

Commencement student speaker delighted to share message of resilience with Tulane graduates

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Tulane's commencement student speaker Tamunoboma Dominion Fenny hopes her message of resilience resonates with Tulane graduates. (Photo by Vincent Postle)

When Tamunoboma Dominion Fenny thinks about her first few months at Tulane University Law School, she never could have imagined standing before thousands of Tulane graduates and delivering a message of perseverance, bravery and hope.

But on Saturday, May 18, at Yulman Stadium, she will do just that, drawing from her own experiences to let graduates know they can do anything they set their minds to — that nothing is insurmountable, even when life's challenges present one roadblock after the other.

Fenny, 24, president of the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA), was selected among dozens of applicants to serve as this year's student Commencement speaker.

"It will be a message of resilience," said Fenny, a native of Nigeria who grew up the daughter of two lawyers in Birmingham, Alabama. "Sometimes we give up because things aren't working out right away. But nothing is unobtainable if you're willing to work for it."

Fenny admits that those first few weeks of law school came with hurdles. The curriculum was academically challenging, she said, and she struggled to find a support network to help her navigate her new school and city. She also had to

quickly plan her move to New Orleans as she was accepted off the wait list one week ahead of orientation, which led to her living with family friends temporarily. Still, she was thrilled with the news, as Tulane Law was her top choice out of 14 schools to which she applied.

Then Hurricane Ida struck, sending students home to work remotely while Tulane recovered from the storm's impact.

During that time, Fenny said she questioned what her next step should look like. "But one of the things that stuck out to me was the fact that this school has such a huge commitment to service. I thought, 'Where will I find another place that is so integrated into the community and has such a pulse on the needs of the community?'"

It was during her time at home that she made it her mission to get involved in all things Tulane once she returned to campus to pursue her Juris Doctor degree. In addition to finding a roommate and an apartment, she joined the Sports Law Society and became a TEDx speaker in her first year of law school. In her second year, she served as secretary of the Black Law Students Association and a legal intern for the Louisiana Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal.

This year, she is a graduate assistant in Tulane's Title IX Office and a law clerk with Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. "I work with the Veterans Unit to provide state and federal healthcare benefits to one of our most vulnerable populations," she said.

The military is close to Fenny's heart. She joined the Air Force ROTC at Auburn University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in political science and committed to a military career after law school. As a Second Lieutenant, she has spent the past two summers as a JAG (Judge Advocate General) intern at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida and Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia. She will soon embark on her Air Force career after taking the bar exam.

Fenny said she feels strongly that her message of resilience will resonate with Tulane graduates. As she shared in her TEDx Tulane talk two years ago, it's all about trusting the process and having faith, even when times are so tough that you just want to quit.

"Everyone was so receptive to what I had to say," she said. "I heard from people all over the country telling me how impactful it was. It was then that I realized I had

something to say that mattered to people.”

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Tulane Law School graduate Tamunoboma Dominion Fenny