Uptown campus on Sept. 27.

[VIDEO: Watch the faculty/staff webinar here.](#)

Fitts began the webinar for students and parents, which followed the faculty and staff webinar later in the evening of Friday, Sept. 10, by stating how much he missed seeing everyone and all of the usual activity of the campus. He continued by acknowledging it is a very anxious time for students but that he admired students’

attitudes throughout all of this.

“Thank you for all that you’ve done — you really responded to this magnificently,” Fitts said.

He noted the students’ handling of sheltering in place during the storm as well as when they were relocated to Houston afterward.

“I’ve never seen more collaboration and support for each other,” he said. “The level of support for one another, the good cheer, the camaraderie —it was really inspiring to me, and it says everything I think about Tulane University.”

He also acknowledged that staff, including Campus Services, Student Affairs, Sodexo workers and hundreds of others, have done an extraordinary job in helping to bring the campus back to life.

Fitts moved on to the academic schedule for next few weeks, including announcing an accelerated fall break that will be held from Thursday, Sept. 23, through Sunday, Sept. 26.

Fitts said the schedule to return occurred more quickly than originally expected due to the fact that, initially, it was not known how long it would take for power to be restored in New Orleans. He explained that the loss of power and basic services throughout the city convinced leadership to relocate students who had sheltered in place for the storm, including on-campus and off-campus undergraduate and graduate/professional students — to Houston. The majority of students who relocated to Houston have returned to their hometown while some 700, mostly international students, will remain there until returning to New Orleans for in-person classes.

Fitts said that if there are situations where a student or faculty member is unable to return to on-ground classes by Sept. 27, the university will be sensitive and accommodating.

Patrick Norton said that the damage assessment and recovery team has assessed the residence halls, which were largely untouched or had very little impact. He also noted the same for academic spaces. Residence hall spaces will be ready for students to move in by Sept. 24, and academic spaces will be ready for on-ground learning on Sept. 27. He emphasized that spaces will be in the same form or

function prior to Hurricane Ida.

Robin Forman highlighted the academic calendar changes for the fall 2021 semester and articulated that deadlines for students, including the opportunity to make changes to their class schedule, will be extended. Forman also mentioned that the university has identified spaces on the Downtown campus and near the Uptown campus [for students to access Wi-Fi](#) during the online learning period.

Dean of Students Erica Woodley, who has been staying in Houston with relocated students, said that there are about 700 students still there, and she is grateful the university was able to provide students with the space to stay until they can return safely to New Orleans. Woodley emphasized the need for off-campus students to fill out the [Off-Campus Hurricane Ida Return Survey](#) so the Office of Student Affairs can be aware of and help those students whose residences may be uninhabitable at this time.

Woodley mentioned that the office has already processed more than 1,000 requests for emergency student aid and will continue to process requests as quickly as possible.

[VIDEO: Watch the students and parents webinar here.](#)

Scott Tims provided expectations of health guidelines on campus when students return. Tims said that students are asked to take a COVID-19 test at least 72 hours before they return, and that students should report their results through the Campus Health patient portal. Students will also be required to wear masks indoors and to be tested again once they return to campus. The Tulane COVID-19 Testing Centers will reopen to students on Sept. 20. Tims said that the university's testing program frequency will change beginning Sept. 27, with all residential students required to test twice a week, all off-campus undergraduate students required to test weekly, and all graduate and professional students required to test twice per month.

Questions were asked regarding campus events that will be rescheduled; details on efforts being made to bring campus back to life for students to enjoy; if packages will be available for pickup when students return, which they will; and if shuttles and transportation will also be available for students' return, which they will.