

President Fitts hails unprecedented success and achievements

September 01, 2023 9:00 AM Barri Bronston
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President Michael A. Fitts delivers the State of the University address in the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall at the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life. He highlighted some of Tulane's recent successes in his speech. (Photo by Sabree Hill)

Tulane University President Michael A. Fitts never misses a chance to celebrate the excellence of Tulane, and this week he did just that, highlighting an extraordinary year of achievement among students, faculty and staff as part of his annual State of the University address.

Fitts, now in his 10th year as president, delivered speeches on the uptown and downtown campuses Thursday and the Tulane National Primate Research Center in Covington Wednesday, proclaiming that Tulane is “stronger than ever before.”

He dubbed the 2022-23 academic year as “the Year of the Green Wave,” recounting one triumph after the other and lauding the school’s dedicated staff and world-class faculty for its stellar work in research, admissions, construction, finances, fundraising and athletics, including the football team’s stunning victory in this year’s Goodyear Cotton Bowl.

“Tulane University is at the precipice of something special — something unique amidst the landscape of higher education,” Fitts told an enthusiastic crowd of staff and faculty assembled in Hutchinson Auditorium, and later that day, in the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall of the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life.

“And at the very center of our incomparable impact is a culture personified by every Tulanian in this room — a compassionate, close-knit family of students, faculty, staff and friends.”

Fitts framed Tulane’s relational culture by likening it to physics, with the pulse of energy, high frequencies and complex waveforms combining to create the magic that defines the university.

“Every relational moment brings our waves closer together — whether you’re crafting and leading world-class move-in and orientation programs, challenging your students and co-workers to collaborate in new, innovative ways or simply being there, day to day, for a colleague.”

Fitts devoted a chunk of his speech to artificial intelligence, saying it “has the power to not only improve and save lives but multiply Tulane’s academic potential and accelerate our research timelines.”

He said Tulane’s leadership team is taking proactive steps to harness the promise of what could be the most powerful engine of technological change in the last century. He said the new Connolly Alexander Institute for Data Science received a \$12.5 million gift that will position Tulane as a leader in data pedagogy.

“Historic Tulane research strengths such as infectious diseases, the Gulf South, health equity, law, the environment and brain health have and will always be at the

center of what we do,” Fitts said, “and our aim is to use AI and data-informed pedagogy to shorten our wavelengths as Tulanians address the most profound issues of our time across these disciplines.”

Among the other highlights of Tulane’s many successes, Fitts noted that:

- By the end of the fiscal year, Tulane will have garnered over \$200 million in external grant funding.
- Just over 10% of the current freshman class are first-generation students, and more than 30% are students of color, the result of various initiatives to build a more equitable, diverse and inclusive campus.
- Tulane’s financial outlook continues to be strong. The university has maintained a balanced budget for the last eight years, has doubled its endowment, and through the “Only the Audacious” campaign, hit the \$1.5 billion mark – “well over any figure in the history of Tulane fundraising,” Fitts said.
- The physical transformation of Tulane is at an all-time high, both on the uptown and downtown campuses, and by the end of the next academic year, 11 new or renovated buildings will have been brought online. They include the new and modern Lake and River Residence Halls and the Small Family Collaboration Hub, which opened this year to students, and Steven and Jann Paul Hall, the future home of the School of Science and Engineering. Downtown plans are well underway and include new graduate student housing, renovations to Hutchinson Memorial Building and the eventual transformation of the iconic Charity Hospital into the centerpiece for Tulane’s downtown footprint.
- The renewal of the Tulane National Primate Research Center’s NIH P-5-1 Base Grant of five years and \$46.8 million. It is Tulane’s longest and largest continuously running grant, marking over 60 years of funding for the university.

While life at Tulane could not be brighter in terms of research, construction and fundraising, Fitts said, “We must never lose sight of what we love most about this institution: each other. The state of Tulane University is bright, electric and exhilarating — but the spirit of Tulane endures through challenges, accomplishments and generations of Tulanians.”

Fitts concluded his remarks with one of his favorite actions as president – the bestowing of staff and faculty awards. This year’s winners are:

President’s EDI Excellence Award

Charvi Greer, PhD, deputy athletic director, student senior woman administrator, Tulane Athletics

Spirit of Tulane Award

Garry Rolland, facilities services supervisor, Campus Operations

Darren Hayes, manager, campus engagement and executive communications, University Communications and Marketing

Robyn Kiper, associate director, University Financial Aid

Jeffrey Crosby, assistant manager of animal care, Tulane National Primate Research Center

Leslie Tate, communications and outreach manager, Tulane National Primate Research Center

Dr. Xuebin Qin, professor in the Division of Comparative Pathology, Tulane National Primate Research Center

Cyndi Trygg, lab specialist technician, Tulane National Primate Research Center

Spirit of Tulane Team Award

Institutional Planning and Budget Team

Dr. Di Tian, associate professor of pathology, and the COVID-19 testing team, School of Medicine

The Office of the University Registrar

The Breeding Colony Team, Tulane National Primate Research Center

Fitts typically announces undergraduate and graduate teaching awards at Commencement, but inclement weather at the 2023 graduation cut the ceremony short, forcing a delay in the announcements. Those award winners are:

Suzanne and Stephen Weiss Presidential Fellows

D. Jelagat Cheruiyot, PhD, professor of practice in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, School of Science and Engineering, and the Kylene and Brad

Beers Professor of Social Entrepreneurship, Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking

Allison Emmerson, PhD, associate professor, Department of Classical Studies, School of Liberal Arts

President's Award for Excellence in Graduate and Professional Teaching

Katherine Andrinopoulos, PhD, associate professor and director of doctoral programs at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

Kris Lane, PhD, professor and chair of the History Department, School of Liberal Arts

"Since the beginning of my tenure in 2014, we've laid a foundation for continued progress, and our strategy for tomorrow is in full swing."

Tulane President Michael A. Fitts







President Fitts congratulates members of the Tulane National Primate Research Center's Breeding Colony Team during his State of the University address in Covington, Louisiana. (Photo by Sabree Hill)

Katherine Andrinopoulos (right), associate professor and director of doctoral programs at the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, smiles as President Fitts admires the artwork on the second-line umbrella she received as a teaching award winner at Hutchinson Memorial Building downtown. (Photo by Sabree Hill)

Deputy Athletic Director Dr. Charvi Greer, recipient of the President's EDI Excellence Award, stands up to be recognized on the uptown campus. (Photo by Sabree Hill)