

Trailblazing alumna highlights mentorship during NTC dean's colloquium

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Alumna and Board of Tulane member Lisa P. Jackson (right), Apple's vice president of environment, policy and social initiatives, was the guest speaker at the 2024 Newcomb-Tulane College John J. Witmeyer III Dean's Colloquium. Prominent attorney and Board of Tulane member Kim Boyle (left) served as moderator. (Photo by Sabree Hill)

The 2024 Newcomb-Tulane College John J. Witmeyer III Dean's Colloquium brought together students, faculty, staff and alumni to hear from a distinguished Tulanian discussing their inspiring journey and career.

Alumna and Board of Tulane member Lisa P. Jackson served as guest speaker, and prominent attorney and Board of Tulane member Kim Boyle served as moderator. Jackson is Apple's vice president of environment, policy and social initiatives and was the first Black administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. Jackson has also been honored as a [Tulane Trailblazer](#).

Boyle is vice-managing partner of Phelps Dunbar LLP's New Orleans office and was the first Black woman president of the Louisiana State Bar Association and first Black president of the New Orleans Bar Association.

The colloquium kicked off Tulane's Black Alumni Weekend, dedicated to celebrating the contributions and accomplishments of Black Tulanians.

"We believe in the power of Tulane and Tulanians to make a positive difference in the world," President Michael A. Fitts said. "Today's event is a conversation between two members of the Tulane community who are doing just that."

An undercurrent of the talk was the importance of having mentors and strong influencers for guidance and support. "I think the people who encourage us and influence us have such a lasting impact on who we are and what we think we can achieve and where we end up," Boyle said.

Jackson shared who those influencers are for her. She mentioned Sam Sullivan, dean of the Tulane School of Engineering (now named the School of Science and Engineering) during the time she was an undergraduate in chemical engineering, and the Tulane faculty who "helped prepare me for what I would see when I went to Princeton," where she earned her master's degree.

When answering Boyle's question about navigating adversity throughout her life, Jackson said an advantage was her sense of confidence. "But I didn't always have it," she said.

She recalled an experience in a high school math class, while Boyle recalled one she had in the courtroom as a young lawyer — both instances left the future leaders feeling embarrassed. But they found encouragement from mentors and reiterated to the audience the importance of such figures in one's life.

Jackson emphasized the need for programs that foster such mentorship as well as overall confidence in students, like the Tulane summer STEM program she attended

in high school that first drew her to chemical engineering, and similar ones now offered to Tulane students such as [ConnectU Summer Experience](#), formerly known as the Newcomb-Tulane College Summer Experience, which helps newly admitted students from underserved backgrounds gain early access to college life and intellectual engagement. Jackson and her husband, Kenneth, [donated a generous gift to support the program](#) in 2021.

“Those programs give you a minute to have that moment of self-doubt and figure out who is going to get you through it,” she said. “But the challenge in that first moment ... is to not think it’s you, to not think you have impostor syndrome.”

Of all the illustrious milestones throughout her career, Jackson said, “The big things in my life are always related to community.” She credited growing up in New Orleans with this foundation, which sparked her caring about the environmental impacts on her community and that of others.

Tulane senior Kwesil Ezeh, a political science and international relations major with a minor in sociology on the pre-law track, attended the event and read [Tulane’s Land Acknowledgement](#) ahead of the conversation.

What resonated with Ezeh was Jackson’s and Boyle’s points about mentorship and perseverance when facing adversity.

“Realizing that these esteemed professionals had endured and triumphed over similar adversities provided a profound sense of comfort and a testament to resilience,” Ezeh said. “Their experiences, shared with such candor, not only offered me solace but have also fortified my resolve, as I know that their stories will be a source of strength for me during times of tribulation in my life.”